

On the gravel hills behind my house in northern New Mexico
at an altitude of ~~more than~~^{over} a mile the ~~vegetation~~^M dominant vegetation
is pinion pine and a variety of arborial juniper. As is typical of
arid land the shrubby trees grow well spaced with much bare ground
between them, ~~an~~^{the} adaptation to ~~the~~^{supply of} limited water ~~resources~~. On
~~the ridges~~^{valleys} the spacing is greater than
in the ~~arroyos~~^{dividing them} and the trees are ~~more~~^{and} stunted
~~and have many dead branches~~
~~an indication of the~~
~~more~~^{more} intense struggle for survival on high ground. This variety of
juniper is especially vulnerable to infestation by a parasitic mistletoe
that ~~attaches~~^{bunches} grows on thick clumps of yellow-green dendritical stems
on the branches of the trees. In the low lands where their growth is
~~most~~^{most} luxuriant the pinion pines are not infected, but on the ridges
~~under the effect of reduced~~
~~where their resistance is reduced~~ by impoverishment of nutrients and
water the mistletoe can become ~~extremely~~ minimally established on the
~~most~~^{most} ~~depleted~~^{stunted} trees. It never acquires the strength, however, on this
host to produce ~~fruit~~. ~~the translucent pink berries that ripen in the fall and in~~
on the ridges ~~food for winter birds and squirrels~~

The bare stoney areas/which ~~at~~^{first} impression appear devoid of
vegetation, on closer inspection reveal a wealth of growth of small
flowering plants. First to appear in the spring is a tiny yellow
composite dotting the surface but never closely massed. The pinkish-yellow
indian paintbrush blooms early too and persists throughout the summer.
A woody plant with clustered stalks six to eight inches tall produces
five petaled lavender blossoms along the stems with filamentous leaves.
all
Clumps of grasses grow ~~throughout the~~ summer long sending up tall seed
stalks that ripen in the fall. There are also several varieties of
inconspicuous ground hugging plants growing in small rosettes that
remain unnoticed until the first frost turns them bright scarlet.

A few of these ^{small} flowers persist into the fall, even after the purple
asters, that bloom with such extravagant abandon ^{in October,} have replaced showy

heads with puffs of gray seeds. On the ridges in late October and into November, in spite of repeated frosts, a lonely few of the yellow composites may still be found standing on bare stalks, and the lavender blossoms ~~can still be found~~ hugging the ground around blackened, desiccated stems and withered leaves, survive ^{these} ~~the~~ first icy blasts of winter in a final effort to reproduce themselves. The grass blades ^{these} ~~the~~ scattered tufts of clustering the bases of ~~the clumps that bare the tall~~ seed stalks ^{or} in the early morning sun become bronzed ~~and~~ bright golden spears ~~with the~~ after all the chlorophyll has been destroyed.