Are you ready for an amazing wildflower season? After three years of dry, hot, spring weather and meager blooms, we finally have the right conditions for a superbloom across California. Please read the general viewing etiquette we posted in the sidebar to the left. We endeavor to include a variety of sites both far-reaching and close to home—deserts, mountains, and foothill valleys. Do visit the popular sites but try to experience other less-familiar trails as well. Crowded trails can be avoided!

The immediate concern this week is that of trail conditions. There are reports of wildflowers being seen, but many facilities are posting road and trail closures due to weather-related and dangerous conditions, so access is limited. Please visit websites or call the facilities posted in the embedded weblinks.

Most trails are planned to follow the contours of the landscape while allowing access to many sought-after views. Visitors who trail cut, disturb the fragile soil and start the negative forces of erosion. Erosion carries away soil, seed, and growing plants. It destabilizes root systems that sustain plant habitats. On the human side, trail-making, maintenance, and habitat restoration is labor-intensive. It is important work often done by restoration biologists and volunteers. Let’s respect their efforts to help us enjoy nature’s beauty. Again, pay heed to any postings or alerts of trail work. Be alert and be safe!

If wild flowers along trails are picked or trampled, they may not set seed and deposit that seed into the soil’s “seed bank” as they come to the end of their life. These seeds germinate the next time environmental conditions like we have experienced this year happen. Remember, the wild flowers you enjoy this year are products of “banked” seeds of past years. Let’s continue this cycle responsibly.
Let’s begin with a visit to Anza-Borrego Desert State Park in the community of Borrego Springs. There you will find the Anza-Borrego Desert Natural History Association center. There, you can find excellent information about current Park wildflower locations, maps and info about trail and road conditions. There are lots of good places with blooms, basically places with sand that stores water for growing plants. If you need to stay on paved roads, DiGiorgio, Henderson Canyon, and Old Springs Roads are an easy cruise with safe pull-outs to stop and take photos. Roadside fields are displaying stands of hairy desert sunflower (Geraea canescens), large, white-flowered dune evening primrose (Oenothera deltoides ssp. deltoides), hot lavender-pink desert sand verbena (Abronia villosa var. villosa), desert blue bells (Phacelia campanularia) and Arizona lupine (Lupinus arizonicus). A note about dune primrose. It is a night bloomer and is best seen early or late on a cool day. If you are able, it is best to walk up sandy washes to find the best diversity of flowers. A couple of easy wash trails include Coyote Canyon and Henderson Canyon. Wandering up the washes, you’ll see ethereal ghost flowers (Mohavea confertiflora), brown-eye primroses (Chylisima claviformis), small-flowered poppies (Eschscholzia multiflora) and playful chicory blooms (Rafinesquia neomexicana) peeking out from the cover of shrubs. Cute “belly flowers” include bristly sunbonnet (Langloisia setosissima), Mojave Desert star (Monoptilon bellioides) and deep pink clusters of Bigelow’s monkeyflower (Diplacus bigelovii).
At Pinnacles National Park in central California, many early bloomers can be found alongside trails. Big berry manzanita (Arctostaphylos glauca) with its distinctive red bark, grey foliage, and clusters of white to pinkish flowers serve as a stately background to smaller colorful plants. Warrior’s plume (Pedicularis densiflora) and woolly paintbrush (Castilleja foliolosa), both root parasites drawing nutrients from their shrubby hosts, dot the landscape with their bright red flower-like bracts. Padre’s shooting stars (Primula clevelandii var. patula) are standing tall throughout the grassy meadows and hillsides. Red maids (Calandrinia menziesii) and milkmaids (Cardamine californica)—not related—can be seen spreading low along the trailside and are some of the earliest bloomers in the Park. Hillside gooseberries (Ribes californicum) are early flowering shrubs with abundant pendant red flowers enjoyed by area hummingbirds. Gooseberries also host several butterfly species. Be sure to check road and trail status at Pinnacles before visiting.

Across the valley, visit the Salt Creek Trail near the Southern Sierra community of Three Rivers. A week ago, the terrain was a lush green cover of tiny mosses, liverworts (a particularly unfortunate name) and lichens hugging every rock face and crevice in the landscape. It is a miniature fairyland of living plants called bryophytes which are tiny nonflowering plants with no roots or true leaves. Bryophytes are rather unassuming most of the year but are in their prime now when it is cool and wet. There is a huge diversity of species and along with their cohorts, the lichens, show off their palette of jade, olive, emerald, bright lime greens, rusty oranges, and silver greys. When the ground warms in that area, we will be rewarded with an array of flowering plants, but for now, enjoy what other jewels nature has to offer in the plant world.

NOTE: There was a snowstorm in this region at this posting, so check weather conditions before visiting. You may have to wait for snowmelt to visit.
Visit Malibu Creek, Topanga Canyon or Point Mugu State Parks in the Santa Monica Mountains for a sampling of what is blooming on the dozens of trails throughout the SMM National Recreation area. Take care, because of the recent storms, it is best advised to check ahead on the conditions of any trail you may visit. The soils in the Santa Monicas are highly vulnerable to erosion; streams and creeks may be running too deep and fast to negotiate safely. Hardy trekkers recently reported seeing California Bay (Umbellularia californica) in flower—a heavenly fragrance BTW. Greenbark ceanothus (Ceanothus spinosus), big pod ceanothus (Ceanothus macrocarpus), bush sunflower (Encelia californica), fuchsia-flowered gooseberry (Ribes speciosa), purple nightshade, (Solanum sp.), succulent lupines (Lupinus succulentus), miner’s lettuce (Claytonia perfoliata), wild cucumber (Marah macrocarpa), and plenty of little white cryptanthas (Cryptantha spp.). Look anywhere on sunny ocean facing slopes of the mountains to spot the iconic giant coreopsis (Leptosyne gigantea).
SAN GABRIEL MOUNTAINS

Placerita Canyon Nature Center located closer to home in the western San Gabriel Mountains, is beautiful now. The main creek is roaring through the Reserve — a scene that hasn’t been observed for a few years. It is still early in the season, but the short Ecology Trail is the best place to see flowers. The hoary ceanothus (Ceanothus crassifolius) is the main draw and covering slopes with specimens shrouded in tiny, white blossoms. The wild cucumber (Marah macrocarpa) is twining its way over other shrubs and beginning to bloom as well. The California peony (Paeonia californica), usually tucked under larger, sheltering plants is displaying their distinctive, maroon-colored flowers which will reveal their hiding places for a short time. The lovely pink flowered chaparral current (Ribes malvaceum) is also blooming along the trail and its cousin, the is a fuchsia-flowering gooseberry (Ribes speciosum) is hosting visitors in the hummingbird garden. The Nature Center has many more trails. Visit often as the emerging spectacle of flowering plants take their turn in the spring pageantry of color.

The hoary ceanothus (Ceanothus crassifolius), fuchsia-flowering gooseberry (Ribes speciosum). Photos by Michael Charters
The plants at the California Botanic Garden are shaking off lingering raindrops and opening to welcome sunshine and visitors. The Garden has a large collection of ceanothus (Ceanothus spp.) species and March is the time to see them at their showiest. The masses of tiny, delicate flowers display every shade of blue imaginable and the snowy-white varieties of ceanothus rival their blue cousins with their distinctive ceanothus perfume. Another group of eye-catching plants are the currants and gooseberries. The Santa Catalina Island currant (Ribes viburnifolium) is a low evergreen groundcover and rather unassuming most of the year. In spring, it emits a subtle, sweet fragrance that delights passersby. The flowers are tiny, so you may not immediately identify where the aroma is coming from. The golden currant (Ribes aureum) is not so subtle. The large shrub is shrouded with small yellow tubular shaped flowers tinged with red and attracts hungry hummingbirds. Just stand back and watch the show of hummers darting back and forth to get a sip of nectar. Furthermore, in late summer, birds of all sorts feast on its juicy golden berries. It’s an entertaining plant. Other flowering gooseberries and currants in bloom now include the pink flowered chaparral currant (Ribes malvaceum) and red fuchsia-flower gooseberry (Ribes species). Along the pathways, smaller plants are starting to put on their own show. Tall, many-flowered stalks of pink coral bells (Heuchera species and cultivars) stand above their mounds of round, scalloped leaves. The orange western wallflowers (Erysimum capitatum) compete with California poppies (Eschscholzia californica) to see which is more “outrageous orange” in color. We’ll let the visitors decide.

Western wallflowers (Erysimum capitatum, California poppy (Eschscholzia californica). Photo courtesy of California Botanic Garden.

**URBAN LOS ANGELES**

The Habitat Gardens at Elizabeth Learning Center are rewilding Southeast LA, and the copious rains have many species popping with flowers! Colorful desert beauties include creosote bush (Larrea tridentata), desert lavender (Condea emoryi), apricot mallow (Sphaeralcea ambigua), bladderpod (Peritoma arborea), brittle bush (Encelia farinosa), blue bells (Phacelia campanularia), bird’s eye gilia (Gilia tricolor) and Coulter’s lupine (Lupinus sparsiflorus). The Garden has a very successful Vernal Pools Habitat and contains Menzies’ fiddleneck (Amsinckia menziesii), owl’s clover (Castilleja exserta), tidy tips (Layia platyglossa), fringe-pod (Thysanocarpus curvipes), Arroyo lupine (Lupinus succulentus), Deerweed (Acmispon glaber), blue dicks (Dipterostemon capitatus), California poppy (Eschscholzia californica), yellow-rayed goldfields (Lasthenia glabrata) and del mar manzanita (Arctostaphylos glandulosa ssp. crassifolia). All the vernal pools are full and teeming with fairy shrimp and other ephemeral creatures! Additional species in their Chaparral Garden include woolly paintbrush (Castilleja foliolosa), red-skinned onion (Allium haematochiton), sugar bush (Rhus ovata), and blue-eyed grass (Sisyrinchium bellum).
Elizabeth Learning Center is located off Elizabeth Street between Atlantic and Wilcox Avenues in Cudahy. Most gardens can be seen from the sidewalk in front of the school without having to check in at the Main Office. For a more immersive visit Tuesday - Friday, contact George Nanoski, the Habitat Gardens coordinator via email: gtn5586@lausd.net. His conference period is 10:30am - 12:20pm. Or a visit can be arranged after 3:30 when school is out.

Arroyo lupine (*Lupinus succulentus*), yellow-rayed goldfields (*Lasthenia glabrata*). Photos by George Nanoski.
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