Theodore Payne Foundation’s Wild Flower Hotline is made possible by donations, and memberships. Please support the Hotline today! The Theodore Payne Wild Flower Hotline offers free weekly on-line and recorded updates on the best locations for viewing spring wild flowers in Southern and Central California. All locations are on easily accessible public lands and range from urban to wild, distant to right here in L.A.

March 15, 2024

ENJOY RESPONSIBLY!

While superblooms are a beautiful and awe-inspiring natural phenomenon, they are also delicate and are easily damaged by human activity, so it is important to enjoy them responsibly and minimize the impact on fragile ecosystems.

Please always...

スタ Stay on designated trails
スタ Share the trails; be respectful of others
スタ Visit on weekdays and/or off-peak hours, if possible
スタ Do not collect or trample wildflowers
スタ Remember your experiences through photos and leave no trace.

Again, we have the right conditions for an excellent wildflower viewing season 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 expand your outdoor experience to other less-familiar trails as well.

Low Desert Region

If you are descending into Anza Borrego Desert State Park via S22, you’ll notice a paucity of color in the adjacent landscape. Only a handful of brittlebush (Encelia farinosa) and a few other species of desert shrubs are in bloom. The colorful annuals will come when the weather warms. Unfortunately, recent vegetation mowing along the roadsides has removed plants closest to the road. The exception along S22 is desert apricot (Prunus fremontii) in bloom in Culp Valley. Chuparosa (Justicia californica) is ablaze with red flowers there too, and wherever it grows in washes and canyons west of Borrego Springs. Things get better, however. The entire desert floor at 1000 feet elevation and below is at peak bloom with wildflowers. Nearly every flat, sandy place in Borrego Springs has fields of desert dandelion (Malacothrix glabrata). Easiest venues for wildflower viewing are in the Borrego Springs area—DiGiorgio Road, Henderson Canyon Road, Coyote Canyon washes and Clark Valley/Clark Dry Lake. Good displays of sand verbena (Abronia villosa var. villosa), dune evening primrose (Oenothera
deltoides ssp. deltoides), browneyes (Chylismia claviformis var. peirsonii), desert lily (Hesperocallis undulata), narrow-leaved johnstonella (Johnstonella angustifolia), silky dalea (Dalea mollis) and desert sunflower (Geraea canescens) are in excellent bloom. Enthusiastic flower viewers are more abundant than wildflowers this time of year so, if possible, visit on weekdays. Another reason to visit NOW rather than later, is that flowers, especially the evening primroses, have been seen with a large sphinx moth caterpillars. Something astonishing happens in wet years in mid-March. Swainson's hawks by the hundreds visit Anza during spring migration from South America and Mexico to feast on these foul-tasting sphinx moth caterpillars— the neon-colored larvae of the white-lined sphinx moth, also known as the hawk moth. The fat caterpillars wriggle across the desert during spring blooms, decapitating flowers. During a typical migration there are many thousands of hawks passing through, sometimes hundreds in the sky at the same time. It’s a story of hawks, caterpillars, and springtime wildflowers. The hawks come to feast on the caterpillars of the white-lined sphinx moth and the caterpillars are here to eat the flowers that bloom after winter’s rainfall. Read about the upcoming Hawkwatch event here and join the event here.
Southern Sierra Foothills

In the southern Sierra foothill woodland east of Visalia at 1,000 – 1,400’ elevation, the iconic blue oaks and redbuds are revealing new leaves and flowers, a sure sign spring is coming to the foothills. Eastwood’s fiddlenecks (Amsinckia eastwoodiae), shooting stars (Primula clevelandii var. patula), small-leaved blinks (Montia parvifolia) and rusty popcornflowers (Plagiobothrys nothofulvus) are blooming nicely, and soon other colorful wildflowers will be joining them. The diminutive but splashy fringed redmaids (Calandrinia ciliata) and milkmaids (Cardamine sp.) are red and white beacons spotlighting themselves in the dark shade under oaks. Standing out in the landscape you may spot a whiteleaf manzanita (Arctostaphylos viscida)—a large, handsome shrub with soft pink urn-shaped flowers clustered among whitish-green foliage. Tufted poppies (Eschscholzia caespitosa) are opening their bountiful pale-yellow blossoms slowly as the temperature warms regionally. Soon they will carpet the hillsides along with silver bush lupines (Lupinus albifrons). Frogs and Sierra newts are out enjoying a wet spring. Lichens, mushrooms, and mosses abound.

Santa Monica Mountains

The giant coreopsis (Leptosyne gigantea) is blooming on ocean-facing, sunny slopes rising above Pacific Coast Highway (PCH). Keep your eyes focused on that famously treacherous road, however. One of the best places to safely pull off the highway and enjoy walking with the yellow giants is at Leo Carrillo State Park. Plan a day trip. Trail maps and other park features are described in the park brochure.
San Gabriel Mountain Region

**Placerita Canyon Nature Center** requires more sunny and warm days to fully rouse spring wildflowers from their slumber. The canyon is cool, shady and the creek is flowing fast. The Canyon Trail that follows Placerita Creek upstream to Walker Ranch traverses the water-gorged, fast flowing creek at several locations and is not recommended for hiking until the water recedes. However, the first ¼ mile of trail before first crossing displays some very handsome flowering plants that are worthy of being seen. Walk out to see California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), arroyo willow (*Salix lasiolepis*), black sage (*Salvia mellifera*), big berry manzanita (*Arctostaphylos glauca*) and hairy ceanothus (*Ceanothus oliganthus*). The Ecology Trail, however, is an easy loop trail that begins and ends behind the Nature Center. No need to cross any streams. It takes you through chaparral, oak woodland, and riparian communities, all stunning now with fresh spring foliage. Hoaryleaf ceanothus (*Ceanothus crassifolius*), California peony (*Paeonia californica*), purple nightshade (*Solanum xanti*), popcornflowers (*Plagiobothrys* spp.), and fuchsiaflower gooseberry (*Ribes speciosum*) with accompanying hummingbirds, will delight you. Wild cucumber (*Marah macrocarpa*) is winding it way up and around other larger plants to get its place in the sun.
This week at the Theodore Payne Foundation, California sun cups (Camissoniopsis bistorta) are giving visitors a first glimpse of their upturned sunny faces. Find them in the demonstration gardens and elsewhere. California poppies (Eschscholzia californica), common sunflowers (Helianthus annus), bush sunflower (Encelia californica), fragrant pitcher sage (Lepechinia fragrans) and hummingbird sage (Salvia spathacea) all continue to color the nearby slopes. Bright orange and gracefully arching fiddlenecks (Amsinckia menziesii) congregate in thick patches. Walking by the nursery you can spot the season’s first baby blue eyes (Nemophila menziesii) peeping out from under the California sycamore (Platanus racemosa). Arroyo lupine (Lupinus succulentus) has started to emerge along the sales yard paths and tiny white flowers of common eucrypta (Eucrypta chrysanthemifolia) and lavender–flowered distant phacelia (Phacelia distans) grow side by side. If you chose to take the short hike up Wildflower Hill, you will spot red maids (Calandrinia menziesii) and wild canterbury bells (Phacelia minor) mixed in with wishbone bush (Mirabilis laevis) and chia (Salvia columbariae). Entangling all plants growing in its path are clinging tendrils of wild cucumber (Marah macrocarpa). Enjoy this SoCal spring smorgasbord responsibly.
The continued cool weather this week has sustained the California Botanic Garden’s lush, spring green appearance. Flowers continue to bloom and welcome visitors. Brilliant yellow Channel Islands tree poppy (Dendromecon harfordii) and bush poppy (Dendromecon rigida) are beacons throughout the garden, and coral bells (Heuchera spp.) near the entrance and on the mesa are blooming abundantly, creating whimsical sprays of bright pink flowers. California lilacs (Ceanothus spp.) bloom abundantly displaying brilliant blues and lavenders and white, Near the administration building, clematis vines (Clematis spp.) are scrambling up and around other shrubs and trees wrapped in cream-colored flowers. Follow your nose to visit the fragrant California pitcher sage (Lepechinia calycina) and the tiny-flowered Santa Catalina Island currant (Ribes viburnifolium) along the ADA ramp. Blue-eyed grass (Sisyrinchium bellum) is occupying spaces all over the Mesa pathways.

Orange County

At The Environmental Nature Center in Newport Beach, the paths are lined with golden California poppies (Eschscholzia californica) swaying gracefully in the coastal breeze. The Nature Center is divided into different Southern California habitat types representing chaparral, coastal sage scrub, desert, riparian, foothill woodland, oak woodland, redwood forest, yellow pine forest and Channel Islands. A pastel palette of flowers are sprinkled throughout these gardens with yellows from brittlebush (Encelia farinosa), California brittlebush (Encelia californica), bladderpod (Cleomella arborea), Palmer’s Indian mallow (Abutilon palmeri) and clusters of bright flowers borne on the Oregon grape (Berberis aquifolium). Shades of blues are displayed on the various California wild lilacs (Ceanothus spp.) and contrast with subtle pinks on the Western redbud (Cercis occidentalis), buckwheats (Eriogonum spp.) and coral bells (Heuchera spp.)
Inland Empire

Still early for most wildflowers on the Crafton Hills Preserve but hiking along the Crafton Hills Ridge Trail you can get an idea what it will be like soon. Not far from the trailhead at Crafton Hills College (CHC), hoaryleaf (Ceanothus crassifolius) and woollyleaf ceanothus (Ceanothus tomentosus) are both blooming and can be seen covering slopes, along with a fair amount of distant phacelia (Phacelia distans), miner’s lettuce (Claytonia perfoliata), rancher’s fiddleneck (Amsinckia menziesii ssp. intermedia), and golden yarrow (Eriophyllum confertiflorum). Rest under an oak and enjoy the company of plants just starting to bloom including wishbone bush (Mirabilis laevis) wild canterbury bells (Phacelia minor), tufted poppy (Eschscholzia caespitosa), red maids (Calandrinia menziesii), southern bush monkeyflower (Diplacus longiflorus), cliff aster (Malacothrix saxatilis) and western blue-eyed grass (Sisyrinchium bellum). Parking is free at all times in the trailhead parking lot at Crafton Hills College, and free on weekends in all other parking lots on campus.
Urban Los Angeles Region

The torrential rains in February made the Habitat Gardens at Elizabeth Learning Center resplendent with vernal pools and late winter wildflowers! Colorful beauties in the Desert Habitat Garden include catclaw acacia (Senegalia greggii), creosote bush (Larrea tridentata), desert lavender (Condea emoryi), apricot mallow (Sphaeralcea ambigua), bladderpod (Cleome arborea), brittlebush (Encelia farinosa), Hartweg’s climbing milkweed (Funaria heterophyllum), desert bluebells (Phacelia campanularia), bird’s eye gilia (Gilia tricolor) and Coulter’s lupine (Lupinus sparsiflorus). The Vernal Pools Habitat Garden contains common fiddleneck (Amsinckia menziesii), puple owl’s-clover (Castilleja exserta), tidy tips (Layia platyglossa), sand fringepod (Thysanocarpus curvipes), arroyo lupine (Lupinus succulentus), deerweed (Acmispon glaber), blue dicks (Diploterostemon capitatus) California poppy (Eschscholzia californica), yellowray goldfields (Lasthenia glabrata), cliff spurge (Euphorbia misera), California adolphia (Adolphia californica), and Del Mar manzanita (Arctostaphylos glandulosa ssp. crassifolia). Additional species in their Chaparral Habitat Garden include Padre’s shooting star (Primula clevelandii), woolly paintbrush (Castilleja foliolosa), Nevin’s barberry (Berberis nevinii), pink fairy–duster (Calliandra eriophylla), black sage (Salvia mellifera), miner’s lettuce (Claytonia perfoliata), Brandegee’s sage (Salvia brandegeei), red–skinned onion (Allium haematochiton), sugar bush (Rhus ovata), Santa Cruz Island buckwheat (Eriogonum arborescens), 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 on Mondays and Thursdays, 9:00am – 10:15am on Wednesdays and Fridays; or a visit can be arranged after 3:30 when school is out.

That’s it for this week. Look for our next report on Friday, March 22 and check back each week for the most up to date information on Southern California wildflower regions to visit.
South Pasadena Nature Park

🌟 South Pasadena Parks Bike Ride and Picnic | March 16 | 9 AM
Special tour of native plant garden and park. Meets at 9:00 AM. Registration required.

Placerita Canyon Nature Center

🌟 Blooms of the Season | 4th Saturdays | 9:30 AM
Learn about native plants on a hike with a docent. 4th Saturday of every month, meet on the patio at 9:30AM for a one-hour stroll. Bring your camera and questions. Visit Placerita Nature Center website for more information.

Theodore Payne Foundation

🌟 Poppy Days Spring Sale | March 29 & 30
Create an at-home superbloom! We’ll have a great selection of colorful annuals and other beautiful spring wildflowers. Members receive a 15% discount and nonmembers receive a 10% discount on all plants, seeds, and TPF gear. RSVP for parking: poppydays.eventbrite.com

🌟 Native Plant Garden Tour | April 13 & 14
Get ready to explore stunning gardens across greater Los Angeles! Each garden is a harmonious creation of Southern California’s climate, soil, natural vegetation, and native wildlife—don’t miss the chance to witness beauty and support critical wildlife habitat in one of the world’s biodiversity hotspots.
Tickets & details at: nativeplantgardentour.org

Prisk Native Garden

🌟 Prisk Native Garden Open House | April 7 & 14 | 1–4 PM
Admission is free. The garden is on the grounds of William F. Prisk Elementary School, in Long Beach.