March 29, 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...

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

Low Desert Region

Anza Borrego Desert State Park is almost finished around the popular wildflower viewing spots of Borrego Springs. A couple of weeks ago, I wrote about the white-lined sphinx moth caterpillars and how they would decimate ABDSP’s popular wildflower fields. Well, they have arrived in Henderson Canyon. These voracious eaters consume a variety of desert plants, including the beloved wildflowers. With their arrival, and their insatiable appetite, the clock is ticking just a little bit faster on how much longer the flowers will be around. Visitors will now have to plan to stay in Anza longer and explore the many canyon trails instead. That means getting out of the car and hiking! One such trail may be Grave Wash and North Palm Wash Loop. This area is east of Borrego Springs about 2/3 the way to Salton Sea via S22—a bit of a drive! Bloom is better than average with lots of bristly langloisia (Langloisia setosissima) in bloom and even more devil’s spineflower (Chorizanthe rigida). Some canyon walls are covered with Parish’s poppy (Eschscholzia parishii) and ghost flowers (Antirrhinum confertiflorum) are being cryptic among the boulders. There are many more surprising finds here in these washes as well. Go for an adventure but always be well prepared for desert hikes.
The Coast Ranges

One of the best landscapes representing California’s tectonic past is found within the spirals of rock and cliffs that give Pinnacles National Park its name. Over the millennia oak woodlands, chaparral, grasslands, and riparian plant communities have emerged and now host a diversity of flora and fauna. The geography of the park provides raptors with ideal nesting sites, both on the inaccessible cliffs and rock formations used by prairie falcons, golden eagles, red-tailed hawks, and American kestrels, and on the oaks and pines along the riparian corridors. Pinnacles has more than 30 miles of trails that showcase the beauty of the park up close and personal and accommodate hikers of different abilities and experience levels. Depending on the trail you choose, early spring flowers can be seen throughout the park. The bluewitch nightshade (Solanum umbelliferum) is common in chaparral and wherever the buckbrush (Ceanothus cuneatus) is in bloom along the trails, it fills the air with the sweet, subtle fragrance of ceanothus flowers. The deep shade cast by rock formations, oaks, and other riparian trees gives refuge to the shade-loving California saxifrage (Micranthes californica). Fiddlenecks (Amsinckia sp.), uncoiling their orange flowers on top of bristly stems, and goldfields (Lasthenia gracilis) can be found in grassy, open areas, especially now along the Bench Trail. Milkmaids (Cardamine californica) and Padre’s shooting stars (Primula clevelandii) are occupying meadows like those along the Rim Trail. The magenta-colored warrior’s plume (Pedicularis densiflora), a root parasite growing on other plants, is abundant in the shade beneath oaks and shrubs. Check them out if you are walking the High Peaks Loop.
The Carrizo Plain

A tapestry of yellow and orange covers the rolling hills of the Carrizo Plain as the hillside daisies (Monolopia lanceolata), goldfields (Lasthenia californica), and forked fiddlenecks (Amsinckia furcata) have suddenly become prominent. It appears it will be a decent wildflower year at Carrizo Plain National Monument. The warm and dry weather is launching a bloom that blankets the low spots on the Plain, including around Soda Lake and gentle slopes of the Temblor Range. Soon patches of blues and purples will appear within the yellow-orange landscape as the purple owl’s clover (Castilleja exserta), Great Valley phacelia (Phacelia ciliata), and baby blue eyes (Nemophila menziesii) pop up. Unfortunately, exotic grasses are doing well this year as well and can compete with and obscure the colorful wildflowers in places. One final note of caution: most of the roads in Carrizo Plain are in decent shape, but several of them—especially Simmler Road and Panorama Road which cross the Plain—have low spots that are still wet and muddy and are places where one can get a car stuck. Towing services are not available, so be safe and don’t take chances with your vehicle or yourself.

Hillside daisies (Monolopia lanceolata). Photos by Mike Wall.

Goldfields (Lasthenia californica) at the southern end of Soda Lake. Photo by Neil Havlik.

Bluewitch nightshade (Solanum umbelliferum), buckbrush (Ceanothus cuneatus), warrior’s plume (Pedicularis densiflora). Photos by Holly Eichrodt.
Driving along Figueroa Mountain Road from Los Olivos, the most exciting flowers of Figueroa Mountain are best at lower elevations. Starting up the mountain road (about 11 miles from Los Olivos), plenty of splendid blooms can be seen and include shiny yellow buttercups (*Ranunculus californicus*), lovely fiesta flowers (*Pholistoma auritum*), blue dicks (*Dipterostemon capitatus*), fiddlenecks (*Amsinckia* sp.), scattered sky lupine (*Lupinus nanus*), California golden violets (*Viola pedunculata*), Cleveland’s shooting stars (*Primula clevelandii var. clevelandii*), popcorn flowers (*Plagiobothrys* sp.), miner’s lettuce (*Claytonia* sp.) and hummingbird sage (*Salvia spathacea*). As you continue to climb the mountain, stunning orange California poppies (*Eschscholzia californica*) are starting to bloom along the road and on the rocky hillsides. Right before the rusty gate, sweet cream cups (*Platystemon californicus*) are in bloom, however, they are very few and quite small. Continuing up the hill, coreopsis (*Leptosyne* sp.) and Cleveland’s shooting stars (*Primula clevelandii var. clevelandii*) dominate the landscape. There are a couple of areas in the distance, along the lower part of the mountains where one can see carpets of goldfields (*Lasthenia* sp.). In the moist, shaded areas along the rocky hillsides, pacific pea (*Lathyrus vestitus*) is also starting to bloom. At Vista Point (large gravel turnout about 11.4 miles from the bottom), the grass is lush and green but look closely and you will find quite a few chocolate lilies (*Fritilaria biflora*) scattered within the grass. Shooting stars are also plentiful in this area. Look for patches of goldfields and fiddleneck as they are starting their bloom here as well. Approximately half a mile further, the famous poppy hill is coloring up with orange poppies and sky lupines. Beyond the Davy Brown Trailhead, the grassy fields leading up to the bottom of Ranger Peak are showing off the plethora of shooting stars! This is a magnificent “shooting star” year. Also look for buttercup, and lovely manzanitas (*Arctostaphylos* sp.) in bloom. From Ranger Peak to Cachuma Saddle only a handful of California poppies and a couple of tree poppies (*Dendromecon rigida*) are beginning their bloom. It is respectfully requested that when coming out to see the wildflowers, please do not stop or park in the middle of the road nor block any part of the road, as this hinders traffic and in the event of an emergency, would prevent emergency vehicles from getting through.

Sky lupine (*Lupinus nanus*), fiesta flower (*Pholistoma auritum*), cream cups (*Platystemon californicus*). Photos by Mike Wall.
San Gabriel Mountain Region

Placerita Canyon Nature Center is still experiencing more cool than warm days and the creek is flowing fast. Visitors will enjoy walking along The Ecology Trail, an easy loop trail that begins and ends behind the Nature Center. It takes you through chaparral, oak woodland, and riparian communities, all stunning now with fresh spring foliage. Hoaryleaf ceanothus (Ceanothus crassifolius), an early bloomer, is beginning to fade. The hairy ceanothus (Ceanothus oliganthus) with masses of sky–blue blossoms is now emerging as the dominant flowering ceanothus. Find black sage (Salvia mellifera), a sun loving plant, illuminated in open spots of sunshine along the trail. California peonies (Paeonia californica) and nightshades (Solanum xanti) are blooming, accompanied now by white popcorn flowers (Plagiobothrys spp.), orange fiddlenecks (Amsinckia sp.) and cheery yellow sun cups (Camissoniopsis intermedia). Standing out above the trail are canopies of cottonwood trees (Populus fremontii) resplendent with tassel-like catkins of flowers—a lovely show, but one that lasts only a short time. Wild cucumber (Marah macrocarpa) is winding it way up and around other larger plants to get its place in the sun.

The long-awaited plant sale at the Theodore Payne Foundation is happening this weekend, March 29 and 30. What’s on your wish list of home garden plants? You are immediately introduced to the diversity and beauty of native plants upon entering the parking area and walking the trail that leads to the Foundation’s sales yard. Along this walk, you will be able to visualize what natives can look like in your own garden. Shrubs like western redbud (Cercis occidentalis), Nevin’s barberry (Berberis nevini), island bush poppy (Dendromecon harfordii), and manzanita cultivars (Arctostaphylos sp. ‘John Dourley’ and Arctostaphylos bakeri ‘Louis Edmunds’) can offer handsome background plantings providing a year-round tapestry of interesting foliage, flowers or fruit. Colorful perennials frolic in the foreground and include apricot mallow (Sphaeralcea ambigua), California brittlebush (Encelia californica), California buckwheat (Eriogonum fasciculatum), purple nightshade (Solanum xanti) and Mojave beardtongue (Penstemon pseudospectabilis). Sweet little flowers can fill in the spaces between shrubs and include blue eyed grass (Sisyrinchium bellum), California sun cups (Camissoniopsis bistorta) and California poppies (Eschscholzia californica). Add a few “conversation pieces” to your garden like...
Shaw’s agave (*Agave shawii*) or Baja fairy duster (*Calliandra californica*). Hummingbird sage (*Salvia spathacea*) and desert marigold (*Baileya multiradiata*), seen in TPF’s demonstration garden, can add color to shady and/or hot, sunny areas in your home garden. Trekking up Wildflower Hill adjacent to the sales yard, you will encounter fragrant purple sage (*Salvia leucophylla*), wild canterbury bells (*Phacelia minor*) and chia (*Salvia columbariae*). Happy plant sale shopping!

It’s the dawning of April at the [California Botanic Garden](https://www.calbg.org/) and visitors are coming to see the spectacle of Douglas irises (*Iris douglasiana*) now blooming near the administration building and around the ponds on the garden’s Mesa. The red firecracker penstemon (*Penstemon eatonii*) and orange bush monkeyflower (*Diplacus aurantiacus*) are also ablaze on the Mesa’s sunnier portions. Baby blue eyes (*Nemophila menziesii*) and blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium bellum*) are lining many Mesa paths. Sages (*Salvia* spp.) abound, dressed in varying pinks and purples, joined by lavender, blue, and white California lilacs (*Ceanothus* spp.), pink western redbuds (*Cercis occidentalis*), and orange California poppies (*Eschscholzia californica*), all producing an impressionist painting of color. North of the Mesa gardens follow the pathway into the “Communities” Section. If you like treasure hunts (or Easter egg hunts!), search for the diminutive calico monkeyflower (*Diplacus pictus*) blooming out there. It’s hard to find in this vast area, but this super special plant is worth the hunt! Most plants in the Communities Section are trees and large shrubs. The calico monkeyflowers are no taller than a few inches and have flowers no bigger than a dime.
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, desert, riparian and woodlands. A pastel palette of flowers is sprinkled throughout these gardens with sunny yellows from brittlebush (Encelia farinosa), California brittlebush (Encelia californica), bladderpod (Cleomella arborea), Indian mallow (Abutilon palmeri) and clusters of bright flowers borne on the Oregon grape (Berberis aquifolium). Shades of blue are displayed on the various California lilacs (Ceanothus spp.) and contrast with subtle pinks on the western redbud (Cercis occidentalis), assorted buckwheat species (Eriogonum spp.) and coral bells (Heuchera spp.). The Environmental Nature Center has taken Tucker Wildlife Sanctuary under its guardianship as well. Tucker is a 12-acre wildlife sanctuary located in Modjeska Canyon on the western slopes of the Santa Ana Mountains. It includes a natural history museum, trails, native plant demonstration garden and a bird observation deck. Visitors mainly go for the excellent birding. Visit the small demonstration Garden and learn what native blooms attract birds to your own home garden like island snapdragon (Gambelia speciosa), fairy duster (Calliandra eriophylla) and wild strawberry (Fragaria vesca). Other trails leading from the Sanctuary take you into classic chaparral vegetation. Check out the handsome pair of flowering shrubs, lemonade berry (Rhus integrifolia) and sugarbush (Rhus ovata), while staying clear of their botanical cousin—poison oak (Toxicodendron diversilobum)—as it is also flowering now. Take caution!

Fairy duster (Calliandra eriophylla), photo by Hannah Perez.
Island snapdragon (Gambelia speciosa) and wild strawberry (Fragaria vesca), photos by Emily Visioso.
Urban Los Angeles

The Habitat Gardens at Elizabeth Learning Center continue their early spring wildflower show! Colorful beauties in the Desert Habitat Garden include desert wishbone bush (*Mirabilis laevis*), catclaw acacia (*Senegalia greggi*), creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*), desert lavender (*Condea emoryi*), apricot mallow (*Sphaeralcea ambigua*), bladderpod (*Cleomella arborea*), brittle bush (*Encelia farinosa*), five-needled pricklyleaf (*Thymophylla pentachaeta*), climbing milkweed (*Funastrum cynanchoideus var. hartwegii*), desert blue bells (*Phacelia campanularia*), bird’s eye gilia (*Gilia tricolor*) and Coulter’s lupine (*Lupinus sparsiflorus*). The Vernal Pools Habitat Garden contains collared annual lupine (*Lupinus truncatus*), Menzies’ fiddleneck (*Amsinckia menziesii*), purple owl’s clover (*Castilleja exserta*), tidy tips (*Layia platyglossa*), fringe-pod (*Thysanocarpus curvipes*), arroyo lupine (*Lupinus succulentus*), deerweed (*Acmispon glaber*), Wart-stemmed ceanothus (*Ceanothus verrucosus*), blue dicks (*Dipterostemon capitatus*), sawtooth goldenbush (*Hazardia squarrosa*), California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*), yellow-rayed goldfields (*Lasthenia glabrata*), cliff spurge (*Euphorbia misera*), spine shrub (*Adolphia californica*), and Del Mar manzanita (*Arctostaphylos glandulosa ssp. crassifolia*). Additional species in the Chaparral Habitat Garden include southern mountain misery (*Chamaebatia australis*), Peirson’s morning glory (*Calystegia peirsonii*), matilija poppy (*Romneya coulteri*), woolly paintbrush (*Castilleja foliolosa*), Nevin’s barberry (*Berberis nevinii*), fairy duster (*Calliandra eriophylla*), black sage (*Salvia mellifera*), miner’s lettuce (*Claytonia perfoliata*), Santa Rosa Island sage (*Salvia brandegeei*), red-skinned onion (*Allium haematichiton*), 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 Monday – Friday (no Tuesdays), 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. A visit can be arranged after 3:30 when school is out.

Wart-stemmed ceanothus (*Ceanothus verrucosus*), Peirson’s morning glory (*Calystegia peirsonii*), desert wishbone bush (*Mirabilis laevis*).
Benefitting from abundant rainfall this winter and spring, Prisk Native Garden in Long Beach is ready to showcase its collection of flowering annuals, perennials, trees, and shrubs. The garden and schoolyard habitat is nearly 30 years mature and is looking fabulous! Rain or shine, Open House Events will welcome visitors on two Sundays, April 7th and April 14th, from 1–4 PM. The showiest annual wildflowers include copious tidy tips (Layia platyglossa), meadow foam (Limnanthes douglasii and L. douglasii ssp. sulphurea), baby blue eyes (Nemophila menziesii), purple owl’s clover (Castilleja exserta), and the super butterfly magnet, cobwebby thistle (Cirsium occidentale). There are several tiny “belly flowers” to examine up close as well. Easy for kids, adults with aging knees, not so much! Perennials include showy penstemon (Penstemon spectabilis), and Palmer’s penstemon (Penstemon palmeri). In the Shade Garden coral bells (Heuchera sp.) are blooming. Hummingbirds are enticed to check out nectar rich hot-pink and red fairy dusters (Calliandra spp.). Bee’s bliss sage (Salvia ‘Bee’s Bliss’) is occupying an enormous amount of ground space as is Mojave sage (Salvia mohavensis). California poppies (Eschscholzia californica) are everywhere there is space, soil and sun encouraging them to grow. Gravel pathways allow visitors to tour the Garden easily. There is a flowing stream and fishpond complex with native arroyo chub fish for curious kids to enjoy. A vernal pool has been added and the ephemeral plant species there are just starting to pop.

Cobweb thistle (Cirsium occidentale), baby blue eyes (Nemophila menziesii), purple owl’s clover (Castilleja exserta), meadow foam (Limnanthes douglasii). Photos by Mike Letteriello.

That’s it for this week. Look for our next report on Friday, April 5th and check back each week for the most up to date information on southern California wildflower regions to visit.
Native Plant & Wildflower Events Across SoCal

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.

CNPS San Diego

🌟 10th Anniversary Native Garden Tour | April 6 & 7
See the gardens at your own pace on this two-day tour. Your ticket gives you garden access on both days. General Admission Tickets: $40 through April 7th, 2024 Free admission for children 17 years and younger. More information: cnps-sd.squarespace.com/native-garden-tour-2024

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.

Theodore Payne Foundation

🌟 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