



Foothills

Nature Notes

CITY OF PALO ALTO • COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT • OPEN SPACE, PARKS AND GOLF DIVISION

Spring Wildflowers of the Foothills

Springtime in the foothills means many things – streams again alive and running after winter rains, verdant hills clothed anew in rapidly growing grasses, a quickening pace of life as evidenced by the sudden appearance of birds, insects, and other wildlife, and the incomparable displays of those lovely creations of nature, the wildflowers. Spring has come when shooting stars, milk maids, and trillium appear along woodland trails and when california poppies and sky lupines flaunt their showy hues of orange and blue along roadsides and grasslands. These are but the first of scores of species of wildflowers which appear in a continuous pageant of color and fragrance over the next months. With the aid of this descriptive checklist (see reverse) and perhaps a wildflower manual and your camera, you can spend many beautiful days in these quiet foothills seeking out the wildflowers of spring.

A good many of our conspicuous wildflowers are annuals, herbs which die after blooming but produce seed that germinate the following season. Most annuals begin growth in winter, bloom in spring, and die in summer, having lived about six months or less. Perennial herbs also die back after blooming but, in addition to bearing seeds, reappear the next season from underground roots, stems, and bulbs. Unlike the herbs, the trees and shrubs possess woody upper parts which persist throughout the year. Unlike the herbs, most woody plants bloom in spring. Some, such as the blue blossom ceanothus and silk tassel bush, are remarkably attractive, and for that reason a few have been included in this list of wildflowers even though we generally think of wildflowers as smaller herbs.

Some wildflowers are quite versatile in their ability to grow in varied environments and habitats. For example, the common star lily blooms February through June in woodland, chaparral, and grassland. Other wildflowers are not so versatile and, as a result, are harder to find. The most rare flowers must be sought out in their secret haunts. To the admirer of wildflowers these are the real prizes: the floral hermits, such as mission bells, columbine, and coral root orchid, are all inhabitants of cool niches in shady woodlands.

Many weeds have become naturalized locally. Some are attractive and pose little threat to the native flora. Sweet alyssum, mustard, and filaree clothe and brighten roadsides and disturbed areas where the natural ecology has been upset. Others like the poison hemlock, Italian thistle and yellow starthistle are noxious pests which invade disturbed areas, persist, and continue to spread. They disrupt the native flora and give an otherwise natural scene a waste lot appearance.

The identification of wildflowers is not difficult and can become a lifelong source of pleasure. Many foothills wildflowers can be identified by a process of elimination using this checklist and relating the flower you have found to the factors listed.

By Bob Badaracco, First Park Ranger

List of summer plants revised and updated by Ted Chandik, Naturalist (4/96)

Take along a guidebook and see how many summer-flowering plants you can find from the list on reverse.

Partial List of Spring Wildflowers Found in the Palo Alto Foothills

Habitat Abbreviations: Ch & Chap: *Chaparral* Gr: *Grassland* Str: *Stream* Wd: *Woodland*

FLOWER COLOR	HABITATS	FLOWERING MONTHS FROM - TO		HERB UNLESS NOTED	COMMON NAME	FAMILY NAME	PERENNIAL UNLESS NOTED	NATIVE UNLESS NOTED
Blue	Gr&Wd	Feb	April		Baby Blue Eyes	Waterleaf	Annual	
	Gr&Wd	Feb	May		Sky Lupine	Pea	Annual	
	Gr&Wd	Feb	May		Blue eyed Grass	Iris		
	Woodland	Feb	May	Shrub	Blue Blossom	Buckthorn		
	Gr&Wd	Mar	April		Common Brodiaea	Amaryllis		
	Grassland	Mar	May		Hound's Tongue	Borage		
	Chap & Wd	Mar	May		Inland Blue Larkspur	Buttercup		
	Gr&Wd	April	June		Ithuriel's Spear	Amaryllis		
	Grassland	April	June		Succulent Lupine	Pea	Annual	
Gr&Wd	Feb	April		Baby Blue Eyes	Waterleaf	Annual		
Green	Chap & Wd	Mar	May		Meadow Rue	Buttercup		
	Chap & Wd	Mar	May	Vine	Wild Cucumber	Gourd		
Orange	Grassland	Feb	Oct		California Poppy	Poppy	Annual	
	Ch-Gr-Wd	Mar	June		Common Wallflower	Mustard		
	Grassland	Mar	June		Common Fiddleneck	Borage	Annual	
	Chap & Wd	Mar	July	Shrub	Bush Monkey Flower	Figwort		
Pink	Gr&Wd	Feb	May		Hillside Pea	Pea		
	Grassland	Feb	June		Fillaree or Storksbill	Geranium	Annual	Non
	Woodland	Mar	June		Star Flower	Primrose	Annual	
	Ch-Gr-Wd	April	Aug		Elegant Clarida	Eve. Primrose	Annual	
	Chaparral	Oct	April	Shrub	Chaparral Currant	Gooseberry		
Purple	Woodland	Feb	April		Woodland Shooting Star	Primrose		
	Ch-Gr-Wd	Feb	May		Purple Sanicle	Parsley		
	Gr&Wd	Feb	June		Ground Iris	Iris		
	Gr&Wd	Feb	June		Blue Toadflax	Figwort	Annual	Non
	Chap&Wd	Feb	July		California Bee Plant	Figwort		
	Ch-Gr-Wd	Mar	June		Chia	Mint	Annual	
	Gr&Wd	Mar	June		Tomcat Clover	Pea	Annual	
	Chap & Wd	Mar	April	Shrub	Flowering Currant	Gooseberry		
	Gr&Wd	Mar	May		Purple Owl Clover	Figwort	Annual	
	Chap&Wd	Mar	May		Mission Bells	Lily		
Gr&Wd	April	June		Chinese Houses	Figwort	Annual		
Red	Chap&Wd	Jan	July		Indian Warrior	Figwort		
	Woodland	Feb	May		Common Trillium	Lily		
	Woodland	Feb	June		Red Maids	Purslane	Annual	
	Chap&Wd	Mar	Sept		Franciscan Paintbrush	Figwort		
	Woodland	April	June		Columbine	Buttercup		
White	Chaparral	Dec	April	Shrub	Coast Silk Tassel	Silk Tassel		
	Gr&Wd	Jan	April		Milk Maids	Mustard		
	Grassland	Jan	Dec		Sweet Alyssum	Mustard	Annual	Non
	Grassland	Feb	May		Miner's Lettuce	Purslane	Annual	
	Grassland	Feb	June		Wild Radish	Mustard	Annual	Non
	Ch-Gr-Wd	Feb	June		Star Lily	Lily		
	Chap & Wd	Mar	May		Vine Virgin's Bower	Buttercup		
	Woodland	Mar	June		Bedstraw	Madder	Annual	Non
	Woodland	Mar	June		False Solomon's Seal	Lily		
	Woodland	Mar	June		Woodland Star	Saxifrage		
Chap & Wd	April	June		White Globe Lily	Lily			
Yellow	Chaparral	Jan	Mar	Shrub	Western Leatherwood	Daphne		
	Chap & Gr	Feb	May		Monolopia	Sunflower	Annual	
	Chap&Wd	Feb	May		Pacific Sanicle	Parsley		
	Ch-Gr-Wd	Feb	June		California Buttercup	Buttercup		
	Grassland	Feb	June		Mustard	Mustard		
	Woodland	Mar	May		Fairy Bells	Lily		
	Gr&Wd	Mar	June		Mule Ears	Sunflower		
	Chaparral	Mar	July		Winter Cress	Mustard		
	Woodland	April	May		Hartweg's Tauschia	Parsley		
	Grassland	April	June		Mariposa Lily	Lily		

