

Native Plant Appreciation Week – Wildflower Walks in Southwest Washington

By Micki Stauffer

Governor Gregoire has declared May 3rd to May 9th as Native Plant Appreciation Week in Washington State. What better way to appreciate native plants than to go to see them where they grow naturally. My husband and I are wildflower fanatics. We love all kinds of native plants, but especially the beautiful wildflowers that bloom so profusely in Southwest Washington. We would like to share with you a few of our favorite places to go to see the most spectacular displays we have found, and would love to hear from you where you go and what you see in our local area.

Catherine Creek



Fritillaria



Dodecatheon



Wildflower meadow

Of course the earliest wildflowers appear in the area where the sun hits first, on the east end of the Columbia River Gorge. Most of the great wildflower displays in the Gorge require some strenuous hiking (i.e. if you are up to them, Dog Mountain, Hamilton Mountain), but Catherine Creek has paved paths and is wheelchair accessible for over a mile of trails. There are also areas that require more hiking ability, and you will see more wildflowers the more area you cover, but the paved paths will give you an excellent introduction to the wildflowers of the area. There are even display boards describing what you will see in each spring month. The flowers change according to the water level, drying out as the spring progresses. The early spring wildflowers appear at Catherine Creek in March, and the display continues with the character changing every few weeks through May, depending on water levels and sun intensity. As you go higher up, you will progress backwards in bloom time. You can go every week and see a different set of flowers. This area is mostly dry after mid-June.

Common wildflowers seen (these are only a few, too many to list!!):

March: Grass Widow (*Sisyrinchium douglasii*), Yellow Bells (*Fritillaria pudica*), Columbia Desert Parsley (*Lomatium columbianum*) and Gray's Desert Parsley (*Lomatium grayi*), Glacier Lily (*Erythronium grandiflorum*).

April: Shooting Star (*Dodecatheon poeticum*), Camas (*Camassia quamash*), White Pectritis (*Plectritis macrocera*), Balsam Root, (*Balsamorhiza* sp.), Lupine (*Lupinus* sp.), Paintbrush(*Castilleja* sp.), Chocolate Lily (*Fritillaria lanceolata*).

May: Blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium angustifolium*), Bitter Root (*Lewisia rediviv*), Cluster Lily(*Brodiaea howelii*)

Getting there: Take Hwy 14 east past White Salmon. Five miles past the Hood River Bridge, turn left onto Old Hwy 8. The road goes around a little lake. The sign for Catherine Creek is about 1.5 miles up the Old Hwy. Park on the left near the gate. The paved paths are on the right heading down toward the Columbia River. On the left you can hike up to meadows and into rocky areas that have a spectacular view of the Columbia River as well as wild flowers galore.

Lacamas Heritage Trail



Camas



Gaultheria shallon



Trillium parviflorum

The 3.5 mile Lacamas Heritage Trail starts at Lacamas Creek and continues on past Lacamas Lake, hooking up with the Lacamas Lake trail system for many more miles of trails. The Lacamas Heritage end of the trail starts at Camas Meadows Golf Course, and has been preserved for its native plant value as well as for wildlife and birds. It is a gravel trail, flat and easy to walk. The most beautiful display occurs in spring when the Camas (*Camassia quamash*) bloom covers the meadows. The meadows also contain the largest known patch of Bradshaw's *Lomatium*, found in only three locations in North America. Along the walk you will see *Trillium parviflorum*, the Small-flowered sessile Trillium native only to the Pacific Northwest, as well as *Trillium ovatum*, the Western Wake Robin. In later spring you will see Columbia Tiger Lily (*Lilium columbianum*), Chocolate Lilies (*Fritillaria* sp.) and many various native flowering shrubs including *Ribes sanguineum*, red flowering current, *Amelanchior alnifolia*, Western Serviceberry or Saskatoon Berry, *Mahonia aquifolium*, Tall Oregon Grape, *Viburnum edule*, Highbush Cranberry, and *Gaultheria shalon*, Salal – again, too many to list!!

Getting there: The entrance and parking lot are on Goodwin Road just past the Camas Meadows Golf Club entrance. Take Hwy 14 to the 192nd St. exit, turn right on NE 13th, which changes name to Goodwin Road.

Silver Star Mountain



Wildflowers



Lupine and Columbine



Columbia Tiger Lily

Later in the season, when the snow melts at higher elevations, Silver Star Mountain is the hands down most spectacular display of wildflowers in the area. This mountain was burned over during the Yacolt Burn of 1902, and the forest cover never returned. Therefore the rocky soil and open meadows give rise to a wonderland of flowers not usually seen at this low (4390 feet) elevation. Getting there is a bit of a challenge, since the old logging roads are not maintained well and the potholes can eat a small car. Four wheel drive is the way to go. The two and a half mile walk to the top is not too difficult, especially stopping every few feet to exclaim over some new discovery or take pictures! At the top, the five mountain view (Rainier, Hood, Jefferson, Adams, St. Helens) is alone worth the effort. The wildflowers vary with the elevation and the exposure. Some years the snow cover does not leave until late June or July, delaying the bloom times. Climbing higher sends you back in time to earlier spring flowers. Mid-July is usually the best time for the most flowers, including Bear Grass (*Xenophyllum tenax*), Columbia Tiger Lily (*Lilium columbianum*), Columbine (*Aquilegia formosa*), Trout Lily (*Erythronium oregonum*), Bunchberry (*Cornus unalaschensis*), *Penstemon rupicola*, *Gentian* species and many, many more.

Getting there: It is best to go with someone who knows the way, as the logging roads are not well marked. From Hwy 503 from Vancouver, drive about 6.5 miles past Battle Ground, turn right on Rock Creek Road (becomes Lucia Falls Road) and go to Sunset Falls Campground. Turn right into the campground, cross the bridge and follow the logging road several miles to the parking lot at Silver Star. The trail goes through some low brush to an abandoned road, through meadows and forest, reaching the top where an old fire lookout used to be.

Many other wildflower walks are available close to Clark County, these are just a few favorites. Hope these ideas encourage you to get out and smell the flowers!!

References

Wildflowers of the Columbia Gorge by Russ Jolley, Oregon Historical Society Press, 1988

[Columbia River Gorge hike: Washington's shining Silver Star](#), by Terry Richard, The Oregonian, Wednesday June 18, 2008

[Catherine Creek](#). White Salmon Washington Hikes, Trails.com