



Mariposa READ
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Thursday, May 26, 2022 at 7:30 PM
Sunday, May 29, 2022 at 2:30 PM

Mariposa Wildflower Hikes

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Mariposa Wildflower Hikes

As we enjoy our spring days in Mariposa County, flowers are in bloom everywhere. While this season holds some dread for those who suffer from allergies, many people from all over the world will choose this time to come to Mariposa to see the huge number of wildflowers that are blooming along some of our famous hiking trails. The variety of flowers add big swatches of color to the region's meadows, foothills, and canyons of the Sierra Nevada area. The roar of the rushing river and colorful hillsides full of spring wildflowers are a combination that makes Mariposa a wonderful place for springtime hikes.

Mariposa County is a huge area spreading across thousands of feet of elevation changes. Ranging from low elevation pastures to alpine meadows, the county makes wildflower viewing very easy, and very colorful. Throughout the warmer months in Mariposa County, you may see a multitude of flowers. One of the most common, and California's most famous, is the state flower, the California Poppy. These brilliant flowers bloom all over the county and can be seen first in low elevation areas like Hornitos, Cathey's Valley, and Mariposa. The California Poppy's bloom is a little orange cup atop thin green stems and feathery leaves. They are everywhere and they turn the hills and canyons orange this time of year. In the Merced River Canyon, along Highway 140, poppies coat the canyon's walls and make for a breathtaking drive. To get a closer look at these beautiful flowers, you may want to take some of the wonderful hiking trails. The California Poppy grows abundantly along Hite's Cove near Cedar Lodge.

The Briceberg area along the Merced Wild & Scenic River offers great viewings of poppies and a lot of other beautiful wildflowers. You can walk or drive the Merced River trail. If you choose to walk, you may park at the Briceberg Visitor's Center for free. You will walk across the bridge just up the road and continue along unpaved Briceberg River Road. That is also known as the old Yosemite Valley Road Grade. It is about five miles to the end of this road and there are restrooms at the end. The Merced River Trail continues for about another mile and a half past the restrooms.

One of the magical views in the Mariposa area is when the Redbud plant has its brilliant pinky-purple, heart-shaped flowers. Redbud is a small tree that is just covered with these little flowers. Redbud in a sea of poppies is truly a spectacular sight. Another common flower is the Lupine. This flower has a stem and a dozen or so small flowers grow along that stem in purples, white, and blues. This flower can also be seen at many elevations and is among the most common flower found in Yosemite National Park.

Yosemite National Park has some great, and user-friendly trails for those that love to see wildflowers. Yosemite Valley Loop Trail is one of the most popular and is a pretty flat hike. The full loop trail is thirteen miles, but you can go as far as you like and turn back or do the half-loop hike. The trail head starts at Upper Yosemite Falls and about a mile in you will arrive at the edge of Cook's Meadow. Here you will have an amazing view of a field of green with flowers dotted all through it. Keep walking a few more miles and you will arrive at the base of El Capitan and another meadow full of bright wildflowers.

Another great wildflower hike in Yosemite is McGurk Meadow along Glacier Point Road. The hike is short and easy. In McGurk Meadow you will find lupine, Indian Paintbrush, Monkeyflowers, Cow's Parsnip, Shooting Stars, and Snow Plant. Snow Plant is one of the rarer flowers in Yosemite. It is easy to spot as its bright red petals grow up out of areas just as the high country's snow is melting. Snow Plant is like a speck of red on a white canvas. The flower rises up between six to twelve inches off the forest floor. This all-red plant has no chlorophyll and therefore does not survive using photosynthesis (using sunlight) like most flowers. Instead it thrives off fungus growing in the wet soil from the melting snow. Getting a photo of a Snow Plant is a true treasure.

If you are near Yosemite looking for wildflowers to discover in the later months of summer, Tuolumne Meadows area along Tioga Pass can be found in bloom as late as August. Because of the heavy snow and slow melt, Tuolumne Meadows offers a cool area with late blooms in many colors, shapes and sizes.

You can find the trailhead of the South Fork of the Merced River trail near Savage's Trading Post. This trail starts on private property and continues into the Sierra National Forest. It is a marked trail that is relatively flat, but narrow. If you want to make that hike longer and more challenging, you could walk all the way to Jerseydale.

No matter if you are exploring Yosemite, the South Fork of the Merced River, Bagby, or any of the other places I have mentioned, hiking during the wildflower season is truly a must for every bloom enthusiast. Viewing wildflowers is an amazing experience in Mariposa County in the spring and summer months. There are some recommendations to follow to assure that it is enjoyable for everyone.

1. Do not pick the flowers. They will be more beautiful in your photos than wilting in your hands. You should also leave them for the next person to enjoy. Allowing them to go to seed to grow blooms next year is an important part of the process. Also note that while you should never pick wildflowers, picking a California Poppy is illegal. Please leave all of the flowers in place.
2. Drive safe and only park in designated areas. Be sure to pull all of the way off of the highway for your photo opportunities and be aware of oncoming traffic. Make sure you are seen and safe when taking photos near the road.
3. Stay on the trails. Trampling the plants is not good for the flowers or for the view of other visitors. You could step on a rock or in a gopher hole and fall or cause erosion in a bad place. When walking through tall brush, the rattlesnakes are more difficult to see. It is truly best to stay on the trails.
4. Leave No Trace. Cub Scouts learn this, and really we all should leave nothing behind where we have walked in nature but our footprints. Do not remove or leave anything that lets anyone know you were ever there. Haul away any trash you have used, do not break tree branches, pick flowers, or interact with wild animals other than taking photos. Leave no trace that you were ever there.

If you would like more information on hiking areas and guided hikes, you could contact the Sierra Foothill Conservancy at 209 742 5556 or find them online at sierrafoothill.org. If you have taken photos of wildflowers on your hikes, we would love for you to share them in this event for Mariposa READ called Mariposa Wildflower Hikes under the Mariposa Adult and Family Literacy Program Page in Facebook