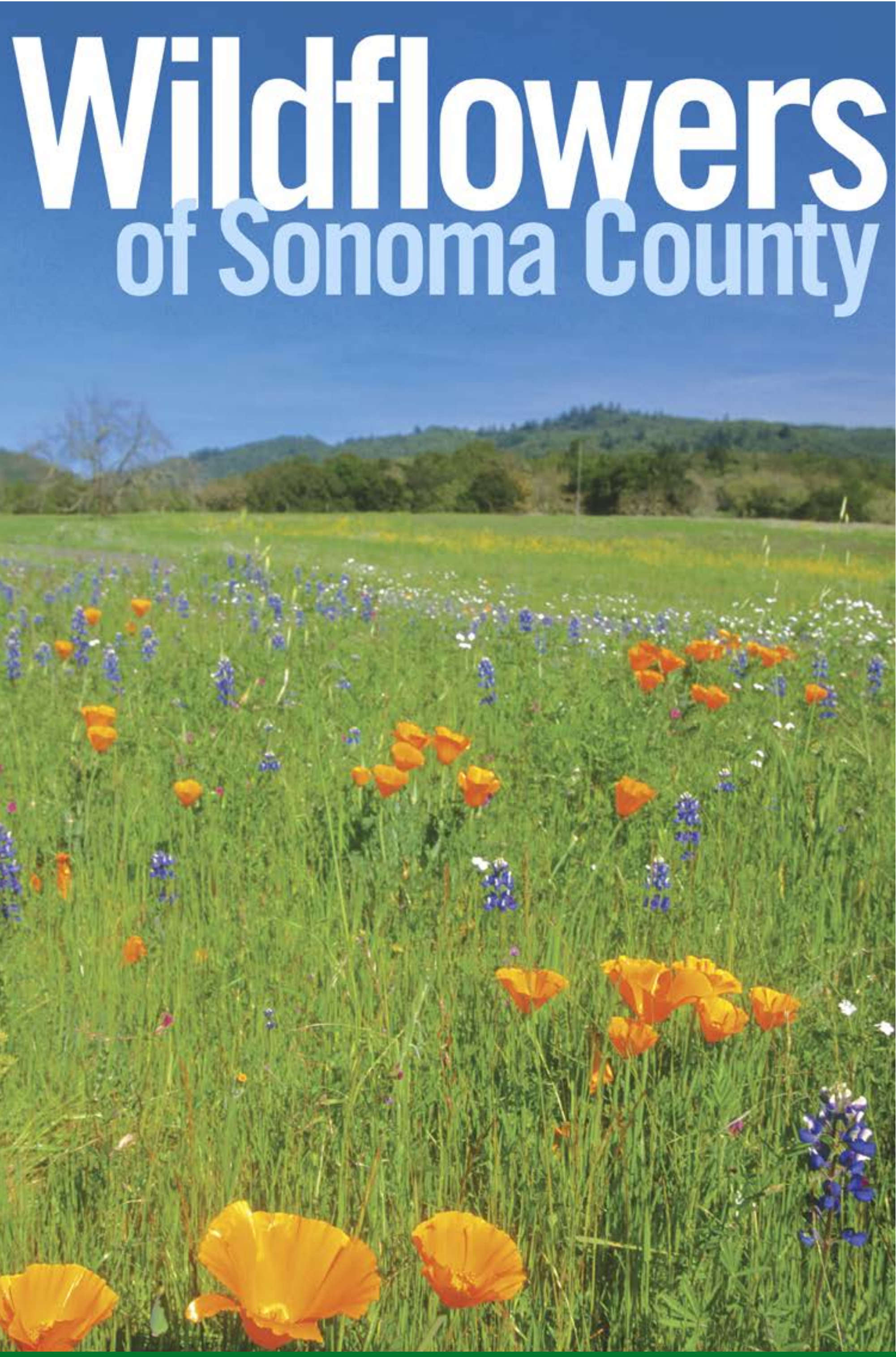
Wildflowers of Sonoma County



SONOMA COUNTY
REGIONAL PARKS

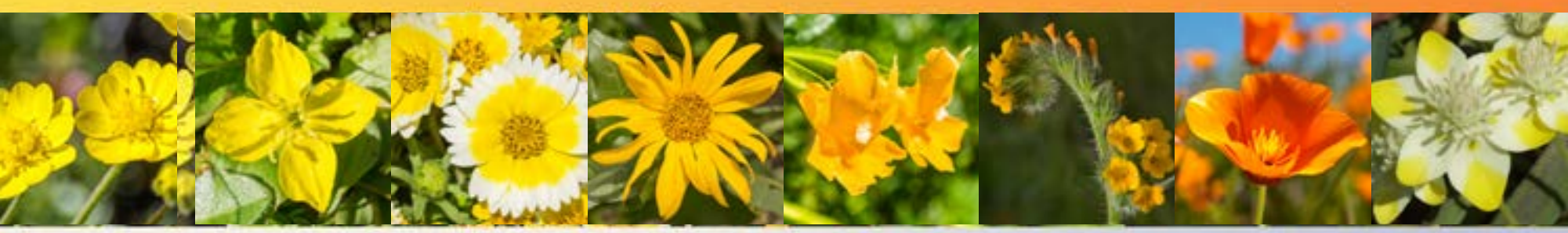
Common Wildflowers of Sonoma County

SONOMA COUNTY REGIONAL PARKS

Every spring, a variety of annual and perennial wildflowers bloom in Sonoma County's parks. This guide will help you identify some of the more common flowers. Parks known for their wildflower displays include Crane Creek, Foothill, North Sonoma Mountain, Sonoma Valley and Taylor Mountain, but you will notice certain flowers in almost every park. The flowers in this guide are organized by color, and more details can be found by clicking on the "More info" link in each entry.

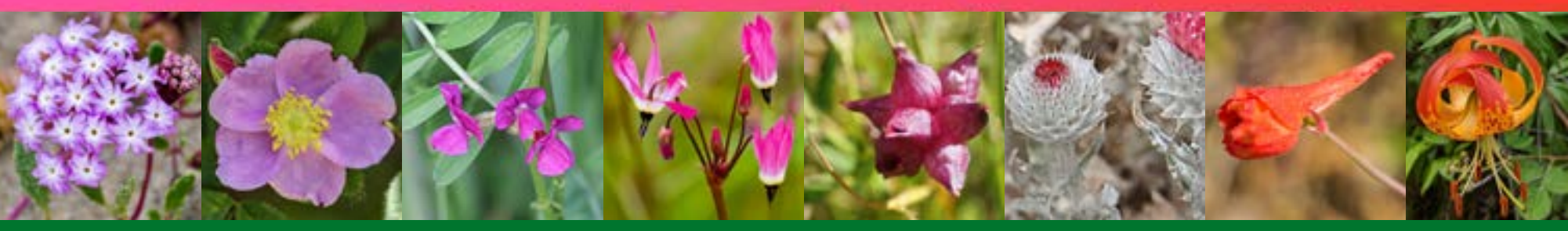
BLUE FLOWERS (Blue to Violet)

YELLOW FLOWERS (Yellow to Orange)



WHITE FLOWERS

RED FLOWERS (Rose to Red)



BLUE FLOWERS (Blue to Violet)

Baby blue eyes

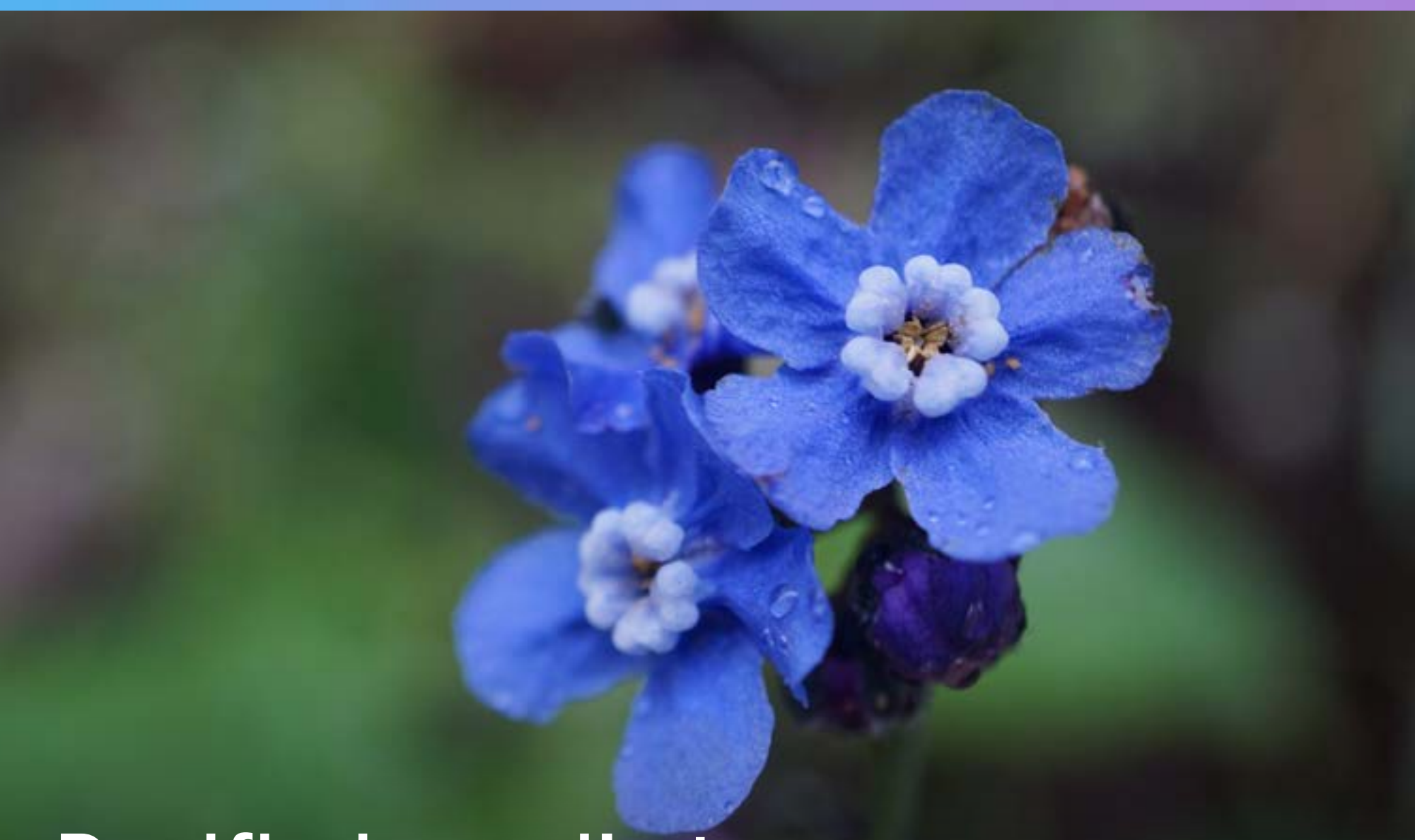
Nemophila menziesii

March - June | Annual

More info

This flower, a common annual herb and popular garden plant, grows throughout California, with two varieties common in Sonoma County. Var. *atomaria*, found in the north coast, has white flowers with black dots, often with a faint blue tint or blue veins. Var. *menziesii* has bright blue flowers with white centers generally dotted with black (pictured). Baby blue eyes are commonly grown as an ornamental flower in native plant or water-conserving gardens.

BLUE FLOWERS (Blue to Violet)



Pacific hound's tongue

Cynoglossum grande / Adelinia grande

February - August | Perennial

More info

This five-lobed flower ranges from pink-purple to deep blue with white centers. It is in the borage family. There are dozens of *Cynoglossum* species found throughout the world, but *C. grande* grows only west of the Cascades and Sierra. Hound's tongue prefers shady areas in woodlands and chaparral. It is similar to the invasive *Myosotis sylvatica* or forget-me-not. Native Americans have traditionally used preparations from the root to treat burns and stomachaches.

BLUE FLOWERS (Blue to Violet)

Lupines

Lupinus spp.

March - October *(depending on variety)*

Perennial or Annual

More info

These herbaceous ornamental plants, which can be perennial or annual, grow throughout California. They are common in the California Coast Ranges. The compound leaflets of the flower structure make them easy to identify. They are usually purplish-blue, but some are yellow, such as the coastal bush lupine. Sky lupine (pictured here) can grow up to 20 inches tall with blue flowers containing white or yellow spots. Some lupine is considered toxic if ingested.

BLUE FLOWERS (Blue to Violet)

Douglas iris

Iris douglasiana

February - June | Perennial

More info

The vigorous-growing Douglas iris is usually a purplish-blue and occasionally white or yellow, with two or three flowers on each stem. It's most common in coastal grasslands. Douglas iris is regarded as a noxious weed in pastures because it forms clumps that inhibit other vegetation and its leaves are unpalatable to cattle. It's known to be one of the most important sources of rope and basket-making fiber for Native Americans in Northern California.

BLUE FLOWERS (Blue to Violet)

Blue dicks

Dichelostemma capitatum

February - April | Perennial

More info

This is a long-stemmed flower in the lily family with a head-like cluster of blue, blue-purple or pink-purple blooms. It can be found at elevations from sea level to 7,500 feet. Blue dicks are often seen in burn areas due to their preference for open environments with an abundance of soil nutrients. They mix well with other native plants. The corms have traditionally been used in the diet of many Native American people in California.

BLUE FLOWERS (Blue to Violet)

Western blue-eyed grass

Sisyrinchium bellum

March - May | Perennial

More info

This flower is in the iris family and is more commonly purple than blue, with grassy and tufted leaves. Blue-eyed grass often grows in open spaces where there is some moisture, but can be found in woodlands and from coastal bluffs to interior grasslands. It grows just about everywhere in California, except for full desert. The Coast Miwok and Ohlone people have traditionally made tea from blue-eyed grass to treat stomach aches and reduce fever.

BLUE FLOWERS (Blue to Violet)

Checker lily

Frittillaria affinis

March - May | Perennial

More info

Also called “mission bells,” this flower is found throughout western North America in a variety of habitats, including the coast and oak woodlands and chaparral of parks like Hood Mountain Regional Park. The pendant, bell-shaped flowers on top of slender stems, can range in color from yellowish- or greenish-brown with yellow mottling to purplish-black or yellow-green with purple mottling. It grows from bulbs that have traditionally been cooked and used for food by Native Americans.

BLUE FLOWERS (Blue to Violet)

Bird's Eye Gilia

Gilia tricolor

April - August | Annual

More info

This flower is found throughout California and is a member of the phlox or Jacob's ladder family. It has feathery leaves and petals with blue-violet edges and lighter, almost-white centers. Bird's eye gilia has blue pollen, which is uncommon in wildflowers. The flower's tubular throat is dark purple at the top and yellow toward the bottom. It is frequently visited by bees and hummingbirds.

YELLOW FLOWERS (Yellow to Orange)

California buttercup

Ranunculus californicus

February - May | Perennial

More info

This perennial herb brightens much of California with its glossy, deep yellow petals. It cheerfully announces spring in its native habitat that extends to Baja California and some Pacific Coast islands. It can grow from 5 inches to more than 2 feet. Ranunculus is Latin for “little frog” and reflects the flowers’ preference for wet habitats. An excellent nectar source for bees and other pollinators, the Miwok people have traditionally used California buttercup seeds for food.

YELLOW FLOWERS (Yellow to Orange)

Sun cup

Taraxia ovata

February - April | Perennial

More info

Sun cups have a wide rosette of four fleshy, feather-shaped or oval leaves, which are usually yellow but occasionally white with yellow spots. The stems are thin and erect. Sun cups are native to California Coast Ranges and are often found in clay soil. Without water, they can go dormant in the summer, but come back after the seasonal rains. Sun cups are in the evening primrose family and are also commonly called "goldeneggs."

YELLOW FLOWERS (Yellow to Orange)

Tidy tips

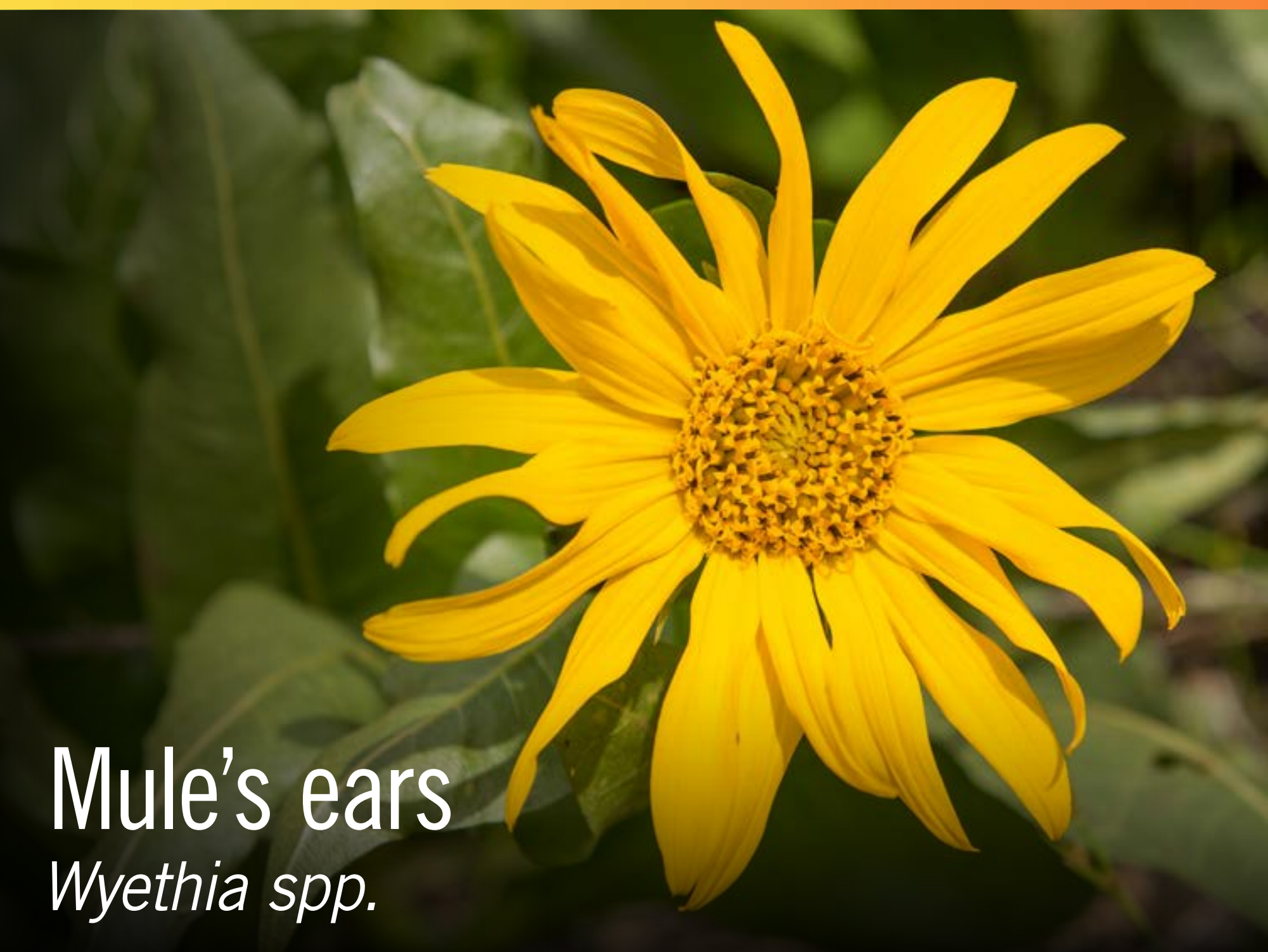
Layia platyglossa

February - May | Annual

More info

Tidy tips are bright golden-yellow with distinct, sharp-margined white tips. This daisy-like flower is native to California's Coast Ranges and grows in meadows and grasslands. It has a long bloom period and is usually one of the first wildflowers to appear in spring. This flower is an important food source for the threatened Bay checkerspot butterfly. The Ohlone people have traditionally eaten the seeds as pinole, a ground meal. Tidy tips are often found in commercial wildflower mixes.

YELLOW FLOWERS (Yellow to Orange)



Mule's ears

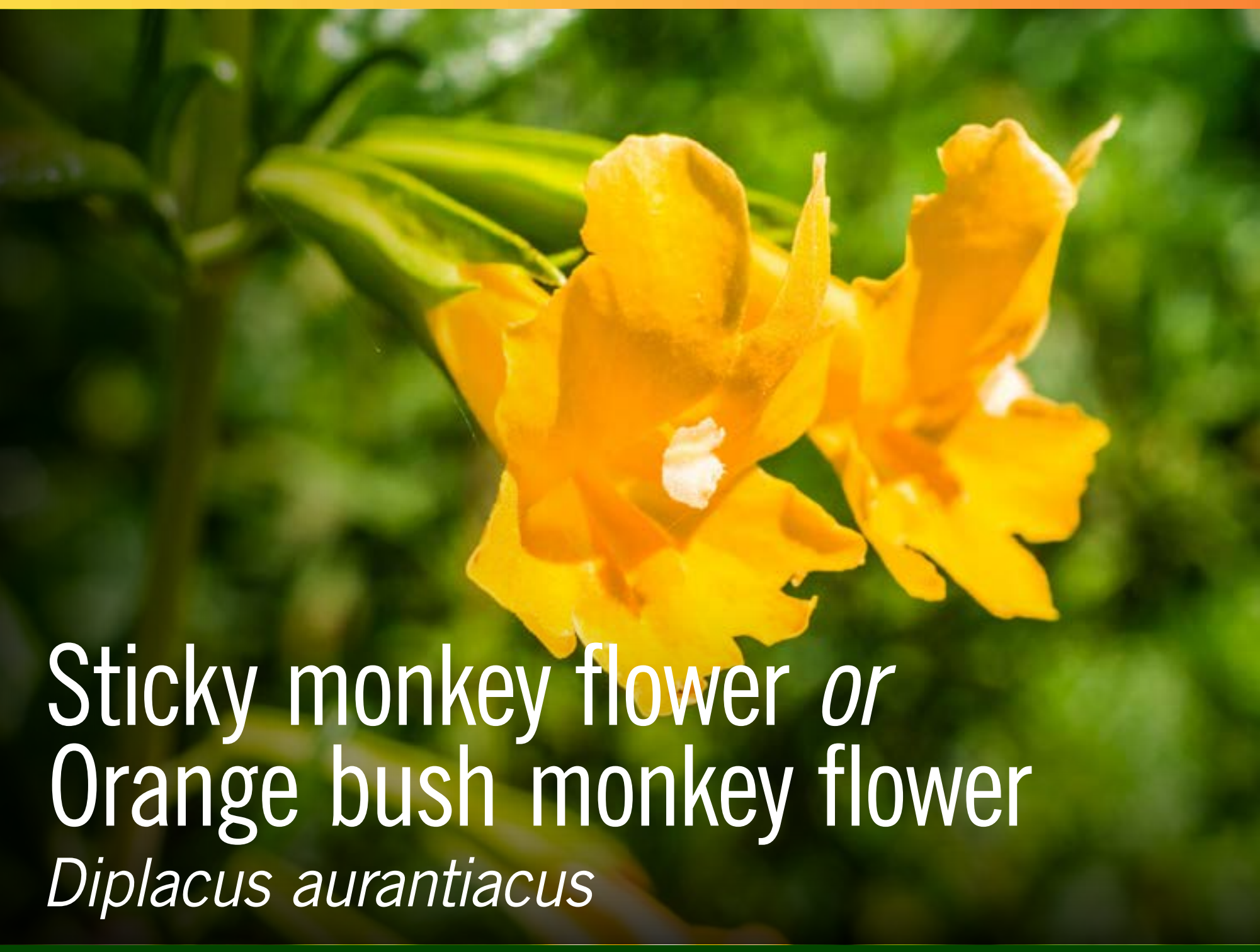
Wyethia spp.

March - June | Perennial

More info

Two species of mule's ears – narrow-leafed (*Wyethia angustifolia*, pictured) and smooth-leafed (*Wyethia glabra*) – are found in Sonoma County. Part of the sunflower family, this perennial herb has large flowers – 2 to 3 inches wide – relative to other wildflowers. Native to the West Coast, it grows in grassland and other open habitat. Mule's ears are often spotted in sunny meadows and at the edges of woodlands. It attracts seed-eating birds and is a great plant for bees and butterflies.

YELLOW FLOWERS (Yellow to Orange)



Sticky monkey flower *or* Orange bush monkey flower

Diplacus aurantiacus

March - August | Perennial

More info

California has many species of monkey flower in a variety of colors, but this light-orange species is more common. It has deep, green, sticky leaves that protect against dessication and tubular flowers with five broad lobes. Pollinated by bees and hummingbirds, it's a host plant for larvae of the common buckeye butterfly. The Miwok and Pomo people have traditionally used monkey flower for decoration and to treat minor ailments like sores, burns, diarrhea and eye irritation.

YELLOW FLOWERS (Yellow to Orange)

Fiddleneck

Amsinckia spp.

February - June | Annual

More info

The many species in the fiddleneck genus look similar and are named for their flowers that curl up almost in the shape of the head of a fiddle. Two species in Sonoma County are the common fiddleneck (*Amsinckia menziessi*, pictured) and rancher's fiddleneck (*Amsinckia menziesii intermedia.*) Seeds and foliage are poisonous to cattle, and the plant's sharp hairs can irritate human skin. However, the shoots, seeds and leaves have been traditionally used for food and medicine by Native Americans.

YELLOW FLOWERS (Yellow to Orange)

California poppy

Eschscholzia californica

February - September

Perennial or Annual

More info

Found throughout California, this flower was named the "Golden State" flower in 1903. Its solitary flowers grow on long stems with blue-green foliage. The four silky petals can range from orange to yellow and each petal has a deep-orange spot at its base. The petals close at night or in cold, windy weather and open in the morning sun. The leaves and roots of this flower are rumored to have a sedative effect.

YELLOW FLOWERS (Yellow to Orange)

Creamcups

Platystemon californicus

March - May | Annual

More info

This flower is in the poppy family and has five basic color patterns: solid white, solid yellow, a white petal with a yellow tip or yellow base or both. Its stem and leaves can vary, depending on geography and habitat conditions. Coastal forms, found in Sonoma County, may be hairless and somewhat succulent. The flowers can be pollinated by both wind and bees.

WHITE FLOWERS

Common yarrow

Achillea millefolium

April - August | Perennial

More info

Found throughout North America and in nearly every California habitat, common yarrow is made up of large, white, compact clusters of fragrant flowers that produce abundant pollen for bees and butterflies. Yarrow is found in grasslands and forest openings and can grow up to 3 feet tall. In the Middle Ages, yarrow was used in beer prior to the use of hops. Yarrow has been traditionally used by the Miwok people as an analgesic and head cold remedy.

WHITE FLOWERS

Woodland star

Lithophragma affine

March - May | Perennial

More info

This flower, also called San Francisco woodland star and common woodland star, is a pretty herb that's found in a variety of habitats where competition from grazing and non-native plants are low. It grows on a long stem with leaves divided into sharp-pointed lobes. The stem can have up to 15 widely spaced flowers with five bright-white petals divided into three tooth-like lobes at the tips. It's found almost exclusively within California.

WHITE FLOWERS

Milkmaids

Cardamine californica

February - April | Perennial

More info

Also called bitter cress or California toothwort, this is one of the first wildflowers to bloom in the Bay Area each year. The flower has four white petals that close at sundown. The flower also nods its stem during rains to protect its pollen. Milkmaids grow in a variety of habitats, including shady slopes, grasslands and open woodlands. Milkmaids are considered to be a first sign of spring.

WHITE FLOWERS

White brodiaea

Triteleia hyacinthina

March - June | Perennial

More info

Also called “wild hyacinth,” “fool’s onion” or “white-flowered grassnut,” this flower is found in low, moist places such as meadows, vernal pools and along streams. It also grows in drier valley grasslands, foothill woodlands and closed-cone pine forests. The flowers are usually white, but can also be lilac, blue or purple. The outer part has a distinctive green vein. It grows from corms, which Native Americans in California have traditionally eaten raw, roasted, boiled or baked.

WHITE FLOWERS

Fringed false hellebore

Veratrum fimbriatum

July - September | Perennial

More info

Also called the “fringed corn lily,” this flower has only been documented within a 60-mile stretch of northern coastal scrub plant communities in Sonoma and Mendocino counties, including Gualala and Stillwater Cove Regional Parks. Its closest relatives live in the High Sierra. If not in bloom, you’ll see its large, flat green leaves that grow around the base of the plant. And, if you’re lucky enough to catch it in bloom, take a moment to enjoy its fragrance.

WHITE FLOWERS

California buckwheat

Eriogonum sp.

April - September | Perennial

More info

This plant has white or pinkish flowers that densely cluster to form a ball shape. Its leaves are somewhat fuzzy with greenish-gray on top and white underneath. It's an important nectar source for summer butterflies and is particularly attractive to honey bees. There are many recognized varieties of California buckwheat, including seaside buckwheat (pictured), which commonly grows on the Northern California coast. Some species shed flowers and leaves each dry season, creating a natural mulch.

WHITE FLOWERS

Fremont's deathcamas

Toxicoscordion fremontii

March - May | Perennial

More info

Also called common star lily or star zigadene, this flower is usually found on grassy or woody slopes or rocky outcrops. Its spike of cream-colored flowers bloom from an underground bulb. Even though it is perennial, it does not bloom every year. The name "deathcamas" refers to a toxin found in all parts of the plant. Evidence suggests the Lewis and Clark expedition accidentally ate deathcamas bulbs ground into a bread, which halted their journey while its members recovered.

WHITE FLOWERS

Giant White Wakerobin

Trillium albidum

February - June | Perennial

More info

This flower is found throughout the western United States, usually in deciduous woodlands, in large shady ravines and on rocky bluffs. Also called “white toadshade,” it is low-growing and sometimes rose- or spicy-scented. Several species of trillium contain chemical compounds called sapogenins that have been used medicinally. A single trillium plant can typically live for 25 years or longer.

RED FLOWERS (Rose to Red)

Pink sand verbena

Abronia umbellata

Year round | Perennial

More info

This plant, a popular California native, has fragrant rose-purple flowers with reddish stems and fleshy oval shaped leaves. It's typically found blooming throughout the year on beaches and sand dunes. Pink sand verbena blossoms were first collected by European naturalists in 1786 in Monterey, and it was the first California native plant to be described scientifically. You may also encounter the more common (and fragrant) yellow sand verbena, which is found in the same habitat.

RED FLOWERS (Rose to Red)

California wild rose

Rosa californica

May - August | Perennial

More info

This plant grows throughout the West Coast, from Oregon to Baja California. It grows most abundantly in moist soils near water sources, but can also survive drought. Wild roses usually have fewer petals than cultivated roses, but they are similarly fragrant. The rose hips remain on the plant throughout winter, providing an important food source for wildlife. California wild rose is also a key pollinator plant, attracting a variety of native insects.

RED FLOWERS (Rose to Red)

Common vetch

Vicia sativa

February - June | Annual

More info

Also called garden vetch, tare or simply vetch, this is a nitrogen-fixing leguminous plant in the pea family. Although it's non-native to California and considered a weed when found growing in cultivated fields, this hardy plant can be useful as livestock fodder. The pea-like flowers, which are often visited by bumblebees, are usually bright pink-purple but sometimes whitish or yellow. Vetch has long been part of the human diet, found in carbonised remains at early Neolithic sites.

RED FLOWERS (Rose to Red)

Henderson's shooting star

Primula hendersonii

February - April | Perennial

More info

Also called "mosquito bill," this flower can be magenta to deep-lavender to white. It's usually found in open woodlands and is sometimes grown in gardens as an ornamental flower, preferring good drainage and a dry summer. It's "buzz pollinated" by bees, which means bees grab onto the flower and move their flight muscles rapidly, causing the flower and anthers to vibrate, dislodging pollen. Only about 9 percent of flowers in the world are primarily pollinated this way.

RED FLOWERS (Rose to Red)

Cow bag clover

Trifolium depauperatum

February - May | Annual

More info

This small annual is named because it looks like a cow's udder. This flower is also called dwarf sack clover, and it can grow upright or trailing on the ground. It's native to western North America and to western South America. The tiny, sack-like petals are pinkish purple and sometimes have white tips. Cow bag clover grows in many types of habitat, including coastal prairies and mixed evergreen forests.

RED FLOWERS (Rose to Red)

Cobwebby Thistle

Cirsium occidentale

May - July | Perennial

More info

This eye-catching plant can be found throughout California in mountain ranges, valleys and the Mojave Desert. Unlike many non-native thistles, the cobwebby thistle is not a troublesome weed. It's beautiful, varied and showy, with silver leaves and a large brilliant flower. It's an important larval host to the California crescent, mylitta crescent and painted lady butterflies. It can be short or quite tall (9.5 feet), and its petals can range from dark pink to red.

RED FLOWERS (Rose to Red)

Red larkspur

Delphinium nudicaule

March - June | Perennial

More info

The color blue is usually associated with larkspurs, but red larkspur (canyon larkspur or canyon delphinium) is one of the few red species. It's in the buttercup family and can grow from 1 to 6 feet tall. It has thin, long stems, and the flowers can be found in shades of red and orange. It's often pollinated by hummingbirds and has been traditionally used as medicine by Native Americans.

RED FLOWERS (Rose to Red)

Leopard Lily

Lilium pardilinum

May - July | Perennial

More info

Also known as "panther lily," this flower is native to California and southern Oregon and usually grows in damp areas. It typically grows 3 to 6 feet tall and can sometimes reach 8 feet. The flowers are red-orange with numerous brown spots and are pollinated by bees and butterflies. The plant spreads through a root systmen (or "rhizomes"), which can be cooked and eaten. This species has several rare subspecies, like the Pitkin Marsh lily, that are restricted to specific habitat types.