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## A Walk on the Wild(flower) Side of Los Angeles

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Bush Monkey Flowers appear in absolute riots of orange blossoms. Photo by Edward I. Placidi

Spring is a bedazzling sight this year like the turning of a kaleidoscope. [Wildflowers](#) have burst into bloom in a full spectrum of colors, shapes and families. And they can be enjoyed in a place little expected by most: In the heart of the famous urban sprawl of Los Angeles.

No, this is not an aberration or anything unexpected, though it is a bit more intense, concentrated and abundant this spring than the typical year following a few good downpours. Ribbons of mountains dissect and frame parts of greater Los Angeles, offering immediately accessible, semi-feral escapes from the metro madness. And what you find plying the hiking paths that wend through canyons, atop ridges and up hillsides is also a mad, mad world – an explosion of wild blossoms in every color of the rainbow.

On recent hikes in April and May through the chaparral in Franklin Canyon Park – one of the scores of canyons, parks, ranches, beaches and preserves that comprise the [Santa Monica](#)

[Mountains National Recreation Area \(https://www.nps.gov/samo/index.htm\)](https://www.nps.gov/samo/index.htm) – nature’s display was eye-popping and spirit lifting. Clusters of white California Everlasting. Riots of orange Treasure Flower. Alien-looking thistles dotting the landscape with intense purple buds. Sprays of bright yellow Bush Sunflowers. Surprise clumps of stunning pink Prickly Phlox and lavender Parry’s Phacelia. Splashes of brilliant red California Fuchsia contrasting with the green shrubbery.

The bounty this year brought back memories when I used to hike these hills as a youngster, developing a great appreciation for nature’s palette, and often picking handfuls of wildflowers to bring home to my mother and aunts. Those were wilder times in the canyon, long before it was added to Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and huge homes were built along the crests of the hills that encroach on the perimeters of the park. Deer are rarely about today but were plentiful back then and could be seen grazing in groups by the now-empty lower reservoir, while bobcats and foxes were occasionally spotted. And unlike today, when the trails are usually abuzz with hikers, joggers and dog-walkers, humans were infrequently seen.

Only one thing hasn’t changed over the years – the indomitable annual flare-up of wildflowers. Nothing discourages or defeats them. Each spring they burst to life once again, each with their distinct personality and characteristics, carpeting the hills with their signature hues and designs. The more delicate varieties, often with a small number of tender and brilliantly painted blossoms, tend to flame out quickly, while other hardier flowers may endure for many months, even persisting through the hot summer.

There are numerous flower families represented here, each with many varieties. But among this overflowing bouquet, I have had one enduring favorite, today as in the past – the Bush Monkey Flower. They appear in absolute riots of orange blossoms, with serrated petals that are slightly sticky to the touch. Seeing them brings an instant smile to my face, and puts an extra spring in my step, as I trek once again through the hills of Franklin Canyon Park.

<http://www.lamountains.com/parks.asp?parkid=14>

<http://www.examiner.com/article/a-walk-on-the-wild-flower-side-of-los-angeles>