



Super blooms

After wet winter, wildflowers fill gardens with color

BY DEBBIE ARRINGTON



California poppies bloom at Fremont Community Garden in Midtown.

PHOTO BY DEBBIE ARRINGTON

Flower lovers don't have to trek to the hills to see California poppies gone wild. "Super Bloom" has come to Sacramento.

Gardeners throughout suburban Sacramento have embraced California native plants. Just like their untamed wildflower cousins, these natives have enjoyed a wet winter and now are blooming like crazy wherever they can.

"My plants are so happy!" said Chris Lewis, director of Elderberry Nursery. "They got extra rain. ... It allows perennials to get their roots down deep. It's a fabulous thing."

Lewis, who lives and gardens in Carmichael, runs Elderberry Nursery at Soil Born Farms' American River Ranch in Rancho Cordova. The Sacramento Valley chapter of the California Native Plant Society operates Elderberry to propagate native plants while also educating the public how to grow them.

Native plants love winter and spring rain. Most of California got a deep soaking. In response, annual wildflowers carpeted the state's valleys and hillsides from Lake Elsinore to Oroville.

Since January 1, Sacramento rain totaled about 16 inches, more than 50 percent above normal. That's spurred green growth and abundant blooms from all sorts of plants, but particularly native species.

"Native plants will just have a phenomenal year," Lewis said. "We had so much rain, the water table is up so nice and high. There's a lushness we haven't felt in a long time."

"It's a great year for flowers," she added. "Redbuds are having a very nice time. Evening primrose will be around a lot longer. California fuchsia will be very happy. And of course, the poppies."

California's state flower will pop up often on the ninth annual Gardens Gone Native tour, which showcases the many ways to grow natives in the Sacramento area. Set for April 27, this free event invites visitors to 24 private gardens planted with mostly native species. Gardeners and docents will be on hand to share their secrets to blooming success. Last year, about 1,000 people took the tour, another project of Sac Valley CNPS.

"Everything's been kind of late [blooming] because of the weather," said organizer Colene Rauh, noting the cold spell in March. "But these warm days are really good. The ceanothus is out now. Irises are looking beautiful. Monkeyflowers are starting to bloom.

Blue-eyed grass and woodland strawberries love this weather. The sages are doing well. By the tour, there will be a lot to see."

One gardener on the tour created his own front-yard super bloom. Mark Lum in North Highlands turned his former lawn into a field of wildflower dreams.

"It focuses on bringing the beauty of the wild California super blooms into a neighborhood setting," said Lum, who started his lawn conversion in 2017 and now grows more than 50 native plants. "The land needed to retain more water, so I created two rain swales and a mounding landscape."

"The garden is heavy in annuals such as the Sky Lupine that has a pleasant floral smell when enough are present," he added. "But unique perennials like the fiery tips of the Indian Paintbrush also bring in the spring with color."

Gardens Gone Native Tour: 9:30 a.m.- 4 p.m. April 27. Free. See 24 private gardens in Sacramento and neighboring communities on this self-guided tour. For a map and garden descriptions, register at GardensGoneNative.eventbrite.com. For details, go to sacvalleycnps.org.

California Native Plant Society's Elderberry Nursery at Soil Born Farms: 2140 Chase Drive, Rancho Cordova. 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Wednesdays. For details, go to soilborn.org. □

Debbie Arrington, an award-winning garden writer and lifelong gardener, is co-creator of the Sacramento Digs Gardening blog and website.



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