

|| WILD COLORADO ||

# Wildflowers and the 5 senses

There's a sweetness to the air that's different than the rest of the dry summer months.

The rain just fell and you can see colors dotting the rolling hills above Highway 9 north of Silverthorne. It's so distant from the dustiness of the late summer, the dry

days, when everything is starting to brown and gray again. No, now, there's a scent in the air that's fresh, smells as delicious as a well-spiced bakery.

Smell the essence of sage. Every now and then, as the wind blows, you pick up the fragrance of wildflowers scattered through the fields near Lower Cataract Lake, a spot tucked under the Gore Range near Heeney.

Look around and test all five senses. Take in the purple lupine reflecting the sun and a butterfly fluttering above the soft grass. Hear the sound of water rushing through the creek and the whisper of the breeze moving across the peaceful lake. Feel the sun on your face and the connection of foot to trail as you walk further from the trailhead, toward the waterfall you can see is crushing down out of the mountains.

If I can make one suggestion as you embark on a wildflower hike, it's that you take your camera along. It seems a given, but here's the trick: Turn it to macro mode. Only take close-up photos. It will help you look closely and appreciate your surroundings — including the tiny bits. And for the particularly curious explorer, take along a wildflower book like "Rocky Mountain Wildflowers - Pocket Guide" by David Dahms.

### Morning glory

Coming from the East Coast, I appreciate the coolness of the morning air along the trail bordering the lake. I revel especially in the uniqueness of the moment: A two-hour hike accessible only 30 minutes outside of town, one that can be completed

## + MORE INFO

### THE COLORS IN THE HILLS

As temperatures heat up in higher elevations, different areas will start to pop with wildflowers

### TIPS FOR TRAIL USE

Wildflowers typically burst after snow melts and the ground is still wet. Keep that in mind as you seek to take in the picturesque settings of the High Country:

- > Wear shoes and be ready to clomp through mud. Trying to walk around widens the trail and destroys vegetation.
- > Be respectful of the trails and the work that goes into keeping them clean and useable for everyone. Clean up your dog's waste!
- > Go on a weekday to avoid significant traffic on popular trails.
- > Keep an eye out for tracks in the mud: deer prints are common!
- > Stop by the Forest Service office in Silverthorne for suggestions of where to go to find the flowers.
- > If you think it will take you two hours, give yourself at least three. Allow ample time to take in the scenery, snap photos and look closely at what lines the trail.

### A CHALLENGE TO READERS:

It's easy to take in the sights of the trail. But the smells of spring and summer are tough to describe. When you pay attention to all five senses, you get the full experience of being outdoors. The challenge is to come up with a description of scents and email it to me at [jkurbjun@summitdaily.com](mailto:jkurbjun@summitdaily.com). I'll publish the best blurbs in a future edition of Wild Colorado.

before the work day begins. I can't wait to show folks my Summit County morning.

Rounding a bend in the trail, there's the whitewater, the majesty of the waterfall tumbling into Lower Cataract Lake. The sound of rushing water moves across the lake and into my ears, with the background of birds chirping and the rustle of the wind in the aspen — coupled

with the pat-pat-pat of footsteps along the trail.

Looking up, there's the half moon, sitting in the sky — a bright blue sky, hardly a cloud in sight but for those hovering on the eastern horizon. Below the moon, the green-gray undersides of the aspen leaves flutter as the wind picks them up and twists them about in front of the slowly swaying pine trees.



Marsh marigold (left) and parry primrose, taken along the Continental Divide.

SPECIAL TO THE DAILY/KIM FENSKE



SUMMIT DAILY/JANICE KURBJUN

Recent rains have a serious silver lining in the number of wildflowers blooming in the High Country.

Every now and then, sourness mixes with the sweet — perhaps something green growing contrasted against the smell of a flowering plant.

Along the trail, before the falls, a massive old-growth tree stands topless, its upper branches seemingly removed by lightning. Its reddish-brown color is mixed in with gray, weathered limbs poking out under a swirl of char at the very top, along its jagged edges where the rest of the tree separated and fell to the ground.

Just beyond, the report of footprints changes from the hard, pat-pat-pat on rock and hard-packed trail to a duller sound of a needle-covered trail. The air cools and fills with moisture, and there's the Doppler effect of moving closer to the rushing falls.

Picking a path across a rock bridge to approach the falls, water that can't be contained in the creek's regular path turns into braided streams — lots of them — and the area feels more like the Pacific Northwest than Colorado's arid High Country.

Taking a moment on the bridge, I breathe deeply and

smell the fresh water galloping out of the craggy hillside. Opening my eyes, I chuckle when I watch a chipmunk and squirrel scramble nimbly across narrow trees perched above the raging current that looks like it'll swallow anything in its path. Suddenly, two birds zip out from under the bridge, chirping loudly over the waterfall, flying low and fast.

On the far side of the lake, exiting the damp greenery of tall, strong, old pines, the sunshine beats down again. The sound of the falls fades and songbirds can be heard as I step into another field with an inexplicable scent. Dull pinks dots the landscape among the white and the green and the sage and the purples and yellows. The lake at its edge is the color of iron, broken by rich foliage creeping up the hillside.

The trail winds high above the lake, closed in by tight bushes that encroach the trail — but their flowering smells waft into my nostrils, complementing landscape views of the water below and mountains in the distance.

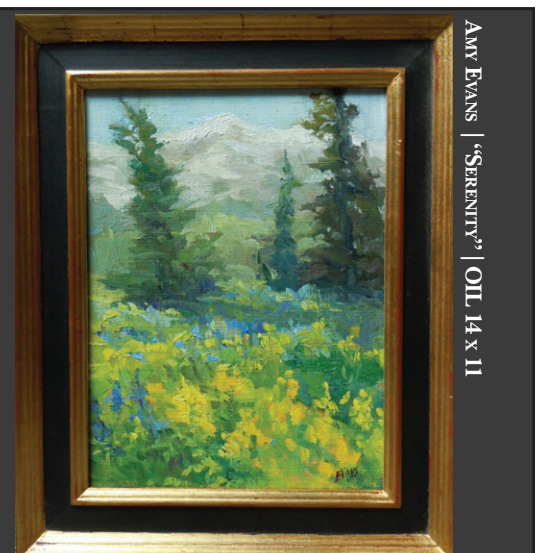
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