

By John Darling
For the Tidings

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Wet winter, warm spring make buds burst

Because of the wet winter and early bursts of heat, wildflowers are showing their darling buds in April, as a group from North Mountain Park Nature Center discovered – to their delight – while trekking [the Oredson-Todd Trail in Ashland](#) on Tuesday.

The hike was sold out and was rife with amateur botanists who were “good spotters,” notes leader Marcia Wineteer of the Bureau of Land Management. One would hear them chirp the charming names – Hooker’s Fairy Bells (nodding white flowers), Scarlet Columbine (nodding red flowers), Ocean Spray (tiny, white), Star Solomon Seal (perfect little white stars) and a rare wild orchid, “the treasure of the day,” said Linda Chesney, stewardship coordinator of [North Mountain Park](#).

“It’s an awesome year,” says Wineteer. “I thought it would bloom late because of the cool weather and rain, but the warmth made many of them bloom early. Two years ago, in the drought it was definitely not spectacular with wildflowers. What we saw were a lot of leaves.”

Chesney explained how NMNP is participating in [Project Budburst](#), where people may record the first budding of various species and contribute them to a database that will be used to track the effects of global warming. The idea, she notes, is that the warmer the climate, the earlier the buds. To see and report data about bloom times, go to [budburst.org](#).

This week in Ashland, Mission Bells, a fritillary lily (green-yellow, not the rare Genter one) is in bloom, as is Hooker’s Fairy Bells, another lily, whose creamy white flowers deftly hide under the leaves.

Western Sweet Cicely is a controversial bloom, as it looks a lot like the deadly Hemlock, which was used to execute Socrates (he ended up drinking it by his own hand), so Chesney says she’s hesitant to even point it out. Clue: Don’t eat anything that looks like carrot greens.

Wineteer points out another plant you don’t want to mess with – poison oak. It’s got its own couplet: “Leaves of three, let it be.” It comes in reds and greens of many sizes and is everywhere at this elevation throughout the West Coast. New immigrants from the east have to be sternly cautioned not to let it touch the skin.

On the other end of the spectrum of usefulness, she points out the Pathfinder plant, which has leaves shaped like arrowhead and lies close to the ground so all you have to do is flip over one leaf, exposing a much lighter shade of green – and, viola, you can tell people behind you where you’ve gone!

Useful as a food is Miner’s Lettuce, a lightly and pleasingly delicious plant with two points on its leaves and tiny white flowers at the center.

If you’ve ever wondered what that plant is that seems to be covered with rubber cement and clings to your socks, it’s called Bedstraw, Wineteer explains. It once stuffed mattresses in the outback and was used by ladies in the era of frock dresses to make them flounce out.

Uncommon and a bit puzzling, if you’ve never seen them, are Ground Cones, which look just like pine cones, but they sprout out of the ground. They’re parasitic on manzanita and madrone.

Chesney hands out a long list of wildflowers, shrubs trees and herbs, noting which are native. Almost all are.

She says, “It’s a wonderful time for them, lots of beautiful blooms this year.” New trail maps, she adds, are available free from the [Chamber of Commerce](#) and North Mountain Nature Center. They’re also on several websites, including the [Ashland Woodlands & Trails Association](#) and the city’s page. Cell reception is good at Oredson-Todd and parts of many other trails, so you can see maps on phones.

This trail is not only a wonderland of wildflowers, but a beautiful, two-mile loop, where you can explore many canyons and creeks without many steep pitches. Dogs are OK, but bikes aren’t. To get to the trailheads (going either way on the loop), [go up Tolman Creek Road, right on Greenmeadows Way, left on Lupine and find the parking area](#) with a map posted.

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Columbine is one of many plants to be discovered during a hike in the Oredson-Todd Woods in Ashland. Daily Tidings/Denise Baratta