

High Desert in Bloom

The wildflowers have gone crazy with all the wet weather we've had lately. In fact you could mow and bale the blue grama this year it's so tall. So if you're enjoying this spectacular show of flowers in the medians, community entrances, and along the sidewalks and would like to know more, read on.

The purple daisy-like flowers about 2-3' tall are asters, the low ground-cover like clustered blooms are verbenas.

The taller bright orange flowers like miniature hollyhocks, with blooms that are cup shaped are called globe mallow. The shorter spiky red-orange blooms are Indian paintbrush found typically buried in blue grama grass – they're symbiotic. Gallardia or blanket flower is the mixed red and yellow flower also less than a foot tall. For deep carmine red you can't beat the autumn sages, a two to three foot shrub with blooms adored by the hummingbirds.

The small white flowers that turn pink as they fade are bush (or sand) penstemon, a shrub about two feet tall. Speaking of shrubs, the four to five foot tall shrub with white flowers and pinkish plumes which glow when the sun shines through them, is apache plume. The mound shaped flower with large white trumpet shaped blooms and big dark green leaves is datura or jimsonweed.

The predominant color of yellow is everywhere, from the four to seven foot tall gold of the chamisa to the small street-side yellow-cream paperflower. There's the green narrow-leaf foliage of perky sue and angelita daisy, and the gray brocade lace foliage of desert marigold (a biennial). For great smells in the morning you have to enjoy chocolate flower. It's like having milk chocolate for breakfast. The golden asters have that lovely whorled green foliage. Senecio or silver groundsel has narrow petals with gray foliage and an old man's gray beard as the bloom turns to seed. And not only in High Desert but along the roadsides there are sunflowers, a natural treat for the birds. For groundcover there's prairie zinnia with yellow foliage folded around a small orange center and dogweed another aster like flower.

And as foils to all this color there's the grasses and the larger shrubs. Grasses such as blue grama with the eyebrow like seed head, silver beardgrass, sideoats grama with military hash mark-like seed heads, and galleta. Shrubs like winterfat whose seed heads look like cotton candy on a stick, artemesias including sand sage, and the changing red leaves of three leaf sumac (known as *rhus trilobata* because of its three deeply lobed leaf sections).

Then in the midst of all this color there's specimen plants like cholla cactus (sometimes called stick man cactus), prickly pear cactus, and mullein or verbascum.

It's glorious to live in High Desert and be able to enjoy the beauty of our natural environment. Aren't we fortunate!

