

## Catch Florida's wave of spring wildflowers

By Dr. Jeff Norcini

### "Catch the wave"?

The wave refers to the wave of showy wildflowers that starts in March in South Florida and proceeds northward through May into June.

While some wildflowers can be seen at any time of the year in South Florida, the showy spring wildflower displays in South Florida are mainly in March and April. In North Florida, those of you with a good eye saw some blooming wildflowers as early as February, especially along trails or openings in wooded areas. However, the showiest displays are from late April into June. In Central Florida, the best time to view spring wildflowers typically is late March into May.



Photo by John Moran/Courtesy of FDACS

Throughout the state, look for yellow-flowered tickseeds, like Leavenworth's tickseed. While some of it has been planted, most Leavenworth's tickseed naturally occurs in moist ditches and swales. In northern Florida each May, it will be hard to miss the swaths of goldenmane tickseed that adorn roadsides and fields. Often mixed in with the goldenmane tickseed are the pinks and purples of annual phlox. Annual phlox is a familiar roadside wildflower throughout the Big Bend and as far south as Tampa, including I-75. Another purple wildflower that is becoming more common to roadsides is powderpuff, a creeping wildflower that embellishes roadsides throughout much of the state. And not to be missed are the showy stands of one of our few true blue native wildflowers, blue-eyed grass, which is not a grass at all — it's related to the garden iris.

### How showy will this spring's wildflowers be?

Great! The reason: El Niño, a cool weather pattern that brings winter rain to Florida, is good for spring and summer wildflowers. And all the rain combined with a cooler-than-normal winter should set us up for a good crop of fall wildflowers as well. The El Niño conditions were ideal for stimulating germination of many fall flowering wildflowers.

### Who planted these wildflowers?

In most cases, Mother Nature. Then roadside vegetation specialists like Florida Department of Transportation's Dick Bush in North Florida and Will Moriarty in Central Florida simply use management practices that preserve and expand these natural populations of showy wildflowers.

Some of the wildflowers along roadsides have been planted. For example, in Polk County last fall, FDOT's Dennis Murray planted Leavenworth's tickseed, blanket-flower and lanceleaf tickseed along State Road 471 just north of U.S. Highway 98.



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Look for the results this spring and summer.

## Wildflowers are so pretty. Is it OK to pick some?

Please don't pick the Black-Eyed Susans, or other wildflowers for that matter – even if no one is looking (although Mother Nature *always* is). If you want to preserve the memory of a wildflower, take a picture – it will last longer. So “don't pick it – click it,” and let others enjoy the beauty.

Also, many of our native wildflowers reproduce only by seed. Picking a flower reduces the ability of that plant to reproduce and for that wildflower population to sustain itself. If you want to pick wildflowers, plant some in your yard or in containers on your patio or porch. Seed packets are available from the Florida Wildflower Seed and Plant Growers Association ([www.floridawildflowers.com](http://www.floridawildflowers.com)), and sometimes at garden centers specializing in Florida native plants. To find a native garden center near you, visit the Association of Florida Native Nurseries' Web site, [www.afnn.org](http://www.afnn.org).

More reasons not to pick wildflowers:

- Picking the flowers of any endangered or threatened species is illegal in Florida. For details, see *Florida Statute 581.185 Preservation of native flora of Florida*.
- Stopping along a roadside to pick wildflowers can be hazardous to you and other motorists.

## Where are the best places to see spring wildflowers?

In general, the best places to view wildflowers are open areas in rural settings along two- and four-lane roads, including interstates. Open areas, including woodland edges, provide the bright light that many species of native wildflowers need to thrive. And rural areas are better than urban environments for two reasons – there are more natural stands of wildflowers and lower expectations for manicured landscapes.



Photo by John Moran/Courtesy of FDACS

Some prime areas in which to view wildflowers are:

### Statewide

- Along the Florida National Scenic Trail ([www.floridatrail.org](http://www.floridatrail.org))
- Florida Water Management Districts lands ([www.dep.state.fl.us/secretary/watman](http://www.dep.state.fl.us/secretary/watman))
- Florida State Parks ([www.floridastateparks.org](http://www.floridastateparks.org))
- National Forest lands ([www.fs.fed.us/r8/florida](http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/florida))



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## Panhandle

- State Road 65, Franklin and Liberty counties
- County Road 379, Liberty County
- Apalachicola National Forest, forest roads (some only accessible with four-wheel drive)
- Florida Caverns State Park, Marianna
- Torreya State Park, Bristol

## North Florida

- U.S. Highway 17, between Palatka and DeLeon Springs
- U.S. Highway 27, Suwannee County
- U.S. Highway 129, south of Live Oak
- State Road 100, between Bunnell and Palatka
- St. Johns River to the Sea Loop (Flagler, St. Johns, Volusia, Brevard and Putnam counties, including the A1A Scenic and Historic Byway south of St. Augustine, which in 2007 received a grant from the Florida Wildflower Foundation to plant roadside wildflowers. For the complete account of wildflowers along the cycling and driving route, click [here](#) to download the report (PDF format, 7 MB)
- Ocala National Forest



Photo by John Moran/Courtesy of FDACS

## Central Florida

- I-75 (Pasco County)
- Florida's Turnpike
  - Okahumpka Service Plaza
  - Mile Markers 272 and 280.4 (northbound)
  - Mile Marker 236 to 193 (southbound)
- Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge
- Tosohatchee State Preserve, Christmas
- Longleaf Pine Preserve, Volusia County





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- Seminole State Forest, Lake County

## **South Florida**

- Everglades National Park (Royal Palm Hammock)
- Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary and vicinity (Collier County)

Click [here](#) to see wildflower locations submitted to the Foundation. Click [here](#) for spring wildflower tour suggestions.

## **Now it's your turn**

If you know of a showy wildflower site, please visit the Foundation's [Web site](#) for details about submitting wildflower locations and photos of Florida's beautiful wildflowers.

