

Peak wildflower blooming time should not be missed

by Candace Ward



wild rose

Look for wild rose during June at roadside and woodland edges.

As we come to the summer solstice, it's time to enjoy a significant event in our local natural history calendar—the peak wildflower season. Take time to walk in the woods, by wetlands, and up in the alpine tundra to view this spectacle of nature.

Wetland blooms to enjoy include brown chocolate lilies, purple wild iris, pink bog rosemary, white cloudberry, and yellow monkey flower. Woodland favorites include white dwarf dogwood, pale pink twinflower, white starflower, and pale pink wintergreen. Disturbed roadsides are showy with purple lupine and deep pink wild rose.

Though mid-June is the time for the most concentrated wildflower blooms in the lowlands, a second wave of the flowers can be found in alpine areas from 800 to 2000 feet and higher. In late June and early July, look for blue harebells, pink moss campion, yellow spotted saxifrage, and white gentian.

A few commonly encountered wildflowers require caution—white flowered baneberry, purple monkshood and purple larkspur are all very poisonous. It is recommended that you wash your hands after even lightly touching these plants to prevent any of their oils from being transferred to your hands and eventually to your mouth. Another flowering plant to avoid is the large white-flowered cow parsnip that produces

an oil that causes severe skin irritation in some people.

Wildflower season is a great time to find the flowers of wild berries so that you can stake out good berry patches for late summer and early fall. Look for white wild raspberry flowers in disturbed areas by roadsides and trails. White lowbush cranberry (lingonberry) flowers tinged with pink can be found in woodlands and wetlands. White bell-shaped blueberry flowers are found in wetlands and alpine areas.



fireweed

Not only do Alaskans enjoy beautiful wildflower displays all summer, but also thanks to the hardy pink fireweed, we have one of the most colorful wildflower “exits” of any place in the world. In late July and August, roadsides, meadows, and mountainsides are a vivid pink with awesome displays of showy fireweed.

While Alaska is renowned for its scenery, fish, and wildlife, let's not forget how remarkable our state is

for its awesome wildflower displays. To protect our wildflower heritage far into the future, remember to view or photograph these beautiful blooms, but refrain from collecting wild flower bouquets so that there will be seeds for next year's blooms.



wild iris

Mark your calendars for August 2, 2003, when Kenai NWR and Alaska Maritime NWR host a Centennial Celebration of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The event is free to the public at the Alaska Fairgrounds in Ninilchik and lasts from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Attractions include speakers, movies, displays, and kid's activities sharing Alaska's refuges and wildlife. Live music and delicious food will also be provided.

Candace Ward works at Kenai National Wildlife Refuge as a park ranger specializing in visitor service and education. Her favorite wildflower and wild berry guides are "A Field Guide to Wildflowers" by Verna Pratt, "Alaska's Wild Berries & Berry-Like Fruit" by Verna Pratt, and "The Flora of Alaska" by Eric Hulten. To learn more about Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, visit the website, www.kenai.fws.gov. For more information about the Refuge, visit the headquarters in Soldotna, call (907) 262-7021. Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://kenai.fws.gov>.