



# to Super GLOOM Super BLOOM

## Radiant wildflowers explode across California

**H**ave you ever wondered what it would feel like to be in one of Monet's majestic landscape paintings?

It turns out you don't have to travel to France to experience such a wonder! After multiple consecutive atmospheric rivers, California has emerged from five years of drought, and a dreary landscape dominated by brown hues, to an explosion of color.

Large stretches of California are blanketed with bright yellows, oranges, reds and blues, creating a wildflower kaleidoscope known as a "superbloom." Satellite images even show the pops of color from outer space.

Judith Schwarz, a local environmentalist and horticulture expert with three decades of experience working with California's native flowers, takes a step back to put this year's superbloom in context.

"The first thing you should know is that California is very blessed [because] we're the number one [region] in the world with the most annual flowers," Schwarz said. "That's something to be proud of."

According to Schwarz, the super bloom was no accident. Coming off of a drought, California was fortunate to get ample rain over the course of the winter.

"Now everything is exploding because the elements are just right," Schwarz said. "The weather is not too hot and there is moisture in the soil."

No single flower is responsible for the super bloom. Many varieties contribute to the diversity of colors and sizes.

"The California poppy, known as *Eschscholzia californica*, has bright yellow blossoms," Schwarz said. "Some [wild flowers] are very tiny, others are larger. Another one is yellow with an orange center that blooms longer than the orange poppies. There are also Baby Blue Eyes that are really a true blue."

However, nature's show of lights doesn't last long. Schwarz estimates that the wildflowers can show off their dazzling colors for up to two and a half months, but the flower's longevity is contingent on the weather.

"There's a clarkia that is amazing and in good soil can get about four feet tall," Schwarz said. "The bees and hummingbirds love it. If we get hit by a heat wave, things will dry out faster so it really depends on the year."

Jennifer Dirking, chair of Wildflower Ambassadors for the California Native Plant Society of Santa Clara County, works to raise awareness of the importance of native plants and the critical role they play in building back ecosystems that support bees, birds and other

wildlife.

"California is one of the biggest biodiversity hotspots in the world," Dirking said. "Superblooms are a great way to raise awareness [on biodiversity]. People see the diversity and ranges of our plants, and they learn that these are really delicate ecosystems."

Beyond the beauty and wonders of nature, there are positive ripple effects that native plants have on an ecosystem. Insects rely on native plants as their primary source of food and larger animals rely on the insects. Nature and living creatures are interdependent.

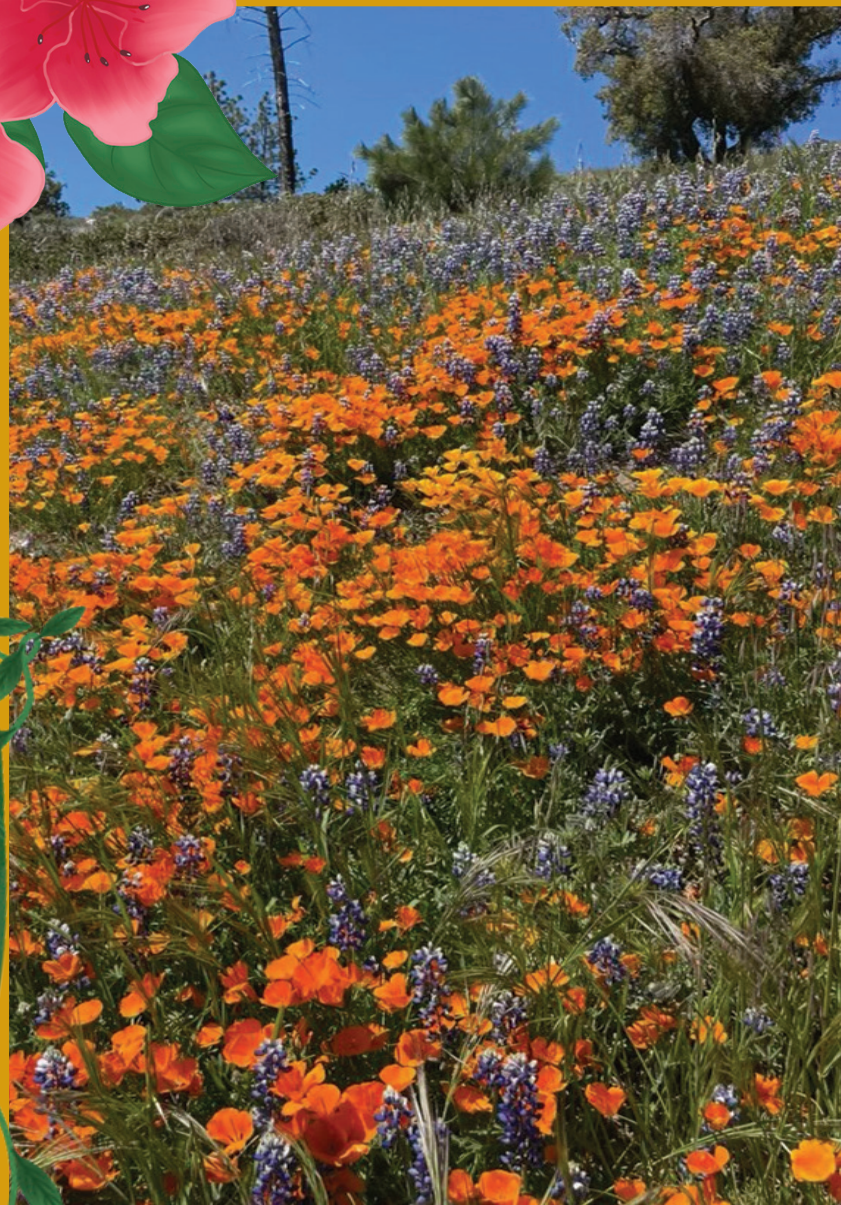
"It's important to build back and restore ecosystems," Dirking said. "Let things eat your plants. It takes a lot of caterpillars to feed a chickadee. If you put on your chickadee eyes and walk through our neighborhoods you'll see that there are no native plants to feed them. There is only one native garden every three or four blocks."

If you aren't able to experience a superbloom this season and don't own a Monet painting, you can take a few simple steps to create one in your backyard. The key is to find plants that are native to California and require little water.

"What people don't realize is that they can have all that beauty in their own yard," Dirking said. "The average yard is really a wasteland. It has a lawn that became popularized by the imperialists in England in 1842 and times moved on since then. It's time to look at the beauty that we have in the hills and nature around us and literally grow some of that where we are."

Text and design by JESLYN CHEN and ANNA MARKESKY •  
Art by JESLYN CHEN • Photos courtesy of HAZEL WIJSEN





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