



Desert in Color



There is no single “best time” to see desert wildflowers. Different types of plants bloom at different times. At White Sands National Monument, flowers bloom later than those in the surrounding desert foothills due to the pool of cold air from the mountains that settles into the basin at night.

Annual Wildflowers

Most wildflowers begin blooming around the middle of April. The most common early bloomers in the dunefield include the sand verbena, hartweg’s sundrops, desert mentzelia, and white sands mustard. In mid-May, these are joined by gypsum centauray, white evening primrose, and greenthread. Some plants may continue to produce flowers throughout the summer, especially after monsoon-season rains.

Pepperweed, a white-flowered mustard that is often overlooked, grows throughout the residential area and dune margins. It is the hardiest wildflower in the park and is the first plant to bloom in the spring, usually around March first, earlier in warmer years (January 1996). It blooms throughout the summer and into the fall. Pepperweed has been seen in bloom in the park every month of the year.

Spring Wildflowers

Spring is when all of the small wildflowers begin to bloom and the grasses and bushes begin to turn green. Soaptree yucca is the star of the spring flowers. It grows tall and can easily be spotted throughout the dunes. Its flowers are white and have

the appearance of upside down tulips. Another big contender in the spring is prairie gentian. This wildflower is easiest to spot at the beginning of the Dune Life Nature Trail. There is also a white version of the plant that will bloom next to the purple one.

Summer Wildflowers

Many wildflowers are seen in the summer but few are robust enough to bloom during the high temperatures. These plants have smaller flowers

like the gypsum centauray and desert mentzelia. They can be found growing in interdunal areas throughout the entire dunefield.

Fall Color

Even though most of the plants at White Sands bloom in the spring and summer there is still color to be seen in the fall. The fall colors can begin to appear as early as October and last through November. This is the time

when the rio grande cottonwood trees begin to turn a beautiful orange and the skunkbush sumacs start to turn a vibrant red. These plants can be found throughout the first five miles of Dunes Drive.



Desert Mentzelia
Mentzelia multiflora
Blooms: Late spring - late summer



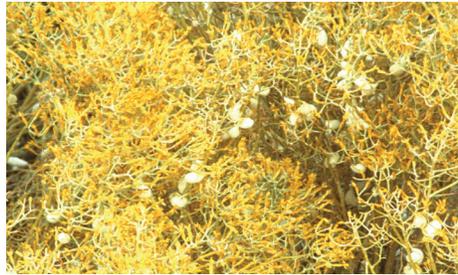
Gypsum Centaury
Centaureum maryannum
Blooms: Early summer



Globemallow
Sphaeralcea sp.
Blooms: Late summer - early fall



Mountain Pepperweed
Lepidium montanum
Blooms: Early spring - late summer



Rubber Rabbitbrush
Ericameria nauseosa
Blooms: Late fall - early winter



Hartweg's Sundrops
Calylophus hartwegii
Blooms: Early spring - late summer



Tree Cholla
Cylindropuntia imbricata
Blooms: Late summer - early fall



Catchfly Prairie Gentian
Eustoma exaltatum
Blooms: Late spring - summer



Cowpen Daisy
Verbesina encelioides
Blooms: Late summer - early fall



Soap tree Yucca
Yucca elata
Blooms: Late spring - late summer



Rio Grande Cottonwood
Populus deltoides ssp. *wislizeni*
Color: Early fall



Skunkbush Sumac
Rhus trilobata
Color: Late fall

*Blooming seasons may vary due to more or less rainfall