



**Wildflowers: Nature At Its
Most Beautiful
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The thought of wildflowers tends to generate images of serene rural settings and the flawless appearance of nature at its most beautiful. A spray of colors dances through the filtered sunlight in a pine forest or accentuates the perfection of a lush meadow in this tranquil, soothing vision.

The common names of these showy plants reflect a simpler time with simpler pleasures. Meadow Beauties, Fire Wheel, Ladies Hatpin, Blazing Star and many others contribute to the brilliant landscapes of nostalgic days gone by.

In fact, wildflowers are coexisting quite handily with the 21st century right here in Wakulla County. Anyone wishing to view them need only to know when and where to look for these eye-catching plants.

Wildflowers, like most plants, have specific environmental requirements for germination and growth. Some like full sun, others shade. Some grow in swamps and marshes, others on drier sites. The variety of species filling these niches is vast and varied.

Depending on the species, blooming can be any season of the year, but most run from spring to autumn. Many wildflowers are annuals which reseed yearly, but some are perennials which live for several years.

Wildflowers are, as the name states, wild. They are open pollinator varieties which have adapted to the ecological rhythm of a locale through centuries of natural selection. Some will grow outside of their region, but very rarely will they flourish.

The mass bloom of many species can be breathtaking with color combinations found only in nature. More than one famous muralist has made a name, and fortune, by covering a mundane landscape with wildflowers.

As interesting is the configuration of the individual wildflowers. A close examination will reveal a tiny world of intricate and complex structures in blazing colors and nearly infinite variations.

In recent years some states Departments of Transportation have used wildflowers on public rights-of-way as an alternative ground covering. The benefits of these public planting have been twofold.

The bloom seasons have been spectacular, many catching national attention through a variety of media outlets. Initial research indicated vehicles slowed to view the flowers resulting in fewer accidents and improved safety.

Another result was the decreased mowing schedule and the reduction of associated expenses. The mowing timetable is critical if continuation of the wildflower species is to be assured.

In Wakulla County there are several prime wildflower viewing areas. The Apalachicola National Forest offers a variety of microenvironments, some adjacent to each other with different blooms. Each trail offers something different throughout the season.

Smith Creek Road north of Sopchoppy, Wakulla springs State Park, and U.S. 98 in eastern Wakulla County currently have plots of late summer bloomers. When viewing, remember to respect the rights of private property owners.

Contact your UF/IFAS Wakulla County Extension Office at 850-926-3931 or <http://wakulla.ifas.ufl.edu/> to learn more about growing wildflowers.

The Extension Office and the Wakulla Public Library provide copies of the free Florida Panhandle Wildflower Map. Chapters of the Florida Native Plant Society meeting monthly in both Wakulla County (Sarracenia Chapter) and Tallahassee (Magnolia Chapter) offer opportunities through presentations and field outings to get acquainted with the different wildflower species.