

Poppies are blooming now at Saguaro National Park



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The calendar says it's still winter but gold poppies — known for their brilliant blooms in spring — are flowering now in Saguaro National Park west of Tucson and elsewhere.

Autumn rains set the stage for a bloom, but winter downpours and recent warm weather have brought the flowers out a bit earlier than usual.

“Poppies and lupines are showing already in the park,” said **George Montgomery**, retired curator of botany at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum and

an avid wildflower watcher. “Maybe it will be a good or great show (of blooms) this next few weeks or months.

“I had over 2 inches of rain in early February after good ones earlier,” Montgomery said in explaining reasons for the colorful flower outlook.

One place to see some poppies this week is at a site along Picture Rocks Road on the northeastern side of Saguaro Park West. Shortly after entering the park from the east on the road, watch for a large parking pullout where the road bends at the bottom of a hill. You'll find flowers in the flat desert area across the road from the pullout.

Don't expect carpets of blooms this early in the season, but even scattered flowers are easy to spot because of their bright golden hue.

Be aware that poppies close up in the evening, and sometimes open slowly in the morning. Most will be open by midday in sunny weather.

OTHER BLOOMS TO SEE

Many other species of wildflowers will be showing off their colorful blooms in the coming weeks — and some are off to a good start already.

“I have seen fairy duster starting to bloom along Gates Pass Road” west of Tucson, said **Meg Quinn**, author of a wildflower guidebook and an environmental educator with Pima County Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation.

Other observers have noted blooms of brittlebush and globemallow in the Catalina Mountains north of the city.

Mark Dimmitt, a botanist and wildflower expert, said, “Parry penstemon is bolting here in Tucson, and looks like it will be in bloom by the end of the month.”