

TRIP FINDER | Wildflowers

ROCKY MOUNTAINS SOUTHEAST

Indian Peaks Wilderness, CO

As the snow melts in late May and early June, blue columbine and pale pink twin-flowers line the trail to Buchanan Pass, 45 miles west of Boulder. Cruise 20.2 miles (round-trip) through lodgepole pines towering over snowmelt-fed streams, and cross vast colorful meadows. Linger on the 11,837-foot pass to view a sea of showy blooms, then drop into Fox Park and begin scouting out a campsite. Permits are required from June 1 to September 15. fs.fed.us/r2/arnf

Ozark National Forest, AR

The 7.7-mile Lake Wedington Trail slices into the center of the 1.2-million-acre Ozarks, the most varied terrain between the Appalachians and the Rockies. Purple toothwort and bright pink spring beauty thrive under the forest canopy, and this out-and-back near Fayetteville is the best way to see them. You'll also see the Twin Knobs, two 568-foot limestone towers. Camp near the Illinois River and head back the next day. fs.fed.us/oonf/ozark

PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Olympic National Forest, WA

Craggy 5,944-foot Mt. Ellinor, two hours west of Seattle, has sweeping surf-n-turf views of Puget Sound. The 12-mile out-and-back on the Mount Ellinor Trail is a popular winter climb, usually done in one day. But come June, the place explodes with bright white starry false Solomon's seal (no kidding, that's its name), wandering daisy, alpine pussytoes, and maidenhair fern. Camp atop the soft, thick cushion of pine needles. fs.fed.us/r6/olympic

2 DAYS



3 DAYS

Shoshone National Forest, WY

May flower-peeping in Wyoming doesn't get any better than on the 16.1-mile North Fork Trail, which tracks through lower elevations along the North Fork of the Shoshone River, 36 miles west of Cody. Look for glacier lilies and lupine growing in the open meadows and arnica and wild strawberries beneath the forest canopy. Fallen trees make for slow-going in spots. fs.fed.us/r2/shoshone

Clingman's Dome, TN

With 1,660 wildflower species, the Smokies are a riot of color in May. On this 28-mile trail from Clingman's Dome, you'll cover roughly nine miles per day, camping amid fragrant fields in marked sites. Link Goshen Prong, Little Creek, Little River, and Jakes Creek Trails where rhododendrons rule. Then wind back to Clingman's via the Miry Ridge Trail and Buckeye Gap. nps.gov/grsm

Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest, OR

Pearly snowbrush and fuchsia shooting star crowd the High Lakes Trail, an hour from Ashland. Their hues look even brighter against a backdrop of ancient brown lava flows. Trek about six miles a day along the Cascade Canal through mixed conifers. Watch for eagles and views of 9,495-foot Mt. McLoughlin, the southern Cascades' highest peak. fs.fed.us/r6/rogue-siskiyou



4 DAYS

Pecos Wilderness, NM

Rattlesnake orchids and elephant heads? They're pearly white and cotton candy pink, respectively, and you'll find them both in the Pecos Wilderness. Go in late May (depending on snowfall) and tackle the 60.5-mile Skyline Trail near Santa Fe. It wraps around the Pecos River Basin, scrambling along narrow ridgelines that rise above 12,000 feet. Blue columbine and wild iris also dot the valleys. fs.fed.us/r3/sfe

Jocassee Gorge, SC

There are so many waterfalls plunging from the top of Jocassee Gorge (70 minutes from Greenville) that native Cherokee once referred to its cliffs as "The Blue Wall." Cruise its length on the 31-mile Jocassee Gorge Trail, passing cascades and the forlorn-looking Oconee bell, a rare orchid found in just seven counties in SC and GA. See blooms through late April. dnr.sc.gov

Mt. Rainier National Park, WA

This 46-mile point-to-point cherry picks Rainier's best fields of delicate white avalanche lilies and pink lupine. From Mowich Lake, hike to Spray Park and follow the Wonderland Trail along 2,000-foot ridges to cross St. Andrews Park, Emerald Ridge, and Indian Henry's Hunting Ground, each famous for unmatched *Sound of Music* scenery. nps.gov/mora

