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Flowers bloom less as heat rises

Wildflowers to see this spring:

This week will conclude our series on spring wildflowers. We are now asking you to think small. To see the following flowers, you must get down at least on your knees, if not your belly to see them. Thus, we call these little jewels, belly flowers. Take out your magnifying glass, drop low to the ground, and you are in for a pleasant surprise.

One of the most noticeable flowers of spring is the goldfields, *baeria chrysostoma*, a low annual that often covers acres, from March to May, with bright yellow daisy-type flowers. Woolly daisy, *eriophyllum lanosum*, is another common dwarf annual. As the name implies, the stems, leaves and flower heads are covered with long, loose wooly hairs. The ray flowers are white or sometimes rosy underneath, and the disk or central flowers are yellow.

Desert star or rock daisy, *monoptilon bellioides*, is not common but well worth watching for, especially in the hills or along sandy washes. It grows close to the ground and may spread to form small mats. The flowers are large for so small a plant, and the white rays and yellow centers tell us they also belong to the daisy family. To distinguish desert star from wooly daisy, notice that desert star, although somewhat hairy, does not have the profuse wooly hairs of wooly daisy. Also desert star usually has around 15 rays; wooly daisy has from five to 10 rays.

Purple mat, *nama demissum* var. *deserti*, is not common in this area because it prefers clay or sandy soils, but should be found south of Black Mountain. Purple mat often forms low spreading mats dotted with red-purple tube flowers that gradually spread out like a funnel. This is one of the most attractive of belly plants.

Spurge, the genus *euphorbia*, is represented among our belly plants by two or more common species. These small plants lie close to the ground. In one common species the roundish leaves, which

are tiny and in pairs along the stem, do not have any hairs but are smooth, thick and somewhat shiny. The numerous flowers are impossible to describe without a whole new vocabulary, but at the base of what appears to be a white petal, you can see a large swollen reddish gland. There are four of these surrounding the pistil and several stamens. In other species the flowers may be quite different, but all are strange.

Members of the *phlox* family give us some very pretty spring flowers. The genus *gilia* has been divided by some botanists into several genera, but many wildflower lovers still call them all "gilias" as they have no common names. The early species are all low growing and the stems and narrow tubular flowers have five lobes and may be white, different shades of blue, bright yellow, pinkish, or occasionally spotted. A yellow one, *linanthus aureus*, likes disintegrated granitic soil, and colors patches of the hills bright yellow east and north of Carefree. *Linanthus bigelovyi* has cream colored flowers streaked with crimson. These flowers open in the evening and are fragrant. *Linanthus demissus* has white flowers that may be marked with purple. These flowers have such short stalks that they are almost hidden by the leaves. This species is also fragrant.

Plantain is a small plant that starts flowering when 1 or 2 inches tall, but it does eventually produce a spike about 3 inches tall or more, the tip of which may be still blooming while on the lower part of the spike the seeds are well along toward maturity. Each tiny flower is a tube with four paper-thin, whitish, almost-transparent lobes. Leaves are all basal, very narrow and covered with short, soft white hairs.

Another small plant is the pigmy weed, *tillaea erecta*, a succulent. The flowers are grouped in minute clusters almost too small to see. At first the plant is green, but as it matures it turns red. Since the plants grow close together, these red patches are very attractive.