



Region – Western Australia

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WILDFLOWERS – A WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE

*I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host of golden daffodils.....*

(from The Daffodils by William Wordsworth)

One wonders what Wordsworth might have penned had he seen the prolific spread of spring wildflowers across Western Australia - even in the outback. Perhaps, for instance, a multitude of pink everlastings ... or a profusion of blue leschenaultia.

Whatever Wordsworth might have written, he would have been astounded not only by the density of the wildflowers but also the number of species. For Western Australia has one of the richest floras on earth.

An estimated 8,000 species have been found with about half of them endemic to WA, according to Dr Ken Atkins, principal botanist with Western Australia's Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM). And new species are being discovered every year. To date, 2,000 new species have been identified but not formally named.

Between July and November, vast areas of the State - from the southern regions to the Pilbara and Kimberley in the north and the Goldfields to the east - are a blaze of colour as the annual display of wildflowers burst into bloom. And visitors do not have to travel far to see them. They're even on the doorstep of the capital, Perth - just a short walk from the city centre.

The city's flora and fauna treasure - Kings Park - showcases Western Australia's unique wildflowers which lure visitors just as much as the stunning panoramic view over the city and the Swan River. The 400-hectare park's Botanic Garden has more than 1,700 native species and more are grown in display glasshouses and a rare and endangered flora garden. A new attraction this year is the refurbished water garden with its beautifully designed landscape using local native plants.



Kings Park is visited by more than five million people a year, with its famous annual wildflower show in October a major drawcard. Now in its 38th year, the festival attracts more than 40,000 visitors and has become an internationally-known event.

In the Darling Range, east of Perth, the ground in spring is carpeted with blue leschenaultia, which aboriginal people are said to have called "the floor of the sky". The blue leschenaultia, like firewood banksia and Geraldton wax, only grow naturally in the South West. Western Australia has no less than 21 different leschenaultias - a small, spreading shrub that rarely grows up more than 50 centimetres high. Its flowers range from deep purplish-blue through sky blue to pale blue in a wide area, resulting in massed spring displays.

A short drive inland from Perth, picturesque country roads lead to historic towns in the Heartlands region which blossoms in spring. Wander through the Dryandra Woodland, an important area for nature conservation. Apart from the many wildflowers, Dryandra is one of the few places occupied by the numbat - a small mammal that is extremely rare and a highly endangered species. It is also one of Western Australia's fauna emblems.

WA's southern regions have, by far, the most diverse range of wildflowers. About 80 per cent of the total estimate for the State are found in the South West alone. The southern regions are renowned for the more rare and dainty flowers such as orchids, milkmaids, honeypots, mountain bells and kangaroo paws - the most famous of the unique native plants. They are most distinctive plants with their bizarre plumes - there are 12 species and several colour combinations. Some are red and yellow, some green and black, others red and green - the latter being the best-known variety and has been adopted as Western Australia's floral emblem.

The southern regions are home to more than 150 species of orchids, 165 species of eucalypts, more than 80 species of carnivorous plants such as the Albany pitcher plant and mistletoes like the picture-postcard Western Australian Christmas tree.

One of the top viewing spots is the Stirling Range, named after the first Governor of Western Australia, Captain James Stirling. The season starts with the Queen of Sheba orchid in August through to mountain bells in November. More than 1,200 species have been identified in the national park, where many tracks provide easy access to the wildflowers. Up to 40 orchid species can be found in the park, including spider orchids, bird orchids, sun orchids and greenhoods. There are guided orchid walks each weekday during the spring from the Stirling Range Retreat.

All six national parks in the Esperance region offer magnificent scenery - and extraordinary flora. The Fitzgerald River National Park (1,750 species) is world renowned for the royal hakea, the pincushion hakea, the four winged mallee, the scarlet banksia, the Qualup bell and the Barrens regelia.

The Kalgoorlie-Goldfields region is not only rich in gold but also in wildflowers with its fields of everlastings, as well as wattles (acacia,) hakea and Sturt's Desert Pea.

North of Perth, the Mid West region is the window for everlastings - and a great many other species of coastal and inland wildflowers. Dr Atkins said the Mid West and the Central South Coast (between Albany and Hopetoun) were regarded as "areas of high species diversity".

In the Mid West, there are never-ending fields (and roadside verges) of pink, yellow and white lollipop-shaped everlastings. There are marvellous displays from mid-August, depending on the amount of rainfall received prior to June/July.



The region is also well known for its wreath flower, *Leschenaultia macrantha* (it looks handmade but is perfectly natural). Lesueur National Park has more than 800 flora species. So rich are some areas of heath here that they are referred to as coral reefs out of water.

Visitors to the Mid West can also experience a wildflower tour with a man who is a walking encyclopaedia on native flora. Allan Tinker, who runs the Western Flora Caravan Park at Eneabba, south of Geraldton, is so passionate about wildflowers, he has had two species named after him - the *Diuris tinkeri* donkey orchid and the *Melaleuca tinkeri*. Apart from his wildflower walks, Allan can project images from a microscope to a TV monitor to show some of the most fascinating characteristics in his park. Allan, who has even had the rare honour of a visit from Sir David Attenborough, believes there are about 2,000 species within a 40-kilometre radius of his park, which itself covers about 65 hectares.

While hooking a fish is the aim of most people visiting Kalbarri, they also get hooked on the wildflowers such as kangaroo paws, banksias, eucalypts and grevilleas, to name just a few. Kalbarri National Park claims 800 species and on any day of the year visitors will find a bloom of some description.

Further north, the Gascoyne region - which includes the areas of the Shark Bay World Heritage Area and Cape Range National Park - is famous for its whale sharks and the bottle-nose dolphins at Monkey Mia. But as well as the fantastic marine life, there's plenty of floral life too - Shark Bay daisies, for instance, and wattles, hakeas, purple peas and dampiera.

Brimming with wildflowers are the Pilbara and Kimberley regions in the north of the State. Both provide yet another range of species - the Pilbara boasts yellow native hibiscus, northern bluebells, sticky cassia, mulla mulla, native fuschias and more than 50 species of wattles, while the Kimberley has its own rose - the Kimberley rose - and many other floral treasures abound.

So what makes Western Australia such a flower power in anybody's language?

Experts say the following factors have led to WA being one of the great centres of flowering plant diversity in the world:

- Early isolation of Australia from the rest of the world.
- The secondary isolation of the South West of Western Australia from the rest of Australia.
- Cycles of wet and increasingly arid conditions.

For visitors who prefer not to drive themselves, there is a wide range of escorted wildflower tours from Perth to all the major wildflower growing regions. They operate mainly from early August to late October.