

Beat the Heat with Late Bloomers!

Most native wildflowers close in late afternoon or early evening when the temperature drops but some (like a few friends I remember from my college days) are just getting started as the sun goes down. Night blooming flowers reflect the moonlight and often are more aromatic than daytime flowers. *Datura* (*Datura wrightii*) is a luminous California native that prefers the night life and is blooming along some roadsides in the Antelope Valley now in late August. Spring and summer “late bloomers” include many members of the primrose family (*Oenothera*), coyote tobacco (*Nicotiana attenuate*), and evening snow (*Linanthus dichotomus*).

These plants attract moths, nighttime insects and even bats as pollinators. The hummingbird sized sphinx moth is one of the pollinators of yellow evening primrose (*Oenothera primiveris*). Sphinx moths, also known as hawk moths, visit these flowers in search of nectar late in the day and throughout the night to lay their eggs on the plants. The larvae feed on the primrose's leaves before going underground to pupate. Yellow primrose will sometimes stay open in the morning on cloudy days. Saddleback Butte State Park is one of the areas where this late bloomer has been identified.

California primrose (*Eulobus californicus* or *Camissonia californicus*) is another night blooming native primrose. Common names for this native include “mustard-like primrose” because it has the unfortunate characteristic of resembling invasive mustard when its small, yellow blooms close, usually around 10 am. It is very hard to identify after that time. In the Antelope Valley it grows in Leona Valley, Lake Elizabeth and other areas along the desert edge.

Five-lobed tubular coyote tobacco (*Nicotiana attenuate*) is a native night bloomer that contains tobacco and has been cultivated and used for thousands of years. Found on the desert edge, like yellow evening primrose, coyote tobacco is a larval host plant for the sphinx moth. Coyote tobacco can switch from night to morning blooms if the sphinx moth caterpillars start to damage it; it then blooms in the morning in order to attract hummingbirds and bees as pollinators instead of sphinx moths.

Evening snow, also called desert snow (*Linanthus dochotomus*), is a wondrous night bloomer that blossoms in May or June after a season of adequate rain. In his book, “A Flower-Watcher’s Guide” author Milt Stark includes this lovely quote from Jane Pinheiro concerning evening snow, “There is one small meadow I often go by just to see reenacted the miracle of desert snow.... The dry sandy stretch on which some grasses are turning brown, suddenly, as one watches becomes studded with shining white stars an inch or more across and a jasmine like perfume is wafted into the evening air.” Blooming as early as 5 pm, look for desert snow along the North Poppy Loop Trail at the Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve.

Please visit www.prmidia.org and select Newsletter for a linked version that will take you to photos and more information for these native wildflowers from calfora.org.