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photo courtesy of Ennis Convention & Visitor's Bureau

the colors of a texas spring

by amanda van cura

FOR A BEAUTIFUL SPRINGTIME GETAWAY, look no further than the hills, meadows and roadsides of the Lone Star State. Beginning in March, Texas wildflowers start appearing throughout the Texas Hill Country as well as other surrounding areas, offering natural roadside beauty. Although favorites include the colorful Indian paintbrush, the Mexican poppy and the Indian blanket, the most popular is the State Flower, the Texas bluebonnet.

TEXAS BLUE CLOSE TO HOME

Wildflowers have become such an attraction in Texas that several cities and areas have created trails and festivals in their honor. Just 25 minutes south of Downtown Dallas on I-45, the city of Ennis hosts the Bluebonnet Trails Festival, celebrating its 53rd year April 16th – 18th. Designated the “Official Texas Bluebonnet Trail” by the State Legislature in 1997, Ennis showcases more than 40 miles of mapped trails that welcome approximately 100,000 visitors each year. For more information about the festival weekend or the trails, call 1-888-366-4748.

A CANVAS OF COLOR IN HILL COUNTRY

In the Texas Hill Country, several cities celebrate the season of flowers with local events, festivals and special wildflower routes. The Texas Hill Country Tourism Association invites visitor's to view the scenery by traveling the Wildflower Trail anytime during the spring and summer months. Attractions include bluebonnets, Indian paintbrush, coreopsis, straw flowers, Mexican hats, standing cypress, Indian blankets, lemon mint, white prickly poppies and other flowers. “The Wildflower Trail is very important,” says Deborah Farquhar-Garner, Wildflower Trail Coordinator, “Because it promotes one of Texas’ prettiest things – wildflowers.”

photo courtesy of Texas Hill Country Tourism Association

While driving along the Hill Country Wildflower Trail, enthusiasts will pass through several communities, including Burnet, the Bluebonnet Capital of Texas. This year, Burnet hosts the 21st annual Bluebonnet Festival April 10th – 11th. Fredericksburg will host the Wine and Wildflowers Trail in April. In addition, Wildseed Farms, the country's largest wildflower seed farm, hosts a celebration this same month. Open seven days a week, the farm includes a self-guided walk along wildflower-packed trails.



In Lampasas, the Bloomin' Fest celebrates gardening with arts, crafts and, of course, plants. Other cities along the Wildflower

Trail that host spring and summer events include the towns of Goldthwaite, Mason, Llano, San Saba, Johnson City and Brady. For details about the Texas Hill Country Wildflower Trail, call 1-866-TEX-FEST or visit www.tex-fest.com.

WILDFLOWER DAYS

A short drive south to Austin will land visitors at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, dedicated to preserving and restoring the natural landscapes of North America. Beginning March 20th, the Center will host its annual Wildflower Days, which will run through May 2nd. Events include an artists showcase, a book signing by renowned children's author Eric Carle, the premiere of *The Living Garden* and more. The Spring Plant Sale and Gardening Festival on April 17th is also a popular event, boasting the largest selection of native plants in Central Texas with nearly 23,000 plants from which to choose.

DID YOU KNOW?

Most people are aware that the State Flower of Texas is the Bluebonnet, but there are many other facts about this and other Texas flowers that may not be as common knowledge. For instance, did you know that the two main species of Texas bluebonnets are found growing naturally only in Texas and nowhere else in the world? Other names for the bluebonnet include buffalo clover, wolf flower and el conejo. In addition, breeding often brings other colors of bluebonnets, including white, pink, lavender and maroon. No matter what color, all are celebrated on April 24th, Texas State Wildflower Day.

Spring is a beautiful in Texas. Why not take a drive and discover the beauty for yourself? Texas was the first state in America to plant its roadways with flowers. Today, everyone can enjoy.

Amanda VanCura is a freelance writer living in Plano.