

Wildflower Hotspots in Homestead

By Marabeth Grahame

A hike along any of Homestead's many trails will bring much flower viewing enjoyment. However, if you are looking for concentrations of flowers, consider seeking out areas of prime habitat. Oak woodlands, forest edges and meadows have some of the most diverse wildflower populations in Homestead. Efforts at habitat restoration and invasive broom removal have targeted these areas for this reason. Although only weeded of broom for a year or two, the recovery of native plants in these areas has been encouraging with beautiful displays of wildflowers blooming now.

The Ridgewood Rock

With its spine of meadow bordered by oak woodland and many terraces formed by the rock, the Ridgewood Rock (marked R on the attached map) is one of the best habitats for wildflowers in Homestead. Over 30 different wildflowers have been found on the top of the Ridgewood Rock, and at least 20 more grow in the shadier habitat below. Some of these flowers have been found nowhere else in Homestead. The Rock is down the trail from junction marker 12. The trail curves down through a meadow to where it peters out above the lowest terraces where many unique flowers can be found. Please remember that this is sensitive habitat and walk on the rocks whenever possible.

A loop that includes the rock face as well as its top starts at the trail that leaves from the dead end of Ridgewood (trail marker h11). Before you cross the first creek, be sure to look up to the left for views of the rock face with its mosses and ferns. Look for wood rose and false lily of the valley. After crossing the creek, pass through forest edge habitat where asters, hound's tongue, fetid adder's tongue bloom and false lily of the valley, crimson columbine and more are blooming now. Climb up through a small meadow peppered with oaks. Look for flowers and mushrooms as you work your way up to the Homestead Trail and marker 11. Turn left along this main trail where iris and buttercups are blooming in the meadow and the large hawthorn is currently ablaze with white blossoms to the right at the creek crossing. Trail marker 12 is up the slight rise where you turn left and walk down into the meadow for the many flowers and stunning views of Mt Tam from the top of the Ridgewood Rock. Return to marker 12 after your rock top explorations, turning left down to junction marker 13. Along this stretch, admire the work we are doing to restore this oak woodland meadow habitat. At 13, look for harvest brodiaea, California plantain, blue-eyed grass, purple sanicle and a patch of blue dicks at the nearby bench. Turn left at 13 and proceed down to the trailhead at the top of the driveway for 361 Ridgewood.

Less than a mile, this loop is a great choice for flower viewing in all but the driest seasons. Parking area is opposite the drive for 361 Ridgewood.

Waterview

This loop takes in cool forests and expansive ridge top views. The trail from the mid point, junction 15 (no trail marker), up toward Homestead Hill is very steep and can be perilous, especially going down.

Begin at the Homestead Fire Road trailhead at the end of Waterview. Before the fire road heads up the hill, take the trail down to the right (junction marker 7m). In the forest, the first junction, 16 (T on the attached map) marks a sort of garden formed by a small triangle of trails. Look for crimson columbine now, for fetid adder's tongue, false lily of the valley, milkmaids and more in other seasons. Turn right down the trail for a short detour looking out for canyon gooseberry, oso berry and giant trillium. Turn around before the trail heads

uphill again and, back at junction 16, continue to the right. At the next creek, enjoy the 'octopus tree', a large bay with many flailing arms, one of which provides a convenient seat, complete with footrest, for the weary hiker. The trail winds in and out a few times before you arrive at the next junction (T/15 on the map, NOT marked with a sign post). This junction was the site of one of our biggest habitat restoration projects as we weeded the broom that used to cover this hillside and obscured the large patch of Indian warrior that now covers the hill below and above the trail. Spend some time exploring this area looking on the trail banks for yellow and red spotted coralroot, iris, Oakland star tulip and others before heading left up the steep trail. As you head up toward the ridge, you enter meadow habitat with a whole new variety of flowers like owl clover, checkerbloom, blue dicks, lupines and many more. When the trail intersects the main Homestead Hill trail, turn left and head downhill. Just to the right of the junction with the fire road, push through the coyote bush on the small trail to climb the knoll that rises right above the trail (Kon the attached map). This knoll is home to a wide variety of flowers from barberry to coyote mint depending on the season. Return to the fire road and continue down toward the trailhead. Look for mule's ears, blue dicks, lupines, poppies and more in the meadow clearings along the fire road.

1 - 1.5 miles, this loop offers great variety of habitats and wildflowers. Parking is along Waterview before the Fire Road.

For more information about the wildflowers of Homestead and a current map, visit the Homestead Valley Land Trust website at hvlt.org. Page 2 of the downloadable pdf map, includes trail marker route descriptions of a number of scenic loops and trails: the Ridgewood Rock Loop, Red Plum Trail, Amaranth Loop and Big Loop.