

Nature Observations in the Sausal Creek Watershed

Spring has always been my favorite time of year. The days are longer and warmer, bees and butterflies start to emerge, bird song fills the air, and the landscape is painted with flowers in bloom.

This year, spring around the Sausal Creek Watershed has been exceptionally wondrous. With seven different habitat types to explore—grassland, riparian, oak woodland, chaparral, redwood forests, coastal scrub, and wetland—something new is waiting to be discovered each and every day.

Below are my favorite plant observations from this past month.



California buckeye
Aesculus californica

A deciduous small tree with long, pinkish-white flower spikes that typically bloom around May-June. Flowers are enjoyed by native bees and butterflies, but are toxic to nonnative bees. The buckeye nut is poisonous, and was used by Native Americans to stupefy schools of fish to make them easier to catch.



Checker bloom
Sidalcea malviflora

A perennial herb with five pink petals with white veining, common in grassland and chaparral habitats.



Silver lupine
Lupinus albifrons

An evergreen shrub abundant along Sanborn Road in Joaquin Miller Park. Lupines contain alkaloid toxins that make this plant deer-resistant, and can harm livestock. The larvae of the federally endangered mission blue butterfly feed on this lupine (among a few others), causing them to have a bitter taste to predators.



Blue dicks

Dichelostemma capitatum ssp. *capitatum*

An herbaceous perennial growing from an underground corm. Flowers can be blue, purple, or pink.



Wild cucumber

Marah fabaceus

A perennial vine that grows from a large, tuberous root (up to several meters long). This vine begins to emerge from its root in February-March, creeping along the ground and over debris. When fertilized, small white flowers on the vine become spiky green fruit, eventually cracking open to display several brown nuts.



Cow parsnip

Heracleum maximum

A perennial herb in the carrot family, reaching heights over seven feet tall, with leaves up to 16 inches across. Dried stems were used by Native Americans to make flutes. This plant is abundant in Dimond Canyon and Beaconsfield Canyon.



Oakland mariposa lily

Calochortus umbellatus

A rare flowering plant endemic (limited) to California.

Interested in learning more about the natural world in your own backyard? Join Friends of Sausal Creek in our upcoming botany walks, bird monitoring hikes, aquatic insect monitoring days, and restoration and native plant nursery workdays. All information can be found at sausalcreek.org > Programs > Event Calendar.

--Michelle Krieg