

Crater Lake

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Trail Guide to the Castle Crest Wildflower Trail

A 0.4 mile (0.6 km) loop through forest and meadow
filled with colorful wildflowers.
Crater Lake National Park, Oregon

Nature's Garden

Rugged Castle Crest forms a portion of the rim of Mount Mazama, the erupted volcano that encloses Crater Lake. At the base of Castle Crest is a natural wildflower garden, where abundant springs fed by snowmelt allow for a profusion of color throughout the brief summer months.

Built by Boy Scouts in 1929 to highlight this annual display, the Castle Crest Wildflower Trail winds gently through areas of forest, swamp, wet meadow, grassy slope and alpine creek. Over 200 species of wildflowers have been noted along the trail, in bursts of yellows, pinks, blues and whites. Balancing out these delicate elements of the garden are the conifers: towering Shasta red fir, mountain hemlock, lodgepole pine and subalpine fir. Walk the trail and enjoy nature's artistry at work.



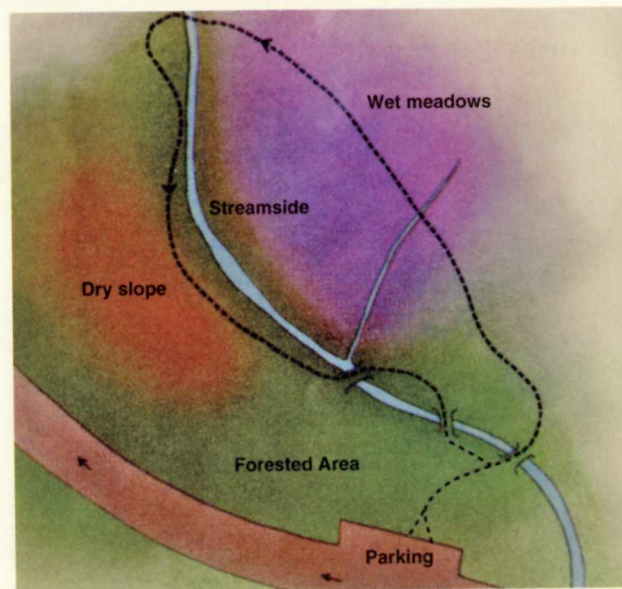
Park naturalist at the footpath access to Castle Crest Wildflower Garden (c. 1930).

Garden Zones

This fairly short trail offers a variety of growing zones for native plants. Here you will have a chance to experience sunny, shady, moist and dry environments.

The trail features a meadow enclosed by the slopes of Castle Crest on the north and east and by low moraines on the south and west. Several springs formed from snowmelt make this a wet environment. If you choose to hike the trail in a counter-clockwise direction, you will traverse a mixed conifer forest, followed by a wet meadow zone, a drier sunny section of the trail, then finishing with a walk along a creek.

Of course, you will see different plant species in each zone, ranging from thick moss to tiny wildflowers to towering pines. Notice also the sound and feel of each zone. Where do you first hear the creek? Do you feel a breeze? Which temperature do you enjoy the most?



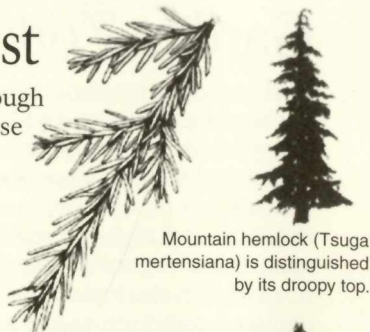
The Garden Forest

The Wildflower Trail winds first through a forest community. Because the dense canopy allows little sunlight to penetrate to the ground, few wildflowers are found here. The trail's elevation (6,300 ft), allows for a mixed forest, including species seen at the Rim, along with trees found at lower elevations on Mount Mazama's slopes. Here you can enjoy the quiet shady glen of a mature forest.

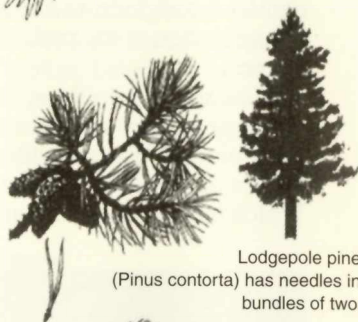
Mountain hemlock is well adapted to handle the garden's heavy snows with strong branches, and drooping branchlets that easily shed snow. Its short blue green needles are arranged around the twig, giving an impression of small stars.

Lodgepole pine may have been the first conifer nature placed in this garden. It is often the first to colonize an area after a fire or other disturbance. However, here on the volcanic soil, lodgepole is also a mature forest species.

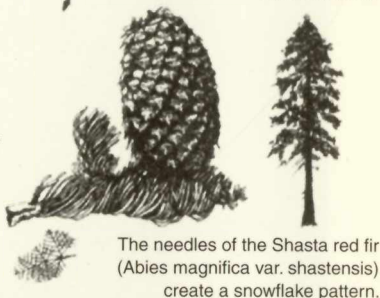
Stately Shasta red fir, reaching 200 feet tall, and mountain hemlock are the most common conifers along the trail.



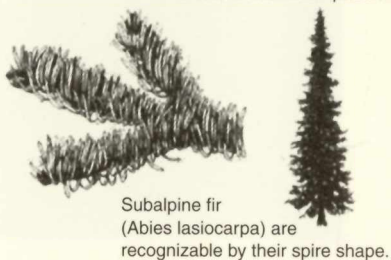
Mountain hemlock (*Tsuga mertensiana*) is distinguished by its droopy top.



Lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*) has needles in bundles of two.



The needles of the Shasta red fir (*Abies magnifica* var. *shastensis*) create a snowflake pattern.



Subalpine fir (*Abies lasiocarpa*) are recognizable by their spire shape.

Shasta red fir, a hybrid of noble fir and California red fir, is found only where their ranges intersect in southern Oregon and northern California. Both parent species are known for their magnificent and noble appearance. Shasta red fir's handsome form only adds to the beauty of the forest garden. Although Shasta red fir enjoys a cool, moist climate, it also tolerates the dry summers at Crater Lake.

Subalpine fir is the remaining conifer of this forest garden. It is the smallest of the true firs of the west coast and is easily recognized by its long slender conical crown. Numerous seed cones grow each year on its upper branches. At maturity the cones disintegrate. Scales and seeds fall to the forest floor, supplying food for several animals that frequent nature's garden: squirrels, mice, voles and several bird species. As you pass through the forest, the trail emerges in the showy realm of alpine meadow.

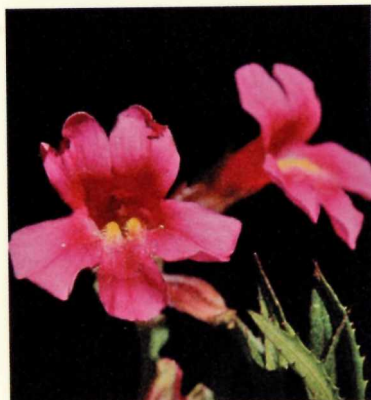


Squirrels dismantle Shasta red fir cones for their seeds.

Meadow Alive

In July and August, the meadow explodes with a prolific display of wildflowers suited to moist soils and plenty of sunlight. The abundance of water makes this floral array possible. In an average winter, 44 feet of snow falls on Castle Crest's slopes. Seeds, roots and runners of a host of plants lie dormant beneath the snow pack.

As spring arrives in June, new shoots push upward and willow branches sprout fresh leaves. While lingering snowbanks melt, tiny violets and buttercups bloom, shooting stars unfurl pink darts, and bistorts flash white florets. Verdant mosses claim the wet meadow center.



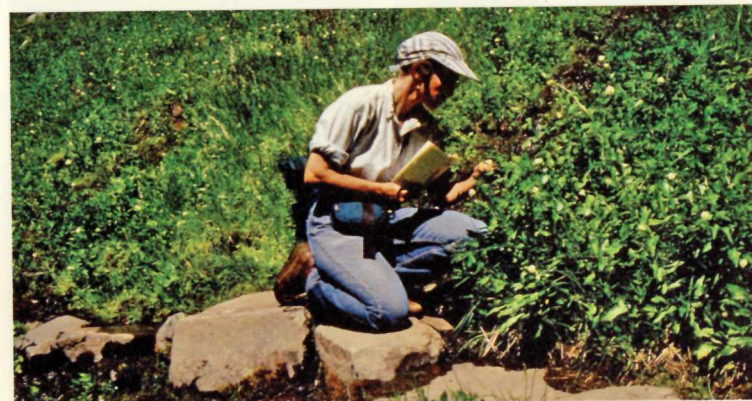
Lewis monkeyflower
Mimulus lewisii



Paintbrush (*Castilleja* spp.)

Different species come into bloom as the season unfolds, giving the meadow an ever changing complexion. These flowers make the most of a short summer, bursting forth with colors bright enough to attract the pollinators, including moths, butterflies and hummingbirds, that will ensure next year's

bloom. Water is always in supply from the springs that feed the meadow and converge to form a small stream. Nature has provided the garden with all it needs for this brilliant display year after year.



Native flagstones placed here help you navigate the wet meadow.



Scarlet (or Skyrocket) Gilia
Gilia aggregata



Columbia monkshood
Aconitum columbianum



Lupine
Lupinus spp.



Elephanthead
Pedicularis groenlandica



Pacific Bleeding Heart
Dicentra formosa



Gorman buttercup
Ranunculus gormanii



A hummingbird (sphinx) moth at a
pink monkeyflower.



Blue Stickseed
Hackelia micrantha

Drier Ground

Along with the opulent wet meadow display, the Wildflower Trail is home to plants suited for drier ground. Before Mt. Mazama collapsed, the final eruptions 7,700 years ago hurled pumice, ash and loose rock onto the slopes of the ancient volcano. Water drains quickly through this ashy slope.

In this parched opening, plants adapted to a sunny, well-drained site pioneer: grasses, spreading phlox, skyrocket gilia, sulfur eriogonum, rabbitbrush goldenweed, and umbellate pussypaws. Watch for rufous hummingbirds flitting and diving here when the gilia blooms.

The Creek

Water from Castle Crest's springs ensures the creek's flow year-round. Here water can be both seen and heard. The flow provides for a stable aquatic community. Living on rocks within the creek, the aquatic moss *Hygrohypnum* provides shelter and food for several small animals.

See if you can find an American dipper, a stocky gray bird that dives into the stream to forage for aquatic insects. The dipper walks along the creek bottom or flaps its wings and "flies" underwater. Water from this creek pours into Munson Creek which flows downslope through Godfrey Glen to join Annie Creek. The path takes you along the creek, through forest and back to the trailhead.



American dipper (or water ouzel)
"flies" underwater.



Perspectives

Poet John Keats could have written of wildflowers in these lines:

A thing of beauty is a joy forever: Its loveliness increases; it will never pass into nothingness . . .

From the time Boy Scouts constructed the trail in 1929, hikers have ambled through forest, across meadow and along creek, taking joy in the sublime beauty of the wildflowers of Castle Crest.

The National Park Service protects the natural systems that created and maintain this forest and flower garden trail so that our children and their children may experience awe in discovering this environment so rich with life. As adults exploring here, we can touch our own sense of wonder at the organization and beauty of the natural world.

Spreading phlox
Phlox diffusa

Sulfur eriogonum
Eriogonum umbellatum

Rabbitbrush goldenweed
Haplopappus bloomeri

As with any trail, please stay on the designated path to prevent damage to fragile soils. Please leave rocks, plants and animals undisturbed for the next visitor. Teach children not to pick the wildflowers. Please do not feed squirrels and birds; it endangers their health and you may be bitten. Thank you for helping care for and preserve this area.



CRATER LAKE

NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

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