White Sands

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
White Sands National Monument

Desert in Color

There is no single "best time" to see desert wildflowers. Different types of plants bloom at different times. At White Sands National Monument, flowers bloom later than those in the surrounding desert foothills due to the pool of cold air from the mountains that settles into the basin at night.

Annual Wildflowers

Most wildflowers begin blooming around the middle of April. The most common early bloomers in the dunefield include the sand verbena, Hartweg's sundrops, desert mentzelia, and White Sands mustard. In mid-May, these are joined by gypsum centaury, white evening primrose, and greenthread. Some plants may continue to produce flowers throughout the summer, especially after monsoon-season rains.

Pepperweed, a white-flowered mustard that is often overlooked, grows throughout the residential area and dune margins. It is the hardiest wildflower in the park and is the first plant to bloom in the spring, usually around the first of March, earlier in warmer years. It blooms throughout the summer and into the fall. Pepperweed has been seen in bloom in the monument every month of the year.

Spring Wildflowers

Spring is when all of the small wildflowers begin to bloom and the grasses and bushes begin to turn green. Soaptree yucca is the star of the spring flowers. It grows tall and can easily be spotted throughout the dunes. Its flowers are white and have the appearance of upside down tulips. Another big contender in the spring is prairie gentian. This wildflower is easiest to spot at the beginning of the Dune Life Nature Trail. There is also a white version of the plant that will bloom next to the purple one.

Summer Wildflowers

Many wildflowers are seen in the summer but few are robust enough to bloom during the high temperatures. These plants have smaller flowers like the gypsum centaury and desert mentzelia. They can be found growing in the interdunal areas throughout the entire dunefield.

Fall Color

Even though most of the plants at White Sands bloom in the spring and summer, there is still color to be seen in the fall. The fall colors can begin to appear as early as October and last through November. This is the time when the Rio Grande cottonwood trees begin to turn a beautiful orange and the skunkbush sumacs start to turn a vibrant red. These plants can be found throughout the first five miles of Dunes Drive.

For more information on White Sands, visit http://www.nps.gov/whsa.

Desert Mentzelia
Mentzelia multiflora
Blooms: Late spring - late summer

Gypsum Centaury
Centaurium maryannum
Blooms: Early summer

Globemallow
Sphaeralcea sp.
Blooms: Late summer - early fall

Mountain Pepperweed
Lepidium montanum
Blooms: Early spring - late summer

Rubber Rabbitbrush
Ericameri nauseosa
Blooms: Late fall - early winter

Hartweg's Sundrops
Calylophus hartwegii
Blooms: Early spring - late summer

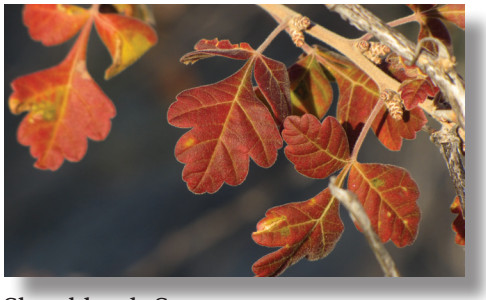
Tree Cholla
Cylindropuntia imbricata
Blooms: Late summer - early fall

Catchfly Prairie Gentian
Eustoma exaltatum
Blooms: Late spring - summer

Cowpen Daisy
Verbesina encelioides
Blooms: Late summer - early fall

Soaptree Yucca
Yucca elata
Blooms: Late spring - late summer

Rio Grande Cottonwood
Populus deltoides ssp. wislizeni
Color: Early fall



Skunkbush Sumac
Rhus trilobata
Color: Late fall

Note: Blooming seasons may vary due to more or less rainfall.