

Alaska Wildflower Identification Guide

FREE GUIDE · ANCHORAGEHIKES.COM

Identify 20 common Alaska wildflowers with bloom calendar, best viewing trails & ecological notes.

■ Region:	Anchorage & Southcentral Alaska
■ Updated:	2024 Season
■ Cost:	Free Resource
■ Website:	AnchorageHikes.com

Introduction to Alaska's Unique Floral Ecosystem

Alaska's arctic-alpine environment is home to a diverse and vibrant array of wildflowers, adapted to thrive in the state's short growing season and unique light conditions. The midnight sun, which bathes the landscape in 24-hour sunlight during the summer solstice, has a profound effect on the bloom intensity of Alaska's wildflowers. This prolonged daylight period triggers an explosion of color, as flowers rapidly bloom and set seed to take advantage of the brief growing season.

The arctic-alpine environment, characterized by rugged terrain, harsh winters, and short summers, has given rise to a distinct suite of plant species that are well-suited to these conditions. Many of Alaska's wildflowers have evolved to bloom quickly, often in a matter of weeks, to capitalize on the brief window of favorable weather. This makes for a thrilling experience for hikers and wildflower enthusiasts, as the landscape transforms from a blanket of snow to a kaleidoscope of color in a remarkably short period.

Common Alaska Wildflowers

1. Fireweed (*Chamerion angustifolium*)

- Description: Tall, stately plant with purple-pink flowers and narrow, lance-shaped leaves
- Bloom time: July-August
- Where to find it: Wet meadows, stream banks, and roadsides, often at elevations below 3,000 feet; common along the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail and Flattop Mountain Trail near Anchorage
- Fun fact: Fireweed is the unofficial state flower of Alaska and is an important source of nectar for bees and other pollinators

2. Arctic Lupine (*Lupinus arcticus*)

- Description: Blue-purple flowers in dense spikes, with palmate leaves and a tall, upright habit
- Bloom time: June-July
- Where to find it: Dry tundra, rocky outcroppings, and alpine meadows, often at elevations above 2,000 feet; abundant in the Chugach Mountains and along the Glen Alps Trail
- Fun fact: Arctic lupine is a nitrogen-fixing legume, which helps to enrich the soil and support the growth of other plant species

3. Forget-Me-Not (*Myosotis alpestris*)

- Description: Small, sky-blue flowers with five petals and a yellow center, on stems with narrow, lance-shaped leaves
- Bloom time: June-July

- Where to find it: Moist meadows, stream banks, and rocky outcroppings, often at elevations below 2,000 feet; common along the Anchorage Coastal Trail and in the Chugach National Forest
- Fun fact: Forget-me-not is the official state flower of Alaska and is often found growing in association with other wildflowers, such as fireweed and lupine

4. Wild Geranium (*Geranium erianthum*)

- Description: Pink to purple flowers with five petals, on stems with palmate leaves and a sprawling habit
- Bloom time: June-July
- Where to find it: Moist meadows, stream banks, and rocky outcroppings, often at elevations below 2,000 feet; common along the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail and in the Chugach National Forest
- Fun fact: Wild geranium is a popular ingredient in traditional medicine, where it is used to treat a variety of ailments, including wounds and digestive issues

5. Chocolate Lily (*Fritillaria camschatcensis*)

- Description: Nodding, bell-shaped flowers with a reddish-brown color and a sweet, chocolate-like fragrance
- Bloom time: June-July
- Where to find it: Moist meadows, stream banks, and rocky outcroppings, often at elevations below 2,000 feet; common along the Anchorage Coastal Trail and in the Chugach National Forest
- Fun fact: Chocolate lily is a unique and charismatic species, with a fragrance that is often compared to the scent of chocolate or vanilla

6. Columbine (*Aquilegia formosa*)

- Description: Red and yellow flowers with a distinctive, spurred shape, on stems with delicate, fern-like leaves
- Bloom time: June-July
- Where to find it: Rocky outcroppings, stream banks, and moist meadows, often at elevations below 2,000 feet; common along the Flattop Mountain Trail and in the Chugach National Forest
- Fun fact: Columbine is a popular garden plant, prized for its unique, spurred flowers and delicate foliage

7. Wild Iris (*Iris setosa*)

- Description: Purple flowers with a distinctive, bearded shape, on stems with narrow, sword-shaped leaves
- Bloom time: June-July
- Where to find it: Moist meadows, stream banks, and rocky outcroppings, often at elevations below 2,000 feet; common along the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail and in the Chugach National Forest

- Fun fact: Wild iris is a popular ingredient in traditional medicine, where it is used to treat a variety of ailments, including digestive issues and skin problems

8. Shooting Star (*Dodecatheon pulchellum*)

- Description: White to pink flowers with a distinctive, star-shaped appearance, on stems with narrow, lance-shaped leaves
- Bloom time: June-July
- Where to find it: Moist meadows, stream banks, and rocky outcroppings, often at elevations below 2,000 feet; common along the Anchorage Coastal Trail and in the Chugach National Forest
- Fun fact: Shooting star is a unique and charismatic species, with a distinctive shape and a sweet, fragrant scent

9. Jacob's Ladder (*Polemonium acutiflorum*)

- Description: Blue to purple flowers in dense spikes, with pinnate leaves and a tall, upright habit
- Bloom time: June-July
- Where to find it: Dry tundra, rocky outcroppings, and alpine meadows, often at elevations above 2,000 feet; abundant in the Chugach Mountains and along the Glen Alps Trail
- Fun fact: Jacob's ladder is a nitrogen-fixing legume, which helps to enrich the soil and support the growth of other plant species

10. Monkshood (*Aconitum delphinifolium*)

- Description: Blue to purple flowers in dense spikes, with palmate leaves and a tall, upright habit; **TOXIC**, handle with care
- Bloom time: July-August
- Where to find it: Moist meadows, stream banks, and rocky outcroppings, often at elevations below 2,000 feet; common along the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail and in the Chugach National Forest
- Fun fact: Monkshood is a highly toxic plant, containing a range of toxic compounds that can be deadly if ingested; handle with care and avoid touching or eating any parts of the plant

11. Bunchberry (*Cornus canadensis*)

- Description: White flowers in dense clusters, with whorled leaves and a low, spreading habit
- Bloom time: June-July
- Where to find it: Moist meadows, stream banks, and rocky outcroppings, often at elevations below 2,000 feet; common along the Anchorage Coastal Trail and in the Chugach National Forest
- Fun fact: Bunchberry is a popular ingredient in traditional medicine, where it is used to treat a variety of ailments, including digestive issues and skin problems

12. Cloudberry (*Rubus chamaemorus*)

- Description: White to yellow flowers in dense clusters, with palmate leaves and a low, spreading habit; produces edible fruit in late summer
- Bloom time: June-July
- Where to find it: Moist meadows, stream banks, and rocky outcroppings, often at elevations below 2,000 feet; common along the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail and in the Chugach National Forest
- Fun fact: Cloudberry is a popular ingredient in traditional cuisine, where it is used to make jams, jellies, and other desserts

13. Wild Rose (*Rosa acicularis*)

- Description: Pink to purple flowers with five petals, on stems with prickly, woody branches and a sprawling habit
- Bloom time: June-July
- Where to find it: Moist meadows, stream banks, and rocky outcroppings, often at elevations below 2,000 feet; common along the Anchorage Coastal Trail and in the Chugach National Forest
- Fun fact: Wild rose is a popular ingredient in traditional medicine, where it is used to treat a variety of ailments, including digestive issues and skin problems

14. Cow Parsnip (*Heracleum maximum*)

- Description: White to yellow flowers in dense umbels, with large, palmate leaves and a tall, upright habit; **CAUSES BURNS**, handle with care
- Bloom time: June-July
- Where to find it: Moist meadows, stream banks, and rocky outcroppings, often at elevations below 2,000 feet; common along the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail and in the Chugach National Forest
- Fun fact: Cow parsnip contains a range of toxic compounds that can cause severe burns and blisters if handled carelessly; handle with care and avoid touching or eating any parts of the plant

15. Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)

- Description: White to yellow flowers in dense clusters, with fern-like leaves and a tall, upright habit
- Bloom time: June-July
- Where to find it: Dry tundra, rocky outcroppings, and alpine meadows, often at elevations above 2,000 feet; abundant in the Chugach Mountains and along the Glen Alps Trail
- Fun fact: Yarrow is a popular ingredient in traditional medicine, where it is used to treat a variety of ailments, including wounds and digestive issues

16. Paintbrush (*Castilleja unalaschcensis*)

- Description: Red to orange flowers with a distinctive, brush-like shape, on stems with narrow, lance-shaped leaves
- Bloom time: June-July

- Where to find it: Moist meadows, stream banks, and rocky outcroppings, often at elevations below 2,000 feet; common along the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail and in the Chugach National Forest
- Fun fact: Paintbrush is a unique and charismatic species, with a distinctive shape and a sweet, fragrant scent

17. Cotton Grass (*Eriophorum* species)

- Description: White to yellow flowers in dense clusters, with narrow, grass-like leaves and a low, spreading habit
- Bloom time: June-July
- Where to find it: Moist meadows, stream banks, and rocky outcroppings, often at elevations below 2,000 feet; common along the Anchorage Coastal Trail and in the Chugach National Forest
- Fun fact: Cotton grass is a popular ingredient in traditional crafts, where it is used to make decorative items such as wreaths and potpourri

18. Mountain Avens (*Dryas octopetala*)

- Description: White to yellow flowers in dense clusters, with narrow, lance-shaped leaves and a low, spreading habit
- Bloom time: June-July
- Where to find it: Dry tundra, rocky outcroppings, and alpine meadows, often at elevations above 2,000 feet; abundant in the Chugach Mountains and along the Glen Alps Trail
- Fun fact: Mountain avens is a unique and charismatic species, with a distinctive shape and a sweet, fragrant scent

19. Nagoonberry (*Rubus arcticus*)

- Description: White to yellow flowers in dense clusters, with palmate leaves and a low, spreading habit; produces edible fruit in late summer
- Bloom time: June-July
- Where to find it: Moist meadows, stream banks, and rocky outcroppings, often at elevations below 2,000 feet; common along the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail and in the Chugach National Forest
- Fun fact: Nagoonberry is a popular ingredient in traditional cuisine, where it is used to make jams, jellies, and other desserts

20. Tundra Rose / Shrubby Cinquefoil (*Dasiphora fruticosa*)

- Description: Pink to purple flowers with five petals, on stems with narrow, lance-shaped leaves and a low, spreading habit
- Bloom time: June-July
- Where to find it: Moist meadows, stream banks, and rocky outcroppings, often at elevations below 2,000 feet; common along the Anchorage Coastal Trail and in the Chugach National Forest

- Fun fact: Tundra rose is a unique and charismatic species, with a distinctive shape and a sweet, fragrant scent

Bloom Calendar

The following bloom calendar shows the peak months for each of the 20 wildflowers covered in this guide, along with the best viewing locations near Anchorage:

- June: Fireweed, Arctic lupine, forget-me-not, wild geranium, chocolate lily, columbine, wild iris, shooting star, Jacob's ladder, bunchberry, cloudberry, wild rose, cow parsnip, yarrow, paintbrush, cotton grass, mountain avens, nagoonberry, and tundra rose
- July: Fireweed, arctic lupine, forget-me-not, wild geranium, chocolate lily, columbine, wild iris, shooting star, Jacob's ladder, bunchberry, cloudberry, wild rose, cow parsnip, yarrow, paintbrush, cotton grass, mountain avens, nagoonberry, and tundra rose
- August: Fireweed, monkshood, and tundra rose

Best viewing locations near Anchorage:

- Tony Knowles Coastal Trail: fireweed, forget-me-not, wild geranium, chocolate lily, columbine, wild iris, shooting star, Jacob's ladder, bunchberry, cloudberry, wild rose, cow parsnip