



3 MAY FLOWERS

No Instagram filter needed: Find a world of color on these four trips to springtime blooms. *By Jen Rose Smith*

PORTERS CREEK TRAIL GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK, TN

Every April, snow gives way to white of a different kind when phacelias, trilliums, and bloodroots burst into season. You don't have to go far to see the show on the hike to Fern Branch Falls: The flora starts at the onset and doesn't stop until you reach the 35-foot, moss-framed cascade at mile 2. Do it as a 4-mile out-and-back, beginning by walking past milky trilliums. Follow the blooms southwest alongside a lazy river (look for the crumbling stone walls of an abandoned farmstead). At mile 1.5, the springtime party will be in full swing, with delicate violets and mauve bleeding hearts mixing in with the snowy phacelias and bloodroots. Reach the turnaround point at the cascade at mile 2, then botanize your way back to the trailhead. **Peak bloom** Mid-April to mid-May
Contact nps.gov/grsm

MOUND TRAIL LOOP BLUE MOUNDS STATE PARK, MN

Watch a sea of grass foam up into yarrows, violets, and pasqueflowers when you join the local bison for a springtime walk through the plains. The park's grasslands and quartzite cliffs create quirky microclimates that sprout an array of unlikely flora, which you can see on a 3.9-mile loop from the Mound trailhead. Hike south on the trail, climbing through a haze of prairie flowers and keeping an eye out for the 100-head bison herd. At mile 1.6, reach Eagle Rock, where you can spy Minnesota's native prickly pear cactus poking out of nooks in the quartzite (the thorny plants pop with golden flowers in early summer). Circle back to the trailhead on the Upper and Lower Cliffline Trails, looking for low-lying violets and pink Virginia waterleafs in cool, shady spots along the crags. **Peak bloom** May to mid-June
Contact bit.do/blue-mounds-sp

Trilliums along the Porters Creek Trail in the Smokies

HITE COVE TRAIL SIERRA NATIONAL FOREST, CA

A glimmering field of poppies flanks the Merced River's south fork, which wends through a jewel box of red-buds, shooting stars, and purple-flecked lupines on its way to the old Hite Cove gold mine. See it all on a 9-mile out-and-back (the trailhead is on CA 140, behind Savage Trading Post). Neon-orange California poppies are the first to appear on the slopes of Pinoche Ridge as you climb a mile through scattered oaks and pines; fiery fields of live forevers and blazing stars keep the party going to the 2-mile point. There, drop to the river (look for bright-colored Sierra newts that breed in spring). The blooms peter out from here, but the 2.5-mile add-on to Hite Cove is worth it: There, see the rusting hulks of abandoned mining equipment before returning the way you came. **Peak bloom** April to May
Contact www.fs.usda.gov/sierra



**SIPHON DRAW TRAIL
LOST DUTCHMAN STATE PARK, AZ**

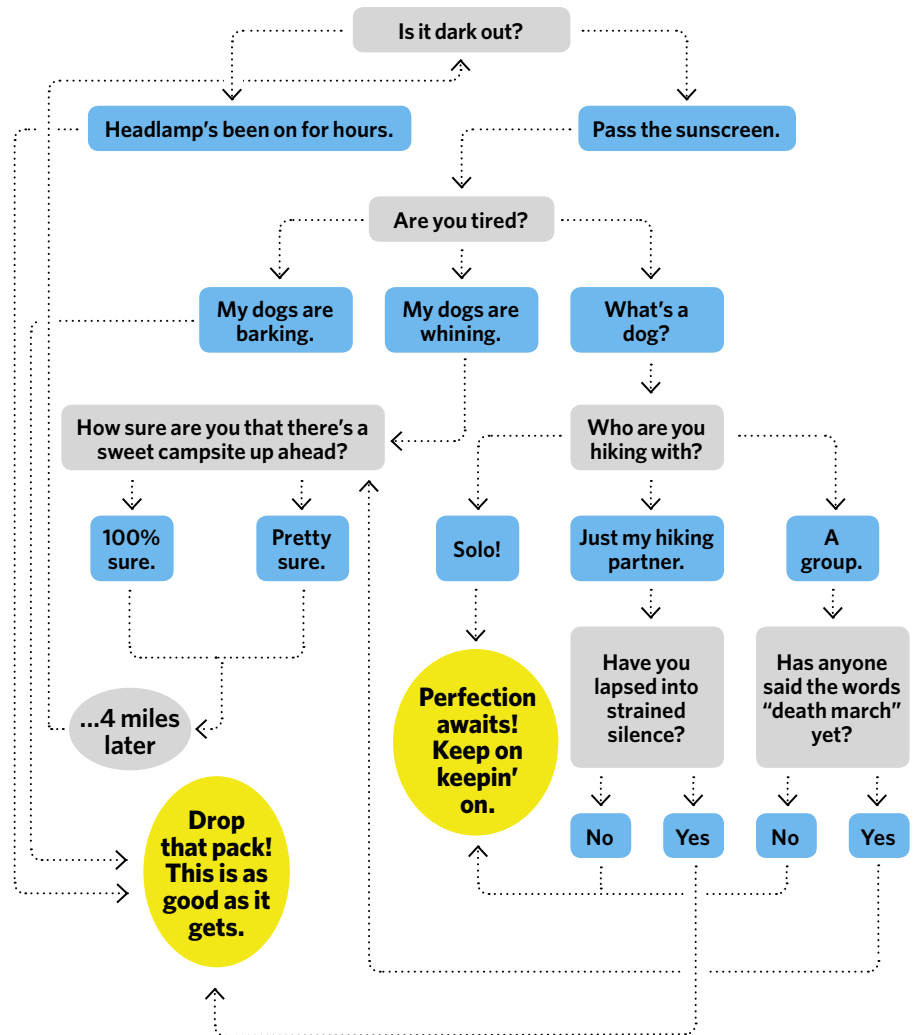
See the desert go green on a 4-mile out-and-back through a spatter-paint carpet of wildflowers in the Superstition Mountains. Follow an old roadbed from the Siphon Draw trailhead into a field of sun-colored brittlebushes, orange poppies, and chuparosas tipped with scarlet blooms. Hiking in early May is rolling the dice on peak flora, but there's a botanical jackpot if you're lucky: Late wildflowers can overlap with the first blooming cactuses to double down on the color. As you climb, look for prickly pears topped by apricot-colored blossoms, saguaros dressed in frilly white, and strawberry hedgehog cactuses with magenta blooms. Turn around at mile 2 or keep ascending the loose scree and slickrock for views of Flatiron Peak. **Peak bloom** March to May **Contact** azstateparks.com/lost-dutchman

TEXT BY MORGAN MCFALL-JOHNSEN (IN THE CLUB)

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SHOULD I STOP AT THIS CAMPSITE?

So, you've stumbled across a just-OK campsite. It's flat, there's water close by, but it isn't perfect. Should you hold out for something better? Here's how to answer the age-old query.



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IN THE CLUB

...IN WHICH WE HONOR THE BEST HIKING CLUBS IN THE COUNTRY.

The first time anyone uttered the words "Issaquah Alps," it was, well, a joke. The rolling green hills outside Seattle aren't quite the snowcapped summits you think of when you imagine the Cascades. But the **Issaquah Alps Trails Club** is the peak of local lands advocacy and its members take their work seriously. Their efforts have expanded protected areas, created new state parks and forests, and, most recently, cleaned up the trails on Tiger Mountain. But it's not all work and no play. With four or five hikes each week, the IATC's 350 members like to get out of the suburbs and hit the trail. This year, the club celebrates its 40th anniversary with a series of classic hikes in its namesake foothills. Visit issaquahalps.org to learn more.

Think your club deserves a shout out? Tell us why at intheclub@backpacker.com.