

Welcome to another edition of Who's in Bloom, a periodical patreon mostly short form podcast series about flowers that we fall in love with during their bloom cycle. I'm your co-host of the Science Witch Podcast, Anjel, and for this episode we are going to learn about one of my favorite wild flowers and signals of spring time: Balsamroot.

Balsamroot, *Balsamorhiza sagittata*, is a beautiful wildflower that grows in the western United States and Canada. It has large, yellow flowers that bloom in the spring and summer. The plant is also known as stickyweed, sweetroot, and wild balsam. Around this time, blooms of this bright show aster blanket the windswept hillsides of the Columbia River Gorge in such a massive profusion that they color the hills yellow. I make a point to try to get out for at least one hike to several of my favorite wildflower viewing trails to experience the bloom season and spectate this beautiful wildflower among the stunning landscape of the Gorge.

Balsamroot is a member of the sunflower family as well as a perennial plant. The plant grows from a taproot that is a long, thick root that helps the plant to store water and nutrients as well as stay anchored on windswept hillsides. These plants have large, basal rosettes of leaves which are lobed and have a hairy texture. When blooming, Balsam root produces a tall, erect stem topped with a cluster of yellow flowers. Like other Sunflower plants, Balsam root has ray flowers in the center and disk flowers surrounding them, however they are much smaller and tend to not grow as tall as their *Helianthus* relatives.

Balsam root was an important plant to the Native Americans, and to many of the tribes in the Pacific Northwest, it was considered sacred. The entire plant is edible and the seeds can be used for food and oil. The leaves are best collected when young and have a citrus flavor. Like the dandelion, the roots can be boiled and have a bitter, pine-like taste. The roots can be sizable and be difficult to remove, so the best time to harvest roots is in the early spring before the plant has been able to grow and send more reserves to the roots.

Many tribes including the Nez Perce, Kootenai, Cheyenne, and Salish used the plant as food and medicine. The roots of the plant contain a sticky sap like substance that was used to soothe sore throats and treat tuberculosis. The leaves were used as a poultice to treat burns and skin irritation. The common name Balsam root comes from this property of the plant.

Hiking the Columbia River Gorge has become one of my rituals to herald in the spring wildflower season. There are several areas that are known to boast some impressive views and populations of Balsamroot, which blooms from late April until June. Among my favorite hikes include Dog Mountain on the Washington side and Mosier Plateau on the Oregon side past Cascade Locks. Since the pandemic, these hikes have become a lot more popular and seen a lot more use, so best practice is to set out hiking early in the morning or go on a weekday. These areas are also fragile and are often not well maintained by the Forest Service, so if you do happen to go hiking, I encourage you to bring a trash bag and trash picker to help ensure these trails are not covered in litter. Picking up trash is a great way to help reduce the impact of recreational activities on these sensitive areas, and to honor the indigenous history and sacred nature of these beautiful wildflowers.

Thank you for listening to this edition of Who's in Bloom. If you liked what you heard and would like to support us, as well as access other episodes of who's in bloom that we only publish for our supporters, check us out on Patreon. You can gain access to episodes of this as well as other Pateron only content for only 1 dollar a month. Once again, thank you for listening, and don't forget to stop, and adore the flowers.

In this episode of Who's In Bloom released on the main RSS feed, Anjel talks about their favorite charismatic wild flower to blanket the windswept hillsides of the Columbia River Gorge: Balsam Root. Original music is by Ruby and writing for this episode is by Anjel.

Show Notes

[Arrowleaf Balsam Root](#)

[Arrowleaf Balsamroot: The Hearty, Heavy Edible Plant](#)

[Arrowleaf Balsamroot \(*Balsamorhiza sagittata* \(Pursh\) Nutt.\)](#)

[10 iconic wildflower hikes in the Columbia River Gorge](#)

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