

Nevada's State Flower is Blooming

By Larry Hyslop



Sagebrush flowers

Each August and September, people celebrate the blooming of our state flower. Idaho may have the syringa and Utah the sego lily, but neither covers that much ground in their states. Nevada's state flower literally blankets our state. I always find it humorous that Nevada's state flower is the sagebrush, but what better flower to represent the state? The problem is most people have never seen a sagebrush flower and a good number have no idea sagebrush flowers.

Anyone who carefully watches sagebrush plants throughout the summer has undoubtedly watched the plants grow taller as flower stalks extend above the plants. Close, very close, examination shows each stalk covered with dozens of tiny, tiny flowers.

Utah's and Idaho's state flowers bloom in the spring but sagebrush blooms during late summer and early fall, much more original. Most flowering plants bloom in the spring. The energy needed to produce these blooms has been stored in the roots since the summer before. If last summer was a poor year, this year may see few blooms even during a good spring. Last summer might have been a good year with lots of energy stored, so lots of blooms are produced during a poor spring and the blooms are wasted. Sagebrush flowers are produced using this summer's energy. A good summer produces a lot of blooms while a bad year sees fewer flowers.

Producing flowers in late summer is difficult. During summer heat, photosynthesis is at its lowest production level. But sagebrush flowering stalks carry small leaves that conduct enough photosynthesis to produce flowers without burdening the rest of the plant.

Sego lilies and syringa need large, flashy flowers to attract pollenating insects. Sagebrush has no need for colorful flowers since wind pollinates its flowers. August and September winds carry clouds of sagebrush pollen across the landscape.

Each fertilized flower produces a single, tiny seed inside a red-brown, woody hull. They look like sunflower seeds, only much tinier, requiring one million seeds to make up a pound. Sagebrush compensates for tiny seeds by creating lots of them, anywhere from 350,000 to one million seeds per plant.

So get out there and enjoy the blooms of our state flower. Pick a bouquet to grace your dining table. Just place a magnifying glass next to the bouquet so everyone can enjoy the blooms.

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