



**FROM THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE:  
“Best Desert Bloom in a Decade”**

DEATH VALLEY, CA-Death Valley, straddling California and Nevada, blooms a little every spring. But when conditions are right, including well-spaced rainfall and low winds, the desert becomes carpeted with wildflowers. This year the conditions were just right. Rains were gentle and penetrated deeply into the soil to germinate dormant seeds. The ground warmed slowly, allowing roots to develop. A moist, El Niño weather pattern kept the flowers watered as they grew. Blooms start in the valleys and work their way up to the tops of the mountains through the spring and early summer.

*Some of the seeds to germinate this year have been lying dormant for a decade or more! And, many seeds in Death Valley have taken out “insurance policies”. As moisture reaches them in a given year, it does not penetrate the seed coat until just the right amount of moisture falls, enough to sustain the plant through the stages of root growth and then bloom. The seed “knows” how much rain is needed to support life and opens only when that amount of moisture falls. Amazing!!*

*Death Valley is the hottest place in North America, averaging about two inches of rain per year. These extreme conditions make it difficult for most plants to survive. Most of the time, the lower elevations in the park appear stark: a landscape of salt flats, sand dunes and rocky mountains vegetated by a few hardy shrubs and small trees.*

Rain in the cooler months triggers wildflower seeds to sprout, some of which may lay dormant for years until just the right conditions occur. Wildflowers bloom each spring in Death Valley, but the density of flowers, extent of the area covered by flowers, and the variety of plants varies a

lot based on rainfall and temperature.

A series of unusual storms in October dropped locally heavy rainfall in several area of the park. The most rainfall fell in places without official rain gauges, but the *National Weather Service estimated that over 3 inches of rain fell in just 5 hours in one area of the park. This autumn soaking was followed by enough winter rain to cause a large-scale wildflower bloom.* The current bloom in Death Valley exceeds anything park staff has seen since the 2005 “super bloom”. Park Ranger Alan Van Valkenburg, who has lived in Death Valley for 25 years said, “...I saw several impressive displays of wildflowers over the years and always wondered how anything could beat them, until I saw my first super bloom in 1998. Then I understood. I never imagined that so much life could exist here in such staggering abundance and intense beauty.”

The previous super blooms of 1998 and 2005 occurred in El Nino years, just as the 2015-2016 one has.

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*Enjoy the beauty of Death Valley!*



*Geraea canescens* and *Phacelia crenulata* offer a color wash across the desert.

