Wildflowers in the Algarve
an introductory guide
by Pat O'Reilly and Sue Parker

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A beautifully illustrated souvenir guide to wildflowers in the Algarve, with clear information on where, when and how to find many of the botanical gems for which southern Portugal is so renowned.

More than 100 large colour photographs, with descriptions of the Algarve's varied wildflower habitats

'Where and when to look' advice plus details of the Algarve's nature reserves and natural parks

Reviews

What a delight it is to come across a book that provides such helpful advice and beautiful pictures to help visitors to this wildflower wonderland. I particularly value having a map as well as location information for the dozens of wildflowers that grown in southern Portugal in springtime (December to May being the key months). The scientific names are included for those who prefer to work that way. A pocket guide that is excellent value for money and beautifully produced. Ten out of ten!
(Review on Amazon)

This user-friendly information source will delight newcomers to the Algarve as well as residents who want to discover more of the hidden botanical gems of the region. Well-known authors and naturalists Pat O'Reilly and Sue Parker have produced a beautifully illustrated introductory guide to the wildflower delights of the Algarve. With chapters on the major habitat types - coastal cliffs and coves, agricultural land, river valleys and estuaries, and mountains and forests - the authors guide visitors to the best wildflower locations, describing and illustrating more than 100 of the most beautiful wildflower species to be found throughout the year.
(NHBS Environment Bookstore)

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About the authors

Writer and broadcaster Pat O'Reilly has wandered the countryside throughout Europe in search of wildflowers for more than 50 years; he has written more than 20 books on wildlife and countryside topics.

Sue Parker is a frequent contributor to countryside magazines, radio and TV programmes and has been studying and photographing wild orchids for more than 30 years; this is Sue's ninth book.

This book uses the commonly accepted term wildflowers, rather than wild flowers. Whatever your preference the flowers illustrated and described in this guide book are some of the most beautiful to be found in the Algarve, southern Portugal.

Sample pages
Algarve Wildflower Habitats

Although its coast faces the Atlantic Ocean, the Algarve shares the mild winters and hot dry summers - sometimes up to five months without rain - that characterize Mediterranean-climate regions in other parts of the world. Perhaps surprisingly, this climate is not restricted to those countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, in North and South America, the Cape area of South Africa and even southern Australia there are Mediterranean-climate regions sharing this unique weather pattern and with distinctive plant communities adapted to the climate conditions. The collective term for these regions, a mere 2% of the planet's land surface, is no measure of its importance in terms of flora and fauna. This small area contains some 20% of the plant species known to mankind.

Bush and fireflies are an all-too-frequent feature of Algarve summers, and indeed the fire has had a major influence on wildflower evolution here. Spurred on by this ability to regenerate from beneath the ashes and grow back from the embers of the summer blaze, as well, in fact, some plants actually depend on fire to perpetuate their specially toughened seeds, releasing the seeds and stimulating them to grow and flower.

While the Algarve and other Mediterranean regions provide ideal conditions for plants, they are also places where people like to live. Over thousands of years, man has cleared most of the accessible land for either olive trees or the black karaka, vines, olives, almonds, citrus, figs and dates. The principal purpose here is to determine which wildflowers now grow in abundance here.

Thyme (Thymus serpyllum), a parasite on thyme plants and related species, is a very common sight on farmland and throughout the Algarve.

Wildflower Hotspots

You can find Algarve wild flowers in the coastal zones, the coastal cliffs and caves in forested mountainous regions (known as the 'alpina') along river valleys and in the pasture lands. Underneath are typical growths that support blooming to 4000 meters, and the great selection of plants up to about 500 meters above sea level comprising compact bushes of plants and shrubs with bare rocky areas in between that make the going fairly wild underneath. From December through to June these are all places where plenty of wildflowers bloom.

A tangle of wildflowers on the cliffs near Carvoeiro

But if you have only a limited amount of time available and want to see lots of wildflowers, concentrate on the peaks, the countryside between the village and the wooded area to the north. This flowering plant is a symbol of a flourishing farmland - indeed, many of the wild flowers for which the Algarve is renowned can be found here.

Barberry (Sarcandra aspera), a tiny wildflower, blooms on the Algarve in late January onwards. This shrub with white flowers open in mid afternoons and close again as dusk descends.

Spanish iris (Iris xiphium) has colonized this area of cleared woodland on a hilltop near Bordeira. With bright orange patches on its azure-blue flowers, Spanish Iris is usually seen at its best between late March and mid-May.

One of the many wild orchids of the Algarve, the broad-leaved bellflower (Epipactis helleborine), a common sight in wooded areas, where it can often be found bathed in dappled sunlight between woodland paths. This elegant plant was photographed in wooded woodland between Monchique and Alvor in late April.