

LIFE ON THE MONUMENT: FLORA

In Celebration of Newberry National Volcanic Monument



Applegate Paintbrush - Photo by Amy Jensen

Enjoying the Monument's Beauty

Written by Gail Whelan

When you visit Newberry National Volcanic Monument, you may be surprised at the abundance of flora that is in the landscape. After all, so much of the land in the monument is volcanic soil produced from Newberry Volcano as well as Mt Mazama (Crater lake). Newberry has a large array of plants low to the ground and high in the sky all with lots of color. In this article we will introduce you to some of the plants that are showcased throughout the entire monument from Lava Butte, Lava River Cave and Lava Cast Forest to Newberry Caldera.

As you drive or ride up Lava Butte, you will notice that a good portion of the butte is made of cinder as this is a volcanic cinder cone that erupted 7000 years ago. As you travel up and around the butte, you will find sections of the cinder that have bright bluish-purple flowers nestled in the cinder. This is Davidson's penstemon which grows to about 4" and blooms in July and August. The bloom pops with color

against the red cinder. When you reach the top of the butte you will see another penstemon plant which is Hot Rock penstemon. This plant blooms late May through early July, showing off a pretty cream flower growing about 18" tall. Both penstemon thrive in dry rocky soil such as



Davidson's Penstemon - Photo Courtesy of Matt Lavin via Flickr

the volcanic soil on the butte. You will also find Oceanspray bushes on the top of the butte, which is a member of the rose family. This bush is very tolerant of the rocky dry soil and grows to around 5'. Flowering May to August, this plant has a tiny and fragrant creamy white bloom that grows in large clusters.

Returning to the Lava Lands Visitor Center, you may see Lowly penstemon. This plant grows in bunches and reaches about 10" in height with bright bluish-purple flowers in July. This too thrives on arid dry soil. Manzanita shrub is prevalent throughout the monument. This shrub is identified by its dark reddish-brown bark. The bloom is a pinkish-white bell shaped flower, that produces a small berry giving wildlife nutrients as well as being a pollinator plant. Lava River Cave, as well as the rest of the monument, showcases a shrub that can get quite big - not only tall (10') but wide.

The snowbrush shrub has a large cluster of small white blooms, coming alive in early spring. This shrub does best in full sun as well as dry soil, and its fragrant blossoms attract local pollinators. As you walk down the path to meet the entrance of Lava River Cave, you will notice two showy plants: False Solomon's Seal and Wood's rose. Both like the coolness of the area and moist soil. False Solomon Seal (in the lily family) blooms late spring into early summer, has feathery white/yellow fragrance flowers. They look like large clumps of feathers. The second shrub is Wood's rose which has pinkish fragrant petals that bloom early summer, and in the right growing conditions can reach up to 7' tall. The fruit of the Wood's rose is a small pear-shaped hip, high in vitamin C and additional nutrients for insects, birds and mammals.



Snowbrush - Photo by Gail Whelan

Lava Cast Forest is our next destination point on the monument to enjoy the beautiful landscape sprinkled with flora. As you walk Lava Cast Forest Trail, you will see a bright color of red scattered throughout the flow. This is the Applegate Paintbrush. This flower

loves the dry and rocky soil, growing in clusters from 4" to 24". Within the rocky landscape and red paintbrush, the beautiful purple Davidson penstemon can be seen.

An intriguing plant that can be found near Ponderosa pine is the Pine-drop. The Pine-drop is a saprophyte living in association with conifers and Manzanita. The spikes of the Pine-drop reach 1-2' in height and are decorated with many flowers on the arched stems.

The rounded seed capsules persist over the winter on the darkened stem. An intriguing plant that can be found near Ponderosa pine is the Pine-drop. The Pine-drop is a saprophyte living in association with conifers and Manzanita. The spikes of the Pine-drop reach 1-2' in height and are decorated with many flowers on the arched stems.

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Pine-drop by Karen Gentry

Some of the other plants that you will see throughout the monument are Wax currant and Sulphur-flower buckwheat. Wax currant can grow to 4' and has tiny pink tube/bell shaped blooms. The Wax currant lives amongst sagebrush and pine trees, and blooms in late spring. Sulphur-flower buckwheat can be found in many drought tolerant landscapes. The perennial blooms yellow umbrella-like bunches in late spring and turns a reddish-yellow color as the summer goes on. Many of the shrubs in this article continue to grow in the higher elevations of the Monument. But one plant you may see more of in the Caldera, is a Pumice moonwort. This plant grows very low to the ground and a grayish-green stocky stem that produces a solitary leaf. The pumice moonwort likes the loose volcanic soil and high altitude of Newberry Caldera.



Wax Currant Before Bloom - Photo by Amy Jensen

As you can see, Newberry National Volcanic Monument with its volcanic dry soil, can produce some wonderful and colorful landscapes. We will see you next time you enjoy a stroll around the Monument!