

HOME & DESIGN

**STRING-LIKE** stems distinguish the dodder plant.**TRUMPET-LIKE** sacred datura raises its horn.**THE WILD** cucumber sticks out with spiky pods.

HAPPENING

One big native garden

By R. DANIEL FOSTER >>> Despite four years of drought, it's a good time to be a plant in Griffith Park. ¶ On Sunday, Jorge Ochoa — an instructor at Long Beach City College who has been nicknamed the “Indiana Jones of Horticulturists” — is leading a plant identification trek into the park, which ranks as the nation's largest municipal park that also contains wilderness areas.

Consider it a great way to glean inspiration for a drought-tolerant garden — or just learn more about identifying native or naturalized plants.

The three-hour trek has been held several times over the last few months, bringing fresh appreciation for the 120-year-old park. Following a ruinous 2007 fire that razed 20% of Griffith Park, Ochoa has been working to catalog its more than 400 species of flora, including 325 native plants. The plant study, part of an ongoing natural history survey that also documents birds, bats, mushrooms and butterflies among other park inhabitants, is the first of its kind.

Griffith Park's inaccessible, deep canyons can harbor “single occurrence species”: plants that exist in distinct, solitary areas.

The chocolate lily, for example — or the *Fritillaria biflora*, to cite the flower's “hoity-toity” botanical name, as Ochoa terms it — has been found only in a western canyon, limited to a space the size of a small patio. Yellow mariposa is confined to a mere 3-foot area on a mossy, north-facing slope. And the Humboldt lily, which has a wider range, is limited to four deep canyon locations shaded by sycamores.

Although Griffith Park's acreage represents a tiny fraction of the vast Santa Monica Mountain range, nearly half the species found in the range are packed into the sliver of parkland.

“Griffith Park is a hot spot of biodiversity,” said Gerry Hans, president of Friends of Griffith Park. “It's surprisingly pristine, unimpacted, and that's how we want to keep it.” (The 500-member organization, founded in 2010, is sponsoring Sunday's trek and organizes other events including field trips and cleanup days.)

The itinerary of the treks change with each hike, but there's one query that comes up again and again: Can you eat the plants?

“That's the question most people ask,” Ochoa said. “California plants — they're not high in caloric yield. That's why populations here were never big. So the answer is, well, you're going to starve.”

home@latimes.com

latimes.com
/home

Virtual tour

Trek online for more photos of the surprising flora finds in Griffith Park.

WATER WISE

Show us how you are keeping dry

We want to see your Southern California drought garden in all its low-water glory.

Share images of how you changed your water-wasting lawn into a drought-tolerant oasis.

You'll never know who you might inspire with your water-sipping ways. And we may also publish our favorites in an upcoming issue of the Saturday print section and online.

Email high-resolution images to home@latimes.com. Please include a daytime phone number so we can reach out to you for additional information, if needed.



GRIFFITH PARK, a regional “hot spot” of biodiversity, reveals its riches to participants in a three-hour plant identification trek.



TOUR LEADER Jorge Ochoa, right, points out a plant, one of more than 400 species at the park.



A BRIGHT sun cup flower.



CANTERBURY bells ring out.



LOOK FAMILIAR? The California everlasting plant is often seen in dried floral arrangements.



SILVERY white sage.

How to participate

Friends of Griffith Park plant identification classes are limited to 40 participants each.

When: 9 a.m. to noon on Sunday and April 17.

How much: \$25.

Info: friendsofgriffithpark.org.