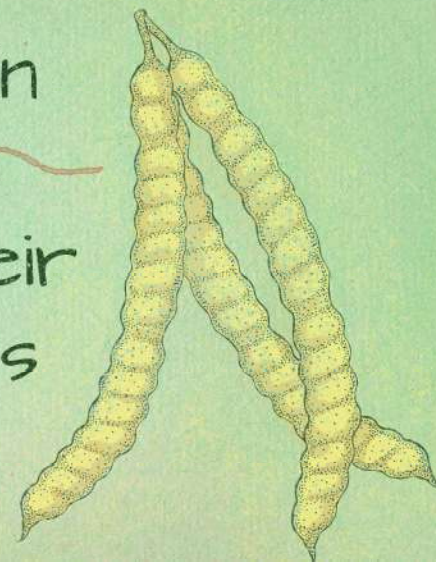


# SPRING...CELEBRATION

THE NIGHTS STILL CARRY A CHILL, but days are sunny and clear and by late February, spring is busting out all over! Short-lived wildflowers that got their start in the fall and were sustained by winter rains are now in bloom — Mexican gold poppies, desert lupine and Arizona twistflower — along with hardy perennials like globe mallow, evening primrose and Parry's penstemon. By March, the foothills are painted yellow as brittlebush comes into flower, punctuated by the flaming tips of ocotillo. This gilding of the hillsides and valleys continues into April with first the blue and then the foothill palo verdes putting on a show. Not to be outdone, the *Opuntias*, both cholla and prickly pear cactus, also bloom in the spring — not just yellow, but bronze, pink and even green.



MESQUITES' LONG, PALE YELLOW CATKINS also emerge in spring, and once bee-pollinated, develop into tasty pods enjoyed by both man and beast. Mesquites also prove their worth as "nurse" trees, defending the vulnerable seedlings of many plants, in particular those of the saguaro.



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WHAT IS THE RECIPE FOR A WORTHY WILDFLOWER YEAR? Simple answer? There isn't one. Yes, rainfall is a factor, but so is temperature, soil condition and the number of hungry plant eaters. Best chances occur when winter rains are early and substantial, maybe once every ten years.



TRUE "SNOWBIRDS," White-winged Doves return from their winter in Mexico, and "who cooks for you?" rings out over and over and over the valley.



## REPTILE RAMBLE

Warmer temperatures mean desert reptiles will be emerging from their winter sleep. Desert spiny and zebra-tailed lizards will promenade before the ladies, but so too will Western diamondback rattlesnakes. It's time to be careful hiking the desert.

