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 gliding 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.