



## Poppy Power

By Kate Halvorson

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California poppies herald springtime. They sleep and disappear for much of the year, then Boom! Suddenly in spring, bright orange, sometimes yellow, poppies make their presence known everywhere from yards to hillsides and along roadways. Not only is it an amazing wildflower that can bring a smile to anyone's face, but the related red poppy of Europe has long been a symbol worn in our country on Memorial Day to honor American military who died serving their nation.

The California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*) is a native wildflower that grows freely across large areas of our state and the West from sea level to about 6,500 feet. Poppies were here long before California became a state, and indigenous peoples used them for food and oil. The California State Floral Society nominated the California poppy as our state flower in 1890. It won out over a close competitor poppy: the Matilija poppy (*Romneya coulteri*) called the "fried egg" poppy). Our state legislature officially adopted the California poppy as the state flower in 1903, and April 6<sup>th</sup> is designated as California Poppy Day.

California poppies sport a bright, beautiful cup-shaped bloom that closes at night and in cool or cloudy weather. They attract bees and butterflies, and are deer resistant. These flowers are drought-tolerant, fast-growing, and self-seeding. They are easy to grow; and if you want them in your yard, using seeds is best – plants do not adapt well to transplanting. Broadcast seeds mixed with a little sand in winter or early spring; choose a sunny location with well-drained (hills work!) soil. Poppies are hardy and can grow in rock beds where there's very little soil.

This time of year, a different poppy deserves merit -- Red Flanders poppies (*Papaver rhoeas*), a traditional symbol of remembrance to honor wartime dead. This practice harkens back to World

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War I when a Canadian soldier and doctor saw the prolific growth of poppies on war-torn Belgium battlefields and burial grounds. In 1915 John McCrae wrote his famous poem “In Flanders Fields” (also commonly called “We Shall Not Sleep”). It ends: “We shall not sleep, though poppies grow – In Flanders fields.”

Following the World War I Armistice, veterans’ organizations worldwide started adopting the Red Flanders poppy to commemorate military who lost their lives serving their country. An American woman named Moina Michael, the Poppy Lady, passionately led this effort in the United States. Writing a poem in response to McCrae’s, titled “We Shall Keep the Faith,” she declared: “We cherish, too, the poppy red -- That grows on fields where valor led.”

Wearing a red poppy on Memorial Day supports veterans’ organizations and helps everyone remember this holiday is about much more than the usual parades and family barbeques. Stay safe and healthy and enjoy Memorial Day weekend and beautiful poppies wherever you see them.

*In response to Coronavirus (COVID-19) California Department of Public Health and El Dorado County Health & Human Services guidelines, all UCCE Central Sierra El Dorado and Amador County Master Gardener public events and classes are cancelled through May 31st, 2020. Check in with us on our website for updated schedules as public health guidelines change.*

*We realize our public classes are valued by County residents and we especially appreciate your continued support and understanding during this public health challenge. Have a gardening question? Master Gardeners are working hard remotely and can still answer your questions. Leave a message on our office telephone: 530-621-5512, or use the “Ask a Master Gardener” option on our website: [mgeldorado.ucanr.edu](http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu). We’ll get back to you! Master Gardeners are also on Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest.*

*Stay safe and follow recommended health and sanitation practices in the coming weeks.*

*For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. If you are looking for garden inspiration, while our garden is closed due to COVID-19, our website has pictures, plants lists and much more. [http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration Garden](http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden). To sign up for notices and newsletters, see <http://ucanr.edu/master> gardener e-news.*