

Field Notes: Crocus

By: Sarah Griffin



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Plod, plod, plod, plod. My joints groan under the weight of Missoula's heavy gray sky, reflecting both in my attitude and cadence. For me, running is one of those instinctual habits – a reflex. In dire situations, our bodies shut down to save our mortal flesh. Mine takes me out to run. Even when it's dull and rainy.

Missoula, MT is a community equally shaped by its ecology of artists, entrepreneurs, students, environmentalists, and surrounding natural landscapes. In this season of COVID-19, we don't

have much of a social crutch to lean on. Fortunately, Missoula's better half is waiting with open arms for people to once again seek intentional solace in the land's unfailing beauty.

I keep going in spite of my lethargy, as I always do, knowing that **one** or **two** or **three** miles down the trail I'll be thankful I did. I passively soften my gaze and disassociate my mind from my body. By now, I can trust my subconscious to dutifully watch for large cracks in the pavement or unpleasant gifts left by migrating geese.

An anomaly at the base of the white picket fence I'm passing piques my conscious-brain's interest. I'm almost offended by the interruption, but delight quickly steps-in to mediate.

Crocuses. A whole patch of them are poking up out of the ground, ready to unfurl.



This perennial cousin of the iris is known for its springtime debut. They have a way of catching me off guard, alive and well in what appears to be a slumbering world. This spring it's especially startling. With life-as-we-know-it paused to battle a rampant virus, it's somehow surprising to see nature unapologetically continue business as usual.

During the harsh winter months, hope for their future hibernates in the bulbous, underground corms from which these flowers grow. Anywhere between sea level and high alpine tundra, the Xinjiang Province in China, and Western Montana, you can find these hardy seasonal favorites sprouting early to mid-April. Montana's wild Crocus (often referred to as Pasqueflower or Prairie Crocus) pop up all over the rolling grasslands and open forests of our state. Their

domesticated cousins do the same all over your neighbor's front lawn, but they are appropriately less wiry and fuzzy than their prairie-counterparts.



I halt my progress to get a better look, breathing heavily. Each deep purple bud stands four to five inches off the ground on a single stem, individuals, yet still enjoying the company of two or three other friends within their clump. I imagine a miniature version of myself bathing in the fairy-sized cup that will form when the six petals unfurl.

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So sweet. I look around for their common yellow, white and cream compadres, but don't see any down the line. *Hmmm...* I stand sighing, with a newly painted smile on my face and in my heart, kissing the little patch goodbye with a promise to visit again soon. *Thank you for the distraction, these little rays of sunshine.* And just like that, the clouds which had fogged my mind dissipate.

I turn the corner with a new spring in my step, only to be flattened by joy. Crocuses scatter like multicolor marbles across the greening carpet of my riverside trail. Yellow, white, mauve, and violet splashed with three yellow stamens and a fringe of thin grass-like leaves. What an unexpected and wholly unnecessary gift during this trying time.

With twinkling and corner-crinkling eyes I send up a shout of joy for all things blessed and commonplace in this life, and for all the little rays of crocus-sunshine lifting heavy skies.