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### **Stalk the wild beargrass at Jamul's McGinty Mountain Preserve.**

By [Jerry Schad](#) | Published Thursday, Feb. 26, 2004

Rising like a scruffy whaleback above a sea of luxury homes and ranchettes in Jamul, McGinty Mountain hosts a rich but circumspect treasure of botanical oddities. Several rare and endangered plant species make their home here on soils derived from a relatively uncommon form of bedrock called gabbro. Over half of California's remaining specimens of Dehesa beargrass cling to the mountain's rocky spine. The endemic San Diego thornmint, its habitat reduced by 90 percent during the past century by urbanization, survives here, as does San Miguel savory, Parry's *Tetracoccus*, and Gander's butterweed. Some of these plants are believed to be relict species, once common but now almost squeezed out of existence by gradual climate changes occurring over the past 10,000 years or more.

Today, much of McGinty Mountain lies within a preserve created by the Nature Conservancy, and a public trail leads intrepid hikers to the mountain's summit ridge. To reach the trail's starting point, follow Lyons Valley Road 0.7 mile north from Highway 94 at Jamul, turn left on Jamul Drive, and proceed 0.4 mile to the gated entrance. Park on the shoulder of Jamul Drive and walk in.

On foot, follow a wide path north up along a shallow draw. After 0.3 mile, just shy of a crest, turn right on a switchbacking trail that quickly rises to the McGinty Mountain ridge. Trained eyes might pick out some of the rarer plants, but mostly you'll notice the typical sage-scrub and chaparral vegetation -- already turning attractively green and aromatic in response to the recent rains. Look for the somewhat unusual coast spice bush (a member of the citrus family) and the common Our Lord's Candle yucca, whose tall flower stalks bear white blossom clusters in the early spring. Clumps of Dehesa beargrass appear higher up, looking somewhat like poor cousins of the common yuccas. They can be identified by their diminutive stature and fibrous, pale green, ribbon-like leaves. Note also the perfume-like scent of Cleveland sage.

The panoramic view expands as you get higher, easily encompassing most of the border-region peaks from Tecate Peak to San Miguel Mountain. Off to the west, beyond Mount Helix and Cowles Mountain, you can sometimes spot the ocean -- dark blue or glistening with sun glare, depending on the time of day.

After about one mile in all, you meet an old dirt road atop the ridgeline. Turn left (north) to set a course for McGinty Mountain's rounded, 2183-foot summit, another 1.5 miles away. You'll be returning on the same route, so take note of any intersecting roads that might cause confusion on your way back. In a few places, the road is steep and slippery, so be sure to wear shoes or boots having a tread with plenty of traction.

