

Forests Come Alive With Color of Spring Wildflowers

Here we are in that in-between time. Early spring is over and it's almost, but not quite, summer. It's probably my favorite time of year. Old friends are returning, the grass is growing and turning green, and the leaves on the trees are beginning to come out. One ride in the woods this week told me that I should revisit my old friends, the spring ephemerals.

There is only a short time each year when the hardwood and mixed wood forests come alive with color and beauty contributed by these fast-growing, short-seasoned, wildflowers. In the spring, before the leaves are fully opened, myriad blooms appear. The spring ephemerals grow in that short space of time. When the weather warms, the spring showers descend, and the full light of the sun hits the forest floor, unfiltered by tree leaves. If you want to see the woods in all their glory, you must go to the forest in the next week or so.

One of the first spring flowers to appear is the Hepatica or Liverleaf, also known around here as the Mayflower (*Hepatica acutiloba* or *H. americana*). These small flowers have thick, leathery leaves with three deep lobes. Actually, what we see in the spring are last year's leaves.

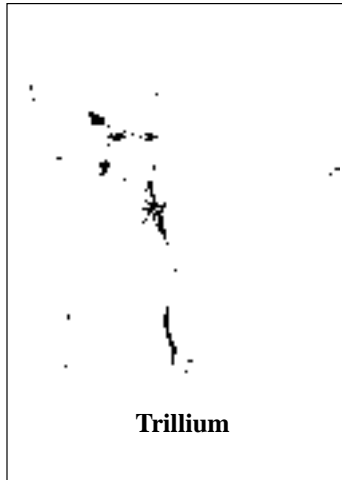
The leaves are dark green with some reddish modeling. The flowers are 0.5 to one inch in diameter and are blue, pink, or white with six to 12 petal-like sepals. The two species differ mainly in the shape of the leaves.

H. acutiloba has pointed ends of the leaves and *H. americana* has rounded leaves. We're getting to the end of the blooming cycle for these plants. Shortly, the new leaves will appear. They begin to unfold after blooming time and are rather hairy in their appearance. We're almost at the end of their blooming season.

Probably the best known of the spring flowers around here, and probably the showiest, is the Large-flowered Trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*). Trillium have a single whorl of three leaves with one solitary flower. In the case of the Large-flowered Trillium, the flowers are white when first out, fading to pink as the flower ages. The plant is six to 20 inches tall and the flower stands erect. The three petals of the flower are 1.5 to 2.5 inches long and are arranged in a funnel-shape at the base, flaring outward from the middle. The flower stalk originates from an underground stem, which will only send up a new flower stalk after going through a period of



Hepatica



Trillium



Common Blue Violet

by the plant's name. The leaves are very broad and prominently veined and hairy beneath. They stand four to eight inches tall and have small, bright yellow, five-petaled, spurred flowers.

The Canada Violet (*Viola canadensis*) doesn't have Canadian citizenship, but certainly may be found in that country, as well as in the northern part of the United States. The leaves of this plant are, again, heart shaped and grow along the flower stalk. The flowers are white with a yellow throat and the backs of the petals are often tinged with purple. While these plants usually bloom in the spring, they may also bloom again in the fall.

A small, pale violet/blue violet that can be found along trails on the Island is the Dog Violet (*V. conspersa*). This small plant has both basal leave and leaves along the stem. The spur of this violet is about one-quarter inch long and blunt. The upper leaves are broadly heart shaped.

Spring Beauty (*Claytonia virginica* or *C. caroliniana*) are some of the most delicate tiny plants found in our woods. They have pink or white flowers, veined with darker pink and composed of five petals. The flowers are about .5 to .75 of an inch in diameter and are in a

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Nature Notes

By Patricia Martin



cold weather. If a flower is picked, it will be at least a year before a new flower stalk is sent up. The plant also will be weakened, as the three large leaves are the main photosynthetic organs in the plant.

Trillium are slow-growing plants. It make take 10 years from the time a Trillium seed falls on the ground to the time it first blooms.


One beautiful yellow spring flower sure to catch the eye is the Yellow Trout Lily, Adder's

Tongue, or Dog-toothed Violet (*Erythronium americanum*). Despite the name, they are lillies, not violets. The Trout Lily is about seven to 10 inches tall. The two leaves are an elongated oval, with parallel veins, and usually mottled with brown. The leaf color gives rise to the name "Trout Lily," as it looks a bit like the mottled belly of a trout. The flowers are solitary, nodding and the petals and sepals are a brilliant yellow. There are three yellow petals and three yellow

sepals.

Speaking of violets, there are a number of different species out and blooming right now. In many lawns the Common Blue Violet (*Viola papilionacea*) can be found. These dark purple/blue violets have all their leaves coming from a basal rosette with a separate stem for the flower. The flowers have five petals with a spurred lower lip. The leaves are heart shaped.

In the woods, at least three species of violets are now up. Probably the most common is the Downy Yellow Violet (*V. pubescens*). I always think that it's odd to say yellow violet. These violets have the leaves on the flower stalk and, sometimes, one coming from the base. The stem's leaves are about as broad as long, with soft hair, implied


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