

Signs of Spring by Cindy Gilberg

After what always seems to be an endless Midwest winter, spring is a long awaited time of year for gardeners. Late winter and early spring—February and March—is a time of sloppy snows alternating with refreshing warm days. Beneath sheer cabin fever lies the need to feel warmth of the sun and see fresh green growth—and, yes, flowers! As the days get longer, subtle signs of spring begin to appear. Buds on tree and shrubs swell, soon to burst with new leaves. Mosses turn rich emerald green. Spring peepers herald in early spring on warm days and birds announce the new season.



Among the first signs that spring is around the corner are the fragrant blossoms of vernal witch hazel, appearing on balmy winter days in late January and February. The soft sweet scent greets you long before you see the small tree with its fringy yellow-orange flowers. Hazelnut, a wonderful nut-bearing shrub that grows throughout Missouri, is seen in bloom at this time as well. Despite its dependence on wind for pollination, it has showy, long yellow catkins (male flowers) and smaller purplish flowers (the female) on the same plant, adding interest to the spring scene.

As the calendar page turns to March, fragrant sumac makes an appearance. Before its leaves emerge, yellow flowers open and are clustered at the tips of the branches. This sumac grows in rocky open woods, and, in late summer, its red berries are favored by many birds and mammals. An intriguing flower to look for in early to mid-March is that of the pawpaw tree. Its maroon flowers are followed by unique yellow fruit that ripens in late summer.

Though the familiar white flowers of dogwood are still four to six weeks away, the orchestra of spring flowers is commencing a magnificent and colorful symphony. By the spring equinox (March 20th), the woodlands are filling with color as spring blooming plants race to bloom and set seed while the sunlight can still penetrate the tree canopy. Chartreuse flowers appear on spicebush, a small tree that grows in damp woodlands. A medicinal tea was once made of the spicy bark and the red fruit is a choice food for wildlife. Among the shrubs that flower at this time is gooseberry. This small, 3-foot shrub inhabits woodlands and has delicate yellow blooms that dangle from thorny stems. The fruit that ripens

later provides a delicious treat for birds. Its cousin, clove currant, is a larger shrub (5-6 foot) that is thornless and grows in more open, partial sun locations. It bursts into bloom with a blanket of brilliant yellow flowers. The flowers of this shrub have a spicy-sweet fragrance that floats on the air, attracting the attention of pollinators as well as gardeners.

Branches of redbuds become covered in the pink blooms, putting on a show that often coincides with the white flowers of wild plum and cherry. Now is also when the serviceberry begins to bloom with its white clusters of flowers. There are many native plants that are wind pollinated and therefore don't have showy flowers. Nonetheless, they join in the spring tradition with a heavy crop of yellow pollen. Included in this group are many of the large trees, such as the mighty oaks and hickories. The appearance of oak flowers is the harbinger of morel mushroom season.



And finally April arrives. It is time for the more prominent woodland wildflowers to bloom. Most early bloomers are between four and twenty-four inches tall, preferring to hug the woodland floor. Bluebells, Jacob's ladder, wild geranium and crested iris all vie for the attention of pollinators. White flowers of bloodroot and woodland sedum are more subtle than bright yellows of bellwort, *Senecio* and celandine poppy. Ferns begin to unfurl their fronds and many of the sedges sport yellow pollen-bearing spikes. Soon red columbines will bloom, just in time for the arrival of migrating hummingbirds. Fluttering about and also seeking nectar are the first butterflies of spring—mourning cloak and question mark butterflies, among others.

Every week presents a new crop of flowers, making it a most exciting time of year. Add a diversity of native spring color to your garden so you don't miss a beat.

Gateway Gardener – March 2011

Spring Blooming Native Perennials

Listed by location and in order of appearance

Carriage House Rain Garden and Patio:

Bluestar *Amsonia illustris*
Rose verbena *Glandularia canadensis*
Prairie alum root *Heuchera richardsonii*

Upper Woodland:

Violets
Yellow *Viola pennsylvatica*
White *Viola cororia f. priceana*
Blue *Viola*
Confederate violet *Viola*
Wild sweet William *Phlox divaricata*
Dutchman's breeches *Dicentra cucullaria*
Cleft or sand phlox *Phlox bifida*
Jacob's ladder *Polemonium*
Dwarf larkspur *Delphinium tricornis*
Columbine *Aquilegia canadensis*
Bellflower *Uvularia grandiflora*
Squaw weed *Senecio obovatus*
Red trillium *Trillium recurvata*
Virginia bluebells *Mertensia virginica*
Blue eyed Mary *Collinsia verna*
Wild geranium *Geranium maculatum*
Celandine poppy *Stylophorum diphyllum*
Woodland sedum *Sedum ternatum*
Fleabane/Robin's plantain *Erigeron philadelphicus*
Mayapple *Podophyllum peltatum*

Home Landscape Garden:

Pale violet *Viola striata*
Maidenhair fern *Adiantum palmatum*
False rue anemone *Isopyrum biternatum*
Barren strawberry *Waldsteinia fragaroides*
Jacob's Ladder *Polemonium reptans*
White tinged sedge *Carex albicans*
Sand phlox *phlox bifida*
Bluestar *Amsonia ciliata*
Wallflower *Erysimum capitatum*
Yellow honeysuckle *Lonicera flavida*
Tussock sedge *Carex stricta*
Yellow false indigo *Baptisia spaerocarpa*

Spring Pool:

Celandine poppy *Stylophorum diphyllum*
Wild sweet William *Phlox divaricata*
Squaw weed *Senecio aureus*
False rue anemone *Isopyrum biternatum*
Jacob's Ladder *Polemonium reptans*
Royal fern unfurling *Osmunda regalis*

Lower Woodland:

Virginia bluebells *Mertensia virginica*
Celandine poppy *Stylophorum diphyllum*
Jacob's Ladder *Polemonium reptans*
Bellflower *Uvularia grandiflora*
Squaw weed *Senecio aureus*
Ferns
Maidenhair fern *Adiantum palmatum*
Ostrich fern *Matteuccia*
Christmas fern *Polystichum arcostichoides*
Silvery spleenwort *Athyrium pycnocarpon*
Trilliums:
Red trillium *Trillium recurvata*
Toadshade *Trillium sessile*
Mayapple *Podophyllum peltatum*
Waterleaf *Hydrophyllum appendiculatum*
False rue anemone *Isopyrum biternatum*
Wild geranium *Geranium maculatum*
False Solomon's seal *Maianthemum racemosum* (formerly *Smilacina*)
Solomon's seal *Polygonatum biflorum* var. *commutatum*
Bloodroot *Sanguinaria canadensis*