



The Wilder Side of Oakland County

by Jonathan Schechter

We are now in the season of our spring ephemerals that add delicate floral beauty to our woodlands. It's a short-lived season and with warmth and rain it will end soon. This week is perfect to search for these often-overlooked delicate wildflower beauties that often appear along the edge of trails in our parks. I once heard a friend refer to them as "here today and gone tomorrow flowers". A more scientific definition might be "Spring ephemerals are woodland wildflowers that emerge from the forest floor, bloom, get pollinated by insects, set seed and vanish before the hardwood trees overhead leaf out." Of note that entire process lasts about six weeks and they appear first in the southern reaches of our county where they are now approaching peak beauty.

Most of my photos were captured April 13 along the trail of the Tenhave Woods Preserve in the City of Royal Oak and a few are from Independence Oaks County Park. By the time you read this the woodland floor of the Tenhave Preserve will be awash with spectacular color. Here are a few of the species now flowering in Oakland County.

a. BLOODROOT (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) I'll confess, this is my favorite spring ephemeral and I'm delighted a few thrive in my woodland. Bloodroot usually appearing in large clusters in healthy hardwood woodlands making it easy to spot. The scientific name of bloodroot refers to the fact that if the stem is broken a reddish sap oozes out. A literature search makes mention that Native Americans used bloodroot to treat human conditions including wound infections and sore throats. A single flower appears at the end of stem growing directly from the ground and each flower has eight to 10 petals with a vibrant cluster of yellow-tipped stamens.



b. SPRING BEAUTY (*Claytonia Virginica*) Spring beauty greets spring with early blooms of soft pink colors that seem to salute springs arrival. They are only about six inches tall but they often carpet yards of woodlands with subtle, yet eye-catching beauty. I never noticed until last week that their pollen is pink; something I discovered when I sprawled out on the forest floor to capture an image.



c. YELLOW TROUT LILY (*Erythronium americanum*) Yellow Trout Lily is unmistakable once you know what it looks like; and it has several common names, including Spotted Adders Tongue and Dogtooth Violet. They are just beginning to flower now and will often carpet large areas of the forest floor. It's one of the first wildflowers I came to know and appreciated when I encountered large clusters of them at the West Bloomfield Woods Nature Preserve. If you wait more than a month to see them; you won't. Their entire above-ground part of their life cycle only lasts about six weeks and is completed by the time that deciduous trees are fully leafed out.



d. FROUND-LOBED HEPATICA (*Hepatic americana*) These eye-catching flowers have gone through several science name changes, but the common name remains the same. They appear in most of our healthy woodlands and have an early pollinator value being one of our earliest Oakland County wildflowers to provide pollen in spring. I was excited to have a bumblebee land on its pollen gathering mission just as I knelt down to capture an image that confirms that fact.



e. MARSH MARIGOLD (*Caltha palustris*) Marsh marigolds thrive in wet sunny habitats across our county. They are flowering now at Independence Oaks County Park and you will find an abundance of them if you park in the first lot on the left when entering the park and follow the trail that goes over the boardwalk. They are abundant in the swampy area adjacent to the boardwalk. I would suggest taking a hiking break there and just admiring the scenery. You might even have a bonus of seeing a muskrat near the marsh marigolds, as I did, but I was too slow to capture a clear image.



Oakland County Parks staffer Jonathan Schechter is an avid "nature-embracing" hiker who follows phenology - the study of natural cycles of nature's way - to inspire his blogs.