
SUNNYSIDE THYMES

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“Helping Others Grow”

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Know Your Natives

By Colleen Craven-Becker, SMG Member

This year, the Education Committee and your fellow Master Gardeners will be providing monthly articles on our beautiful native plants. Each month we will feature a category of natives, such as native shrubs, native trees, native vines, etc. If you are interested in writing an article on native plants, contact Jane Jones at 502-494-3297 or janehjones@twc.com.

Virginia Bluebells

All Photos: Colleen Craven-Becker



Native Spring Ephemerals

It's March, perhaps early April and you just can't stand it any longer. Winter just won't let go and you are starved for something in bloom. If you are fortunate enough to live near a stand of woods, you have the favorable conditions for growing native spring ephemerals.

Spring ephemerals are perennial shade plants that actively grow through spring, flower briefly, and go dormant by midsummer when their leaves die back and the plant virtually disappears. Think daffodils and tulips, non-native plants many or most of us have in our gardens.

At that time of year, it's tough to be a growing plant – soil temperatures are low, the weather is unpredictable, and there are just a few pollinators foraging. As temperatures increase and trees and shrubs start leafing out, sunlight becomes less available in the late spring and summer, growth slows down, nutrients are stored underground, and the plants begin to die back.

Though they are short-lived, they are worthy of having in your garden. With the right location, you

can grow spring ephemerals in your yard. They need to be planted where they will receive dappled sunlight before trees leaf out and the rest of the understory fills in. Due to the fleeting period of growth and bloom, you may want to consider intermixing with other plant species to provide summer, fall and winter interest. Other native shade perennials and non-aggressive, non-native species such as hostas and ferns can be used. (Native shade perennials will be covered in the February or March issue of the Sunnyside Thymes.)

Growing conditions for specific plants listed below aren't covered here due to limited space. However, a good source for that information can be found at the Missouri Botanical Gardens Plant Finder database, missouribotanicalgarden.org

You can find information on where to purchase native plants at the Kentucky Native Plant Society, www.knps.org, and the Indiana Native Plant Society, indiananativeplants.org

Please, *do not* dig native plants. You could reduce the population making it difficult for it to survive and outcompete invasive species. Digging some plants that require specific soil fungi will not survive when transplanted in your garden. And leaving plants in place means someone else can enjoy them.

On the next page is a partial list of spring ephemerals that are native to our area that you may want to consider. Following that is a list of borderline ephemerals that last later into the season but are typically gone by mid-to-late summer.



Shooting Star



Trillium



Rue Anemone

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- **Jack in the Pulpit**, *Arisaema triphyllum*
 - **Shooting Star**, *Dodecatheon meadia*
 - **Trillium** – *Trillium sessile*, et. al.
 - **Trout Lily** - *Erythronium albidum* (white)
 - *Erythronium Americanum* (yellow)
 - **Virginia Bluebells**, *Mertensia virginica*
 - **Rue Anemone**, *Anemonella thalictroides*
 - **Dutchman's Breeches**, *Dicentra cucullaria*

Borderline Spring Ephemerals

Bloodroot – *Sanguinaria canadensis*

Twinleaf – *Jeffersonia diphylla*

Mayapple – *Podophyllum peltatum*

Bellwort – *Uvularia grandiflora*, *Uvularia perfoliate*

Sources:

- *Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant - Native-Spring-Ephemerals-ADA-Accessible-Version.pdf* (iiseagrant.org)
 - *University of Illinois Extension - Early blooming spring ephemerals flowers welcome warmer weather: University of Illinois Extension*
 - *Penn State Extension - Spring Ephemerals — Blair County Master Gardener Program — Penn State Extension* (psu.edu)
 - *Penn State Extension - Spring Ephemerals for Residential Gardens* (psu.edu)
 - *NC Cooperative Extension - Spring Ephemerals in Transylvania County | North Carolina Cooperative Extension* (ncsu.edu)
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