Plants and People

Humans have used Virginia's native plants for food, medicine, shelter, dyes, and much more for over 15,000 years. Much of what we know about the human uses of Virginia's native plants comes from the various Indigenous Peoples who live in Virginia and other states where these plants occur. Every Indigenous nation used plants in different ways, but most plants on the trail were and still are utilized by at least one group of Indigenous people. Below are a few plants you can find on the trail during spring with some of their known uses.

Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*)
As its name suggests, this plant has thick rhizomes which contain bright red sap. The Haudenosaunee and Meskwaki use the sap as a dye. Different treatments of the sap can produce red, orange, or yellow dyes.

Goldenseal (*Hydrastis canadensis*)
Cherokee and Haudenosaunee Native Americans drank infusions of this plant's gold-colored roots to treat a wide array of stomach and digestive problems. This plant remains a popular herbal remedy for gastrointestinal issues, and is at risk of overharvest in the wild.

Wild Ginger (*Asarum canadense*)
More than 10 Native American nations used the ginger-scented roots of this plant to treat fevers, headaches, and as a gastrointestinal aid. The Ojibwe and Meskwaki used the roots of this plant as a fragrant spice when cooking.

Jack in the Pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*)
The Pawnee nation ground up the corms of this plant and used it to treat headaches and sore muscles. The ground up plant was applied directly to the affected area.

Please appreciate the fascinating uses of our plants, but do not pick, cut, or dig any plants from the arboretum.

YOUR SUPPORT MATTERS

The Native Plant Trail is supported by the Foundation of the State Arboretum. Become a member of FOSA and help preserve Virginia's Native Plants. Other benefits include discounts at other gardens across the country. Visit our website **blandy.virginia.edu** and click on the **"Support"** tab for more information.

CONTACT US

400 Blandy Farm Lane | Boyce, VA | 22620
blandy.virginia.edu
540-837-1758

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A Guide to the

Native Plant Trail

The State Arboretum of Virginia
at the University of Virginia's
Blandy Experimental Farm

Exploring the *Nancy Larrick Crosby* Native Plant Trail

The Native plant trail is a celebration of Virginia's native plants. As you follow the trail, it will take you through three unique habitats - a woodland, meadow, and a wetland. Each habitat features plants that showcase the beauty and diversity of our state's flora.

The gardens and landscapes in this area are intentionally left naturalistic and 'wild' feeling. While this area is managed and new native plants are periodically added, we also try to leave space for natural processes to function. Important habitat features like dead stems, fallen leaves and decomposing logs are left year-round to support wildlife. This guide provides information about many native plants along the trail.

Spring in Bloom

Throughout Virginia, the emergence of forest wildflowers heralds the end of winter and the dawn of a new growing season.

Every spring, rivers of colorful flowers bloom across the the understory of our forests, soaking up the sun's rays before the leaves unfurl on the trees above them. Their transient blooms delight both pollinators and humans alike, and are perhaps Virginia's most striking natural phenomenon.

In our open spaces, warm season plants are often still dormant or just waking up as migratory birds begin to arrive for the breeding season.

Wild Geranium (L) and Blue Phlox (R)

Great White Trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*) - This small, showy spring ephemeral is very long lived and very slow-growing. It can take 5-7 years to flower for the first time after a seed is planted!

Pennsylvania Sedge (*Carex pensylvanica*) - This sedge is preferred food for several species of leafhoppers and grasshoppers, as well as some small herbivorous mammals like voles.

Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) - This is one of the first native wildflowers to emerge in spring, typically blooming in early to mid March. The flowers emerge before the unique, crown-shaped leaves.

Virginia Bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*) - This spring ephemeral is an important food source for native bumblebee queens. The queens emerge early in the spring, and need nectar and pollen from early flowering plants to establish their colonies.

Blue Phlox (*Phlox divaricata*) - The tube-like flowers of this plant are shaped so only its preferred pollinators - long-tongued bees - can reach the nectar. However, some large insects often 'steal' nectar by chewing through the back of the flower.

Violets (*Viola spp.*) - There are purple, yellow, and cream colored violets on the trail, each a different species. Over 30 species of fritillary butterflies are violet specialists whose caterpillars can only eat violets.

Golden Ragwort (*Packera aurea*) - This yellow aster blooms only in spring, but its leaves remain green all year. This makes it an excellent groundcover that shelters many species of invertebrates.

Toadshade (*Trillium sessile*) - Like other trilliums, the seeds of this plant are primarily dispersed by ants. A fatty appendage is attached to each seed, which ants eat before depositing the unwanted seed in the fertile soil by their colonies.

How plants survive in a forest

Spring forest wildflowers like this **Wild Columbine** (Aquilegia canadensis) require year-round cover of **fallen leaves** to keep their seeds and roots from drying out, and **shade** in the summer to keep the larger, more aggressive sun-loving plants from crowding them out.

Certain plants like this **Yellow Trout Lily** (Erythronium americanum) only grow during a few months in spring before canopy trees leaf out, going completely dormant and disappearing once the tree canopy closes. These are known as **spring ephemerals**. This growing strategy lets them make the most of the seasonally available sunlight on the shady forest floor.

Mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*) - Though the leaves are poisonous to mammals, the large fruits of this spring ephemeral are favorite foods of box turtles, skunks, opossums, and raccoons.

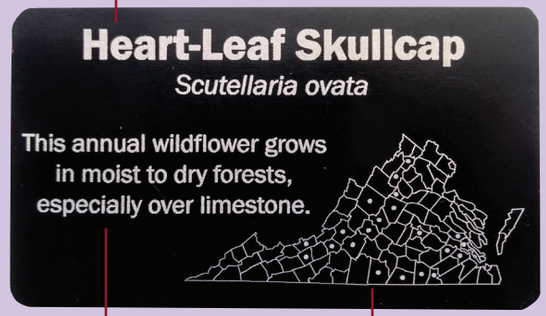
Jacob's Ladder (*Polemonium reptans*) - This plant is host to a specialist mining bee species that only collects pollen from Jacob's Ladder. It also supports two specialist moth species.

Wild Geranium (*Geranium maculatum*) - The distant miner bee is a specialist on pollen from this wildflower. Caterpillars of the geranium budworm moth and bridled arches moth feed on Geranium leaves. Many other species of pollinators also nectar on this plant.

What's in a sign?

Use the signs along the trail to locate plants, and refer to this guide for more information about many of them.

Common name and scientific name



Description of plant form, habitat and growing conditions.

Map of wild distribution in Virginia. Counties with dots indicate where this plant has been recorded growing in the wild.