

## Stan Hywet Blog: Wildflowers of the Dell

By Shelley Funai  
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As horticulturists — and after a long winter in Ohio — we tend to get cooped up a bit waiting to roll in the dirt, and see the first signs of plant life. The anticipation for our fall planted bulbs to sprout, trees to crack buds, and sap to start flowing is super exciting in the eyes of us plant nerds, and maybe for most other humans, too. I used to think fall was my favorite Ohio season because of the ideal temperatures and the changing of the leaves, but now I would have to say I am in love with spring! Even through the hardest of Ohio winters, native plants have adapted to survive and carry on with their life cycle, just waiting to bloom as the weather warms up and the snow subsides.

As early as mid-February in Ohio, you can start to see flowers. Yes, flowers!!! One of our naturalized bulbs called **Snowdrops (*Galanthus spp.*)** bloom with drooping, pearly white petals, and can be seen even with a layer of snow around them (hence the name).

Another favorite to search for on a crisp, late winter day is our **native witchhazels (*Hamamelis vernalis*)**. The specific epithet, *vernalis*, from Latin refers to “vernal” meaning spring, of course! The yellow and quite scraggly, thin-petaled flowers are like mini-octopuses, but on a drab wintry day they can really brighten the garden scape! Today, there are many cultivars with pretty large flowers in shades of burgundy, oranges, and reds.

Another extremely early flower is a bit stinky, but just as interesting: the mottled brown flowers of **skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*)** emerge from swampy soils long before any of the dinosaur-like, large leaves start growing. And yes, it sure does smell like a skunk, attracting flies as the sole pollinators. These three plants are the mark of when I start to explore the woods, and start squealing with joy —because the plants are coming to life! And, you know I am going to sniff a skunk cabbage flower just to confirm that it still stinks like the previous year, and the year before that. That’s normal, right?!?

Let’s fast forward a couple months to April. April is the beginning of what we would call our spring ephemeral wildflower season. “Ephemeral” describes a perennial plant that completes its full life cycle in one single season. That means it grows from a seed or root storage system (like a bulb or tuber), flowers, pollinates, and sets seed again, and dies back to the ground all within the season of spring (early April to mid-May, here). I will just highlight a couple of my favorite wildflowers because there are more than 50 species that can be found in the Dell at Stan Hywet.

One of the most easily recognized spring wildflowers in Ohio is the large flowered **Trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*)**. The Dell is full of this particular species, which usually blooms here right about the middle of April. TRI-llium has leaves and flower petals that grow in groups of three, and the large white flowers can be about 3 inches

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Stan Hywet\_The Dell Wildflowers-Bloodroot 2



Stan Hywet\_The Dell Wildflowers-Dutchmans breeches



Stan Hywet\_The Dell Wildflowers-Large Flowered Trilliums



Stan Hywet\_The Dell Wildflowers-Snow drop



Stan Hywet\_The Dell Wildflowers-Twin Leaf flower



Stan Hywet\_The Dell Wildflowers-Twinleaf leaf and capsule



Stan Hywet\_The Dell Wildflowers-witchhazel

across! They actually tend to stay in bloom for a week minimum, and up to a month, turning to a nice blush of pink as the flowers fade. There are also two other species of Trilliums in the Dell, but I think there are at least 7 that are native to Ohio. Looks like my collection must grow! Wow! (And this is how a plant nerd is born.)

Trilliums have a relatively long blooming flower – as opposed to one interesting, very short-blooming wildflower commonly called **twinleaf (*Jeffersonia diphylla*)**. As its name indicates, it has two leaflets per stem. *The genus was named after Thomas Jefferson and di-phylla refers to the two leaves.* Twinleaf can be in full bloom, and drop all its petals in as short as less than 24 hours; I make certain to check the Dell every day just to snap a photo of this lovely 8-petaled, white, star-shaped flower in full bloom. Lastly after flowering, an interesting capsule-like seed pod will appear. I will let it grow and mature until the hinged cap is just about to pop, then I can pick the seed pod stem and scatter the seeds throughout the garden like the Tinkerbell of Stan Hywet wildflowers.

A similar shaped flower — but with no relation to twinleaf — is the native wildflower, **Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*)**. The name *sanguinalis* stems from Latin meaning “blood” which refers to the red sap that comes from the rhizomes when cracked open or crushed. Indians commonly used this red juice as a dye. As this plant emerges from the ground, the leaves are wrapped around the stem like a fruit roll-up and the flower stalk pops out of the center. The flowers open for a few days before petals drop, followed by the unfurling of the leaves. Again, this is a fairly short blooming period; these ephemerals have to get to work if they are going to set seed before the end of spring!

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It's impossible to describe all the cool flowers you can find in our Ohio woodlands in one blog post. So why not join us and **learn about wildflowers in person** with us. Our "garden guru" walk on Wondrous Wildflowers is April 21, 2018. Details are below!

**Garden Gurus: Wondrous Wildflowers | Saturday 4/21 | 10:30am-12noon**

*SH members: \$10; non-members: \$13. Sign up at [stanhywet.org](http://stanhywet.org) or 330-315-3287*

Join Mike Kosmos, education coordinator (& former park naturalist) and me, your blogger, Shelley Funai in an interactive walk through the Dell to check out all the cool wildflowers. Learn and sniff some stinky wildflowers, see all the great wildflowers in bloom!

I encourage you to take advantage of our nice days in spring, and check often to discover some of these plants. You will be surprised at just how many plants get blooming so early in the year! It is the true awakening of the garden season! Hurray!

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