Flowers in the Lima Campus
Tecumseh Natural Area

This booklet describes small flowering plants likely to be found on the floor of the campus natural area during the months of March through May. Some of these plants remain in the forest throughout the entire growing season. Spring is one of the two most beautiful times to walk the natural trails. (The other time is in the fall when the leaves are turning color.) When the forest trees are fully leafed out the light intensity that reaches the forest floor is only about 10-20 percent of what it is before the leaves appear. Little herbaceous plants on the forest floor who have overwintered as seeds or roots have to make the best use of the limited early season time when it is above freezing and there is still plenty of light reaching the floor of the forest. They grow quickly, flower, set seed, and die back again after the trees leaf out and light becomes limiting. In April and May the forest floor can be almost completely covered with green blossoming plants. The particular species in flower change daily, some withering while others come into bloom. By middle June this fantastic floral display is gone and there are very few green plants left growing on the forest floor.

One of the easiest ways to identify these little plants is by their flowers, and some are in flower for only a very short time. You can use the flowering dates mentioned in this booklet as a very useful aid in species identification. Flowering dates are based on data collected at the Dawes Arboretum in Newark Ohio and on my own observations at the Lima Campus.

**Smilacina racemosa** *(False Solomon's Seal)*
April 29-June 7

This looks like the “true” Solomon’s Seal but its flowers and berries are clustered near the top rather than along its length as is the case with “true” Solomon’s Seal. Plant is 1-2 feet tall, leaves oval and alternating, with obvious parallel venation. Flowers are white and starlike in a dense cluster, berries are red in late summer.

**Polygonatum biflorum** *(Solomon’s Seal)*
May 10-July 4

Slender curving stems 1-2 feet tall with oval parallel veined leaves, bell shaped greenish white flowers hang in clusters among the leaves. The common name of this plant may be based on its presumed medicinal uses. Root extracts are supposed to speed healing (sealing) of wounds and bruises.
**Dentaria laciniata** *(Cutleaf Toothwort)*  
March 29-April 29

4-15 inches tall. Very common in the natural area and one of the earliest common blooms to be seen on the trails. White or pink flowers are clustered at the end of the slender stem. Three leaves in a whorl, each leaf divided into 5 very narrow parts. The name “toothwort” refers to the ivory colored underground stems with sharp tooth-like knobs on their surface. These underground stems are edible and have a peppery taste.

**Podophyllum peltatum** *(Mayapple)*  
May 10-May 22. These large 6-20 inch tall plants with two conspicuous umbrella-shaped leaves can be seen in groups well before they flower. You never see just one Mayapple. All the apparently individual plants in a group are connected by an extensive system of underground stems. Each group is in fact one single connected plant. Those upright stems that are not old enough to flower have only one leaf. Flowers pure white with large petals. The yellow ripe fruits are edible and are the basis of the plant’s name. Immature fruits and all other plant parts including the seeds are poisonous. Mild teas have been used in the past as a laxative.

**Dicentra cucullaria** *(Dutchman’s Breeches)*  
April 3-May 5

Very similar to and once thought to be the same species as squirrel corn. White flower petals are more spread apart than those of squirrel corn. The two big petals look like baggy trouser legs and the flower appears tipped with yellow.

**Symplocarpus foetidus** *(Skunk Cabbage)*  
March 1-April 7

This large leaf perennial herb is by far the earliest flowering plant on campus. It flowers so early that most observers miss the blossoms. The leaves appear after flowering and resemble cabbage leaves. Early summer leafy plants are 6-40 inches tall. In the late winter the heat generated by the floral sheath is so intense that it can melt a circle in the snow. The foul odor of these flowers attracts early season flies and gnats and is the basis of the name. The leafy plant has no odor, but most folks think it looks ugly. Found in low places in the natural area as well as meadows and in my yard.

**Sanguinaria Canadensis** *(Bloodroot)*  
March 27-April 18

Plants are 28 inches tall. The single flower has white petals and golden center of about 24 stamens. This flower in enfolded in a blue-green leaf. There is abundant red latex in the stem and root. This latex was used by Algonquian Indians to dye clothing, baskets, and their bodies. As body paint the latex also serves as an insect repellent.

**Dicentra Canadensis** *(Squirrel corn)*  
April 16-April 29

The two white flower petals form a heart shaped flower. This species has a somewhat bitter tasting yellow swelling at the base or the stem about the size and color of a corn seed. You can sometimes see this without digging up the plant, though usually it is beneath the soil.
Dentaria diphylla  
(Twoleaf Toothwort)  
March 29-April 30

Similar to the cutleaf, and in fact may be the same biological species. This plant has two leaves each divided into three parts which are wider than the segments of the cutleaf toothwort.

Cardamine bulbosa  
(Spring Cress)  
May 11-June 20

This is the last of the prominent natural area spring herbs to stay in bloom. It is very common along the trail edges. Its white flowers are clustered at the top of the slender stems that reach 20 inches tall in June. A cluster of oval leaves is near the base and alternate lance shaped leaves occur farther up. Young leaves of this genus are sharply flavored and useful in green salads. Mature leaves may be too bitter to eat. Grated roots mixed with vinegar make a good substitute for horseradish.

Hydrophyllum macrophyllum  
(Large-Leaved Waterleaf)  
May 14-June 10.

This is quite common in the natural area. It has the mottled light and dark green leaves characteristic of its genus, but differs from other species by having large divided leaves composed of 7-13 segments separated by deep indentations. The stems are covered with white hairs. The plant grows to about 1 foot tall.

Rancunculus abortivus  
(Kidney-Leaf Crowfoot)  
April 5-May 15

Rancunulus is the “Buttercup” genus. Like all buttercups, this species has flowers with 5 very shiny, very yellow petals. It is one of the earliest plants to flower and fairly common along the trails. Upper leaves are divided into 3 segments, looking like a crow’s foot. Basal leaves are more heart shaped and less obviously divided.

Taraxacum officinale  
(Dandelion)  
April 3-October 28

Found along the edge of wooded areas and in meadows, this is perhaps the most widely recognized flower in the state. Although it can flower all during the growing season, most flowers are to be found in May. The “flower” is actually a cluster of many tiny yellow flowers, each of which forms a fluffy white parachute-like one seeded fruit. These fruits can stay airborne almost indefinitely as long as the relative humidity is less than 70 percent. The species was introduced from Europe.
**Uvularia perfoliata**  
*(Mealy Bellwort or Merry Bells)*  
April 15-June 15

Stems 8-20 inches tall pass right through the base of each leaf blade, making this plant easy to identify even without flowers. The flowers point down and have three yellow sepals and two similar yellow petals.

**Trillium sessile**  
*(Sessile Trillium)*  
April 15-May 15

This plant is 4-8 inches tall with 3 mottled leaves and a single upward pointed flower in the center. The species is common along the trails.

**Asarum canadense**  
*(Wild Ginger)*  
April 13-June 21

This common natural area plant has velvety heart shaped leaves and is 4-7 inches tall. It isn't closely related to "real" ginger, which is a tropical spice. Wild Ginger can be used as a ginger substitute by boiling the underground stems in sugar water and using the resulting paste.

**Arisaema dracontium**  
*(Green Dragon)*  
April 2-June 4

This plant has a compound leaf divided into many (5-17) leaflets and a separate long slender stalk for the flowers. The plant grows to 1-3 feet in length. This genus is related to the house plant phylodendron.

**Parthenocissus quinguefolia**  
*(Virginia Creeper)*  
June 15-August 10

This viney plant superficially resembles poison ivy and in the winter it is almost impossible to distinguish between vines of the two species on tree trunks. Leaves of the two species are easily distinguished, however. Virginia creeper leaves are divided into 5 stalked leaflets. The dark blue grape-like fruits are poisonous to humans but not to most other forms of wildlife. The plant is often seen growing as a vine on the tree trunks, touching the plant will not cause a poison ivy-like rash.

**Arisaema triphyllum**  
*(Jack In The Pulpit)*  
April 23-June 6

This plant is very easy to remember. Its little flowers are on the surface on a single fleshy spike, or spadix that is surrounded by a leafy green sheath, which overtops the spadix. This structure resembles the roofed pulpit sometimes found in European churches and cathedrals. On a separate stalk are three leaves.

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**Erythronium americanum**  
(Fawn Lily, or Trout Lily, or Adder’s Tongue)  
April 17-April 30

These small herbs have mottled green leathery leaves, the basis of one of its common names and very characteristic of the species. In April and early May they seem to cover large parts of the natural area floor. By June they are almost all gone. The flowers are pointing down with upsweppt yellow (or rarely white) petals.

**Phlox divaricata**  
(Blue Phlox)  
April 15-May 22

Light blue flowers with five non overlapping petals that are often notched. Individual plants are 6-20 inches tall and form colorful patches in the natural area. Leaves are opposite and lance shaped.

**Amemonella thalictroides**  
(Rue Anemone)  
April 3-May 26

A small plant (2-6 inches tall) with delicate small three-lobed leaves on a wiry black stem. Two or three flowers each with 5-10 white or light pink sepals (there are no petals).

**Hepatica acutiloba**  
(Sharp Lobed Hepatica)  
March 26-April 7

The three parted leathery leaves of this species grow very close to the ground. The brown-green color and shape somewhat resemble the lobes of a liver. Flowers open before leaves appear and are white or pink, often growing up from a layer or last year’s dead leaves.

**Geranium maculatum**  
(Wild Geranium or Crane’s Bill)  
May 9-May 22

This 1-3 foot tall upright plant has hairy five-parted, deeply lobed leaves. The flowers are purple-red and very pretty with five big petals. The name Crane’s Bill comes from its beak like seed pods which disperse their seeds violently when they dry out. The well known garden geranium is a separate but closely related genus.

**Glechoma hederacea**  
(Ground Ivy)  
April 3-June 30

This ground hugging plant is found in campus meadows and along the natural area trails its scalloped heart shaped oppositely arranged leaves emit a minty odor. Tiny blue flowers appear in clusters at leaf bases. The creeping stems are square.
**Toxicodendron radicans**  
*(Poison Ivy)*  
June 5-July 10

“Leaves of three, let it be.” Goes the old saying. Leaflets are grouped in three’s usually with a notch on one side of each leaflet. Both leaf color and shape are variable. Color can be glossy deep green in the spring and then lighter green. In the fall leaves can be bright red. This plant is very common in the natural area and touching any part can cause a rash. The plant often occurs as a vine 10’s or 100’s of feet long growing on tree trunks or as a small shrub on the forest floor. Leaves resemble those of the Box Elder (*Acer Negundo*) tree. White clustered berries can remain on the plant all winter.

**Fragaria virginiana**  
*(Wild Strawberry)*  
April 28-June 17

Three leaflets in each compound leaf and pretty white flowers with 5 sepals and 5 petals. This plant is the same thing as the cultivated strawberry and makes delicious fruit. It is found on campus in meadows and along the edge of wooded areas.

**Erigenia bulbosa**  
*(Harbinger of Spring)*  
March 17-April 21

As you walk the trails this is the first blooming herb you are likely to see in the early spring. It is a very small upright plant with 24 highly dissected leaves. Many tiny white flowers occur near the top of the plant. These flowers first appear before the leaves unfurl.

**Claytonia virginica**  
*(Spring Beauty)*  
March 26-May 22

This small delicate plant sometimes grows in great clusters in the natural area. It can be recognized by its two leaves at the base of the stem and its beautiful white or light pink flowers with 5 petals. Usually there are pink veins that are darker than the rest of the petal. This is one of the prettiest flowers to be seen in the spring along the trails.

**Viola sororia**  
*(Common Blue Violet)*  
April 10-May 30

Very pretty, easy to see flowers with five petals that are purple or white with purple veins. One petal of the five has obvious veins and perhaps acts as a landing platform guiding bees to the nectar within. Leaves are heart shaped, toothed, and colored light green. They are at the very base of the plant, which is 3-12 inches tall.