

Native Spring Ephemerals: A Guide to Illinois Native Ephemerals for the Home Landscape

Spring ephemerals are perennial plants that actively grow through spring, flower briefly, and go dormant by mid-summer when their leaves die back and the plant virtually disappears. Common non-native ephemerals include tulips and daffodils. This brochure is a guide to Illinois native spring ephemerals, the conditions in which they grow best, and how home gardeners can use them in their own landscapes.

By using native plants in your landscape, you help support healthy ecosystems on land and water. Many are food sources for pollinators such as bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds. Native plants promote clean water and conservation by reducing the need for garden inputs. They rarely require fertilizer and pesticides when planted in conditions similar to their natural ecosystems. Further, native plants have extensive root systems that, once established, help them thrive without watering. For more information, visit the University of Illinois Extension Horticulture website:

<https://extension.illinois.edu/global/horticulture>.

Illinois Native Spring Ephemerals

- Rue Anemone (Latin name *Anemonella thalictroides*)
 - Part sun to shade.
 - Mesic soil.
 - White flowers in early spring.
 - Attracts bees.
 - Grows 4 to 8 inches tall.
- Jack-in-the-Pulpit (Latin name *Arisaema triphyllum*)
 - Part sun to shade.
 - Moist to mesic soil.
 - Green flowers in mid- to late-spring.
 - Attracts birds.
 - Grows 12 to 24 inches tall.
- Wild Hyacinth (Latin name *Camassia scilloides*)
 - Sun to part shade.
 - Moist to mesic soil.
 - White flowers in mid- to late-spring.
 - Attracts bees and butterflies.
 - Grows 12 to 24 inches tall.
- Virginia Spring Beauty (Latin name *Claytonia virginica*)
 - Part sun.
 - Mesic soil.
 - White flowers in early- to mid-spring.
 - Attracts bees and butterflies.
 - Grows 3 to 6 inches tall.
- Cutleaf Toothwort (Latin name *Dentaria laciniata*)
 - Part sun to shade.
 - Mesic soil.
 - White flowers in early- to mid-spring.
 - Attracts bees and butterflies.
 - Grows 3 to 10 inches tall.

- Dutchman's Breeches (Latin name *Arisaema triphyllum*)
 - Part sun to shade.
 - Mesic soil.
 - White flowers in early- to mid-spring.
 - Attracts bees and butterflies.
 - Grows 4 to 8 inches tall.
- Shooting Star (Latin name *Dodecatheon meadia*)
 - Sun to part shade.
 - Mesic soil.
 - White flowers in mid- to late-spring.
 - Attracts bees.
 - Grows 12 to 18 inches tall.
- Harbinger-of-Spring (Latin name *Erigenia bulbosa*)
 - Part sun to shade.
 - Moist soil.
 - White flowers in early spring.
 - Attracts bees.
 - Grows 3 to 10 inches tall.
- White Trout Lily (Latin name *Erythronium albidum*)
 - Part sun.
 - Moist soil.
 - White flowers in mid-spring.
 - Attracts bees and butterflies.
 - Grows 4 to 6 inches tall.
- Yellow Trout Lily (Latin name *Erythronium americanum*)
 - Part sun to shade.
 - Mesic soil.
 - Yellow flowers in mid-spring.
 - Attracts bees.
 - Grows 3 to 6 inches tall.
- Virginia Bluebells (Latin name *Mertensia virginica*)
 - Part sun to shade.
 - Moist soil.
 - Blue flowers in mid- to late-spring.
 - Attracts bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds.
 - Grows 12 to 30 inches tall.
- Mayapple (Latin name *Podophyllum peltatum*)
 - Part sun to shade
 - Mesic soil.
 - White flowers in mid- to late-spring.
 - Attracts bees.
 - Grows 12 to 18 inches tall.
- Bloodroot (Latin name *Sanguinaria canadensis*)
 - Part sun to shade
 - Mesic soil.
 - White flowers in early- to mid-spring.
 - Attracts bees.
 - Grows 3 to 12 inches tall.

- Celandine Poppy (Latin name *Stylophorum diphyllum*)
 - Part sun to shade
 - Moist to mesic soil.
 - Yellow flowers in early- to mid-spring.
 - Grows 12 to 18 inches tall.
- Large-Flowered Trillium (Latin name *Trillium grandiflorum*)
 - Part sun to shade
 - Moist soil.
 - White flowers in mid- to late-spring.
 - Attracts bees.
 - Grows 12 to 18 inches tall.
- Snow Trillium (Latin name *Trillium nivale*)
 - Part sun to shade
 - Dry soil.
 - White flowers in early- to mid-spring.
 - Attracts bees and birds.
 - Grows 2 to 6 inches tall.
- Prairie Trillium (Latin name *Trillium recurvatum*)
 - Part sun to shade
 - Mesic soil.
 - Red flowers in mid- to late-spring.
 - Grows 6 to 15 inches tall.
- Large-Flowered Bellwort (Latin name *Uvularia grandiflora*)
 - Part sun to shade
 - Moist soil.
 - Yellow flowers in mid-spring.
 - Attracts bees.
 - Grows 12 to 24 inches tall.

Companion Plantings

Due to the fleeting period of interest spring ephemerals provide, they need to be intermixed with other plant species in the garden to provide summer, fall and winter interest. Below are selections of Illinois native plants to use for specific site conditions. Nonaggressive, non-native species such as hostas can be used, as well. For more information, view the brochure series.

- Wet Woodland site conditions are suited for the following ephemerals: Jack-in-the-Pulpit, Harbinger-of-Spring, White Trout Lily, Virginia Bluebells, Celandine Poppy, Large-Flowered Trillium, and Large-Flowered Bellwort. Companion plants for these species include:
 - Wild Ginger (Latin name *Asarum canadense*)
 - Wild Geranium (Latin name *Geranium maculatum*)
 - Great Blue Lobelia (Latin name *Lobelia siphilitica*)
 - Rosy Sedge (Latin name *Carex rosea*)
 - Cinnamon Fern (Latin name *Osumunda cinnamomea*)

- Mesic Woodland site conditions are suited for the following ephemerals: Rue Anemone, Jack-in-the-Pulpit, Virginia Spring Beauty, Cutleaf Toothwort, Dutchman’s Breeches, Harbinger-of-Spring, White Trout Lily, Yellow Trout Lily, Virginia Bluebells, Mayapple, Bloodroot, Celandine Poppy, and Prairie Trillium. Companion plants for these species include:
 - Jacob’s Ladder (Latin name *Polemonium reptans*)
 - Goatsbeard (Latin name *Aruncus dioicus*)
 - Smooth Blue Aster (Latin name *Symphyotrichum laeve*)
 - Pennsylvania Sedge (Latin name *Carex pensylvanica*)
 - Christmas Fern (Latin name *Polystichum acrostichoides*)
- Dry Woodland site conditions are suited for the following ephemerals: Rue Anemone, Virginia Spring Beauty, Snow Trillium, and Prairie Trillium. Companion plants for these species include:
 - Woodland Phlox (Latin name *Phlox divaricata*)
 - False Solomon’s Seal (Latin name *Maianthemum racemosum*)
 - Woodland Sunflower (Latin name *Helianthus divaricatus*)
 - Pennsylvania Sedge (Latin name *Carex pensylvanica*)
 - Christmas Fern (Latin name *Polystichum acrostichoides*)
- Mesic Prairie site conditions are suited for the following ephemerals: Wild Hyacinth and Shooting Star. Companion plants for these species include:
 - Pale Purple Coneflower (Latin name *Echinacea pallida*)
 - Butterflyweed (Latin name *Asclepias tuberosa*)
 - Nodding Onion (Latin name *Allium cernuum*)
 - Black Eyed Susan (Latin name *Rudbeckia fulgida*)
 - Prairie Dropseed (Latin name *Sporobolus heterolepis*)

SOURCES:

Illinois Wildflowers: www.illinoiswildflowers.info and gardener experience.

WHERE TO FIND PLANTS AND MORE INFORMATION

Several of the species highlighted in this brochure can be seen at the Red Oak Rain Garden: RedOakRainGarden.org. The Illinois Native Plant Society webpage lists sources of native plants. Spring ephemerals are also found at online nurseries that will ship live or bare root plants to your home. For more information about plants, see the University of Illinois Extension Horticulture website.

PUT YOUR NATIVE PLANT GARDEN ON THE MAP

You can be part of a network of native plantings by registering your Illinois native plant garden or rain garden. This helps build community and encourage native plant use. Add your native plant garden to the map: go.illinois.edu/GardenMap.

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