

Sovereign Oaks Spring Wildflowers



Sovereign Oaks Spring Wildflowers



Anemone, Wood & Rue – A true spring ephemeral, in a few weeks before the trees leaf out, it sprouts, flowers, sets seed, and stores enough energy to last until the following spring. Studies show it now blooms 15 days earlier than in the 1970's as a result of climate change. It closes at night to protect the reproductive parts while pollinators aren't active. The Wood Anemone has angular leaves; look for it in April on the Bull Creek trail just over the footbridge. The Rue Anemone has rounded leaves and can be found along the connector between Musterfield Creek and Towering Oaks Way.



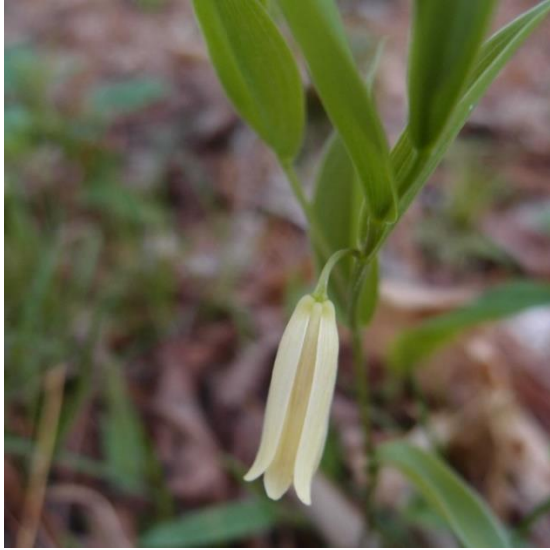
Anise Root – Part of the Sweet Cicely family. Its root and sometimes leaves smell of anise (like black licorice). The root is edible and in folk medicine was soaked in brandy and eaten as an expectorant. Look for it in April/May along the Bull Creek West trail near the gate.



Beardtongue, Gray – This is a native relative of the Penstemons found in many of our gardens. The common name refers to a single hairy stamen in the "mouth" of the flower. A large colony of these can be seen flowering in May where Musterfield Creek trail (or driveway at this point) meets Old Farm School Road.



Bedstraw (aka cleavers) – The bedstraw name comes from its use by settlers for stuffing mattresses, as its scent repels fleas. The cleavers name comes from its habit of clinging to passing animals as part of a strategy for dispersing seed away from the parent plant. Commonly found in our yards and in disturbed area.



Bellwort, Mountain – A delicate nodding wildflower that serves as an important nectar source for queen bumblebees that appear in early spring before other bumblebees. The leaves emerge coiled around the stem tip and unfold like an umbrella. A few of these can be found in April along the Musterfield Creek trail where it transitions from meadow to woods.



Bloodroot – Name from the red/orange juice in roots, used by Native Americans for face paint and dyes. It is now used as an anti-plaque agent and additive to cattle feed. Sends up a single leaf and a flower stalk, but as this is not a true spring ephemeral the leaf keeps growing after the canopy leaves out. Can be found in April along both Bull Creek and Musterfield Creek, with another notable patch near the Bamboo Grove treehouse.



Blue-eyed Grass – Despite the name and grass-like leaves, this plant is actually related to irises. It can be found blooming in April & May in landscapes around the community and along the Bull Creek and Musterfield Creek trails.



Bluets, Summer – distinguished by its four-petaled flowers. The common name comes from close relatives that are blue in color, but these are white and pink. Often called by their latin name *Houstonia*, named for William Houston, who collected plants in Mexico and Central America. Can be found throughout the community in May.



Bowman's Root – The five narrow petals of this flower project somewhat irregularly. The Cherokee used this plant as a laxative and to induce vomiting. It is closely related to American Ipecac, which is still used for that purpose. Can be found in May along the upper part of the Rock Hop Connector trail.



Chickweed, Star – The native version of the cursed Common Chickweed lawn weed. Flower is functionally male for the first 2-3 days, then changes to female, using timing to prevent self-pollination. Used herbally to fight obesity; an extract has been shown to produce competition for fat absorption in the digestive tract. Can be found along both Bull and Musterfield Creeks in April.



Cinquefoil, Common – A low-growing plant found in meadows in lawns throughout the community. The leaves resemble strawberry leaves but are found in groups of five (cinquefoil is French for “five leaves”). Contains a lot of tannins making it astringent. Was used by settlers in mouthwash and for sore throats.



Cinquefoil, Rough-fruited – This relative of the Common Cinquefoil has quite different foliage, resembling somewhat that of the marijuana plant. Not at all tasty in brownies. Can be found in the meadow portion of the Musterfield Creek trail between the Community Greenhouse and the woods.



Clover, Red, White & Low Hop – Native to Europe but naturalized throughout North America. Each head is composed of dozens of individual flowers, which are actually quite beautiful under magnification. Clover actually improves the soil by fixing nitrogen from the air in its roots. Common throughout meadow areas in the community.



Cranesbill, Small-flowered – A small-flowered member of the geranium family. The cranesbill name comes from the shape of the seed capsule, which springs open to cast the seeds away from the parent. Roots are high in tannins and were used by early settlers to tan leather. Can be found in May throughout the community, the lower part of the Cemetery trail is a good place to look.



Daisy, Oxeye – A non-native species that can become invasive, especially in pastures since cattle won't eat it. Unopened flower buds can be used like capers in cooking. Research shows that Oxeye daisies will concentrate PCBs from soils, so it is used to clean up contaminated land. Common throughout meadow areas in the community.



Dewberry – Closely related to the blackberry with similar edible fruits, but with fewer seeds, it grows as trailing vines rather than upright. Can be found along the Bull Creek West trail blooming in April & May.



Doghobble – A low shrub growing in dense thickets with clusters of small bell shaped flowers. Its name reportedly comes from bear hunters; while a 400 lb. bear could go right through the thicket, the hunting dogs could not. Common along the Bull Creek East trail; blooms in May.



Geranium, Wild – Seed pods catapult up to 30' from the parent plant. Once on the ground, the tail of the seed curls when dry, straighten when wet and thereby can work their way across the soil until it finds a crack or hole where it can germinate. Very common along the upper part of Musterfield Creek in April.



Fleabane, Common & Daisy – Native species which can be invasive. On the Common Fleabane, the leaves clasp the stem. It has an extended blooming period from May to October. The name comes from settlers' practice of burning or drying the plant to repel fleas, although there is no evidence it is effective. Folklore has it that if planted by a pregnant women, if the flowers are tinged with pink - girl, blue - boy.



Golden Alexanders – A member of the Wild Carrot/Parsnip family, its leaves smell like parsley when crushed. Early settlers thought it a cure for syphilis. Common along Bull Creek in May.



Jack in the Pulpit – Name stems from the unique appearance of the flower. The plant changes gender from year to year depending on the resources stored in the roots. After a good year it will have the strength to become female and produce the flower and fruits. Leaves are similar to a trillium but are not spaced at equal angles. Animals will not eat it since it contains calcium oxalate crystals that cause burning and swelling. Produces bright red fruits in fall. Look for the flowers along Bull Creek in late May.



Mandarin, Yellow – A member of the lily family with small yellow flowers hidden under the leaves at the end of the stems. Native to the Appalachians. Produces an orange/red fruit loved by turkeys, quail, and wood thrushes. Can be found along the upper part of Musterfield Creek in April.



Laurel, Mountain – A small tree with showy bowl-shaped flowers. Look inside the flowers, where you can see that the stamens are held under pressure against the sides. When visited by a pollinator they spring loose and deposit pollen onto the insect which will carry it to other plants. If no insects visit it will eventually spring loose and self-pollinate as Plan B. Common in the northern portions of Sovereign Oaks with blooms in May/June.



Mayapple - Appears in large colonies on the forest floor; often all part of a single plant connected by underground runners. Males have a single leaf, females have two leaves with a flower and fruit forming where the stems meet. Fruit is an important food for box turtles. The shoots are apparent in early spring with flowers emerging in May. Visible along both Bull Creek and Musterfield Creek.



Orchid, Cranefly – A single leaf emerges in the fall and stays through winter into spring. For this species the leaf is distinguished by a green upper surface and a deep purple underside. The leaf disappears in late spring and then the plant sends up a flower spike with small flowers that are often difficult to distinguish from the leaf litter. Look for these along the Bull Creek East trail next to the creek, with leaves apparent in the early spring and flowers emerging in May/June.



Orchid, Puttyroot – As with the Cranefly Orchid, a single leaf emerges in the fall and stays through winter into spring. The Puttyroot Orchid leaf has distinctive white and green corrugations from end to end. After the leaf dies back it sends up a flower spike in May. Look for these along the steep portion of the Musterfield Creek trail.



Plantain, Robin's – Blooms in early spring unlike most members of the aster family which typically bloom in summer and fall. A bloom contains hundreds of yellow disc flowers in the center, and many white or pinkish ray flowers around the center. Each produces nectar; pollinators love this plant since they can feed for quite some time in one place. Commonly found throughout the community in April.



Pussytoes, Field – Named for its unusual flower resembling a cat's foot. The flowers devolve into tufts of white hair that are spread by wind. Does well in dry, sunny locations. Can be found in flower in May along the driveway at the bottom of the Musterfield Creek trail.



Ragwort, Golden – Showy yellow flowers emerge from deep purple buds. These dominate the Sovereign Oaks wildflower scene in April, especially notable in the wetlands above the Bamboo Grove.



Sage, Lyre-leaved – Cousin to the sage we use as an herb in cooking. Name comes from the shape of the basal leaves which are thought to resemble the musical instrument. Used by settlers to treat warts. Can be found throughout the community in May.



Rose, Carolina – Native cousin to the exotic and invasive multiflora rose that infests our community. The Carolina rose has pink flowers and has fewer thorns on the stem. Uses its scent to attract pollinators. The native variety can be found near the dam ruin with flowers in May.



Solomon's Seal & Solomon's Plume – These plants are notable for their long arching stems. Only as they start to flower can one tell them apart; the Solomon's Plume (pictured above) flowers at the end of the stalk, while the Solomon's Seal develops small bell-shaped flowers under the leaves. The name come from the fact that in winter the dying stems leave a circular scar on the root thought to resemble King Solomon's seal.



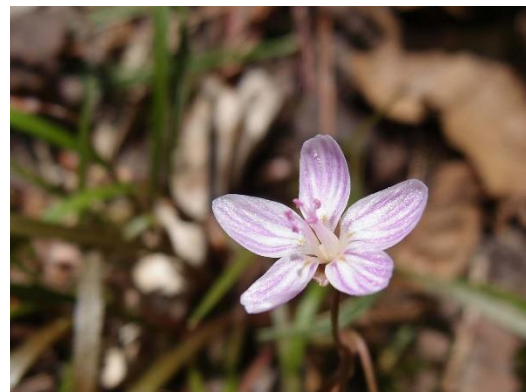
Sorrel, Violet Wood Sorrel – Larger and prettier cousin to the yellow wood sorrel that invades our lawns and gardens, the violet variant is rarer and the species is listed as threatened in a number of northeast states. Sorrels are distinguished by their shamrock shaped leaves. Also called sourgrass, as they are edible and have a pleasant sour taste when chewed. Look for it along the Bull Creek East trail in May.



Spiderwort – A tall wildflower with grass-like stalks that gets its name because a root poultice was historically used to treat spider bites. Spiderwort can be used to detect air pollution as the anthers will change color when exposed to pollutants. Can be found along the upper part of Musterfield Creek.



Speedwell, Persian – A European native that is one of the first wildflowers to appear in spring, often even in February. Reliably found along the Musterfield Creek trail opposite the Community Greenhouse.



Spring Beauty – Another spring ephemeral. Pink lines on the flower petals guide pollinators to the nectar. Seeds have a fatty coating to attract ants, which disperse the seeds away from the parent plant. Look for these in April along Bull Creek.



Squawroot (aka Bear Corn) – An early emerging plant that gets its nickname for being a food for bears in early spring before other plants have leafed out. It has no green color because it does not photosynthesize; it is a parasite on the roots of oak trees that takes 5 years to emerge from the ground. Easiest to find along the Bull Creek East trail in April/May.



Stonecrop, Woodland – Often called by its Latin name “Sedum” which comes from the verb “to sit” since it is usually found growing close to the ground. The “stonecrop” name stems from its tendency to grow on rock faces. Can be found along the Bull Creek East trail growing at the base of some trees.



Strawberry, Indian – Native to Asia, it was introduced here as a medicinal plant. The fruit is edible but tasteless. Settlers used it in a poultice to treat abscesses, burns, insect stings, and eczema. The leaf tea was used to treat laryngitis.



Strawberry, Wild – Native strawberry with smaller but sweeter fruits than the cultivated varieties. An important food source for wildlife. Look for these in open areas like the lower part of the Cemetery trail.



Sweet Shrub – A large shrub with spicy smelling brownish/purple flowers. The scent attracts beetles, which crawl inside to get nectar and are trapped for a few days by the inward-curving petals. That prevents the beetle from pollinating the same flower, since it is no longer receptive by the time the insect is released. There are some specimens along the Bull Creek East trail with flowers in May.



Trillium, Nodding – Named because it does everything in threes, leaves, sepals, and petals. Takes about seven years to form a flower after a seed germinates. Seeds are dispersed by ants. Ours are the nodding variety, where the flower is suspended below the leaves. Can be found along both Bull Creek and Musterfield Creek in April/May.



Toothwort, Cut-leaved and Broadleaf –

Another true spring ephemeral. Name stems from its use as a herbal remedy for toothaches. We saw cut-leaved toothwort in flower, and its cousin the broadleaf toothwort (aka crinkleroot) notable for its interesting foliage. The Cut-leaved Toothwort dominates the upper part of Musterfield Creek in April, while the Broadleaf variety is more common along Bull Creek.



Trout Lily, Dimpled – An early spring ephemeral. Dimpled leaf markings were thought to resemble markings on the native brook trout, hence the name. Very common along Musterfield Creek with flowers in March/April, some can also be found along Bull Creek.



Vetch, Narrow-leaved – One of 140 species of vetch, a member of the pea family. One type of vetch was one of man's earliest cultivated crops, grown 9,500 years ago in the Middle East. Host plant for many species of moths and butterflies. Common in open areas throughout the community with flowers in April through June.



Venus' Looking Glass – Gets its name from a European relative with large seeds with a smooth mirror-like surface. Grows in colonies with upright stems piercing small round leaves arranged around the stem. Can be found along the lower part of the Cemetery trail.



Violets, Common Blue and Sweet White – An early sign of spring. Flowers and leaves are edible. Caterpillars of the fritillary butterfly feed on the leaves at night. A beautiful patch of Common Blue Violets can be found along upper Musterfield Creek in March & April. The Sweet White Violets can be found along the upper part of the Rock Hop trail and at the small bridge marking the boundary between Sovereign Oaks and Warren Wilson College.



Yellowroot – Named for its bright yellow roots that were used in dye-making. We saw it with sprays of tiny purplish flowers. Always grows near streams; the seeds are dispersed by floating downstream. The strong root network and flexible stems allow it to withstand flood waters. Look for them on the banks of Bull Creek just upstream from where our trail meets the Warren Wilson trail system.

References

- Newcomb's Wildflower Guide, by Lawrence Newcomb is a good reference for identifying wildflowers
- Wildflower & Plant Communities of the Southern Appalachians and Piedmont, by Timothy P. Spira is an excellent reference for ecological context

Prepared by Randy Richardson
Photos by Randy Richardson