

Spring Growth – a riotous moment in the life of spring ephemerals

By Ed Max

Think spring (or late winter) -- the thaw ensues . . . life appears, the robins are loud, and the ground trembles. Well, that may be an exaggeration, but I sense there is movement afoot. Particularly in a wooded or shaded Silva -- teeming with native flora, bulbs, and witch hazel!

What first appear (as seen below) are the aptly named *Snowdrops*. Though not native, it is a well behaved species -- meaning that it does not get out of hand and become a nuisance. As of late January 2016, it's already an inch or two high. What's not to love!



What follows is a blast of golden yellow in the Winter Aconite, another bulb that is installed in fall, and once established, promises to colonize. Though not considered an invasive, it is not native, but I love it. As the snow retreats, the one-inch-high aconite unfurls, revealing a sulfur yellow bloom.

A reason to love them is to see the honeybees and other species of pollinator roughing them up for their first meal since late fall. That's a good thing! With large swaths creating yellow carpets in the woodland, it's incredible, and just as the snows recede.



Winter Aconite

As the early bulblets fade, on comes the main event -- GROWTH that appears magically, suddenly, and with an important mission: to bloom, pollinate, and set seed: all before the overhead canopy unfurls!

The excitement in seeing them all is hard to contain.

Early April natives such as Hepatica, Bloodroot, Dutchman's Britches, Red Trillium, and Bellwort spring forth, and quickly!



Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria can.*), purported to have many medicinal uses, as well as containing a bright red juice within the tuber-like root, once used as a dye.



Native Dutchman's Britches (of the *Dicentra* family, which includes the Bleeding Heart) can be found in high quality woodlands (though it's becoming much less common), and can also be purchased from reputable natives retailers for your woodland or shade gardens.

A favorite of mine and another less-common species is the wonderful Bellwort.



Bellwort (*Uvularia*) close-up. There is something about this clump-forming native that I find quite interesting, with its twisting petal structure, smaller stature (to 12-15 inches), and fleeting beauty. Again, this native ephemeral is not a common species of our woodlands. It is seen rarely except in a few areas, such as the canyons at Starved Rock. Only buy on-line from reputable sources. Site in shaded rich soils, and you won't regret it!

As for that trembling soil beneath my feet? That would be emanating from the large colonies of Mayapple. What a cool plant! The growth appearing initially resembles that little umbrella you used to get smacked into your Mai-Tai back in the day.



Mayapple (*Podophyllum*) does have an edible apple!

Bloom of a Mayapple

We are now up to mid-April. We can pick up on late April through May another time.

Spring is on the way. Buds are already swelling. Watch for Sierra Club wildflower hikes: there are many. Or get out and plant a few wildflowers in your wooded or shaded areas, and begin creating your own bit of nature. The pollinators will appreciate it!

Here are a few more to consider.



Skunk cabbage (for those wet areas)



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Virginia Bluebells (Another colonizer, thriving in wetter areas)





The trilliums

And lastly the Spring Beauty



and



Trout Lilly

Enjoy!

Ed is an active Sierran, outings leader, and certified naturalist from West Chicago, Illinois.