



Illinois Native Plant Society -
Southern Chapter

Guide to Spring Wildflower Hikes in Southern Illinois

All photos and text by Chris Evans and Chris Benda

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Cover photo: Yellow trout lily along the Rocky Bluff Trail, Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge

Back photo: Woodland phlox at base of bluffs along the Snake Road Trail, Shawnee National Forest

Introduction

Springtime offers nature lovers an opportunity to view beautiful displays of wildflowers in southern Illinois. These gems can literally carpet forest floors in color, bursting forth as the spring sun warms the soil. These species take advantage of that sunlight in early spring, before the tree leaves have emerged and cast the area into heavy shade. This trick of timing allows these diminutive plants that need a lot of sun to survive, reproduce and even thrive alongside the towering oaks, hickories and maples of our hardwood forests. Rich, undisturbed woods are the best sites for seeing large, breathtaking displays of wildflowers. Fortunately, many of these sites are now being protected by state or federal agencies and have been designated as state nature preserves or research natural areas. To help protect sensitive species and preserve the sites for the enjoyment of others, please remain on marked trails.

Through a grant from the Illinois Wildlife Preservation Fund, the Southern Chapter of the Illinois Native Plant Society has produced this guide to spring wildflower hikes in southern Illinois. This guide was designed to highlight the best wildflower viewing opportunities and the seven sites described are all on public lands, have well-marked trails and are relatively easily accessible.

The guide includes a written description of each trail, a list of notable spring wildflowers found at the site, trail distance, difficulty rating and a trail map. Driving directions are included in the text and coordinates for the trailheads are given for GPS users. On the trail maps, the hiking trails are marked with a gray dashed line and public land is beige in color.

While this is not a field guide, instructing the reader on how to identify the wildflowers, a small section is included to show fifteen of the most common wildflowers that you are likely to observe on any of the hikes. To learn more about the identification of spring wildflowers or just to enjoy our native plants in general, please consider getting involved with the Illinois Native Plant Society. The Southern Illinois Chapter is very active, hosting meetings and guided hikes throughout the year. Information on the Southern Chapter of the Illinois Native Plant Society can be found on our website at www.ill-inps.org or by sending an email to southernillinoisplants@gmail.com. Please "like" us on facebook at www.facebook.com/southernillinoisplants.

A Note on Invasive Plants

Invasive plants, species not native to the natural ecosystems of southern Illinois, can have a devastating effect on our native wildflowers. Unfortunately, sometimes people unintentionally introduce these species into our natural areas through seeds on their clothing or in mud on their shoes. To help prevent this from happening, we ask that everyone hiking on these trails makes sure their clothing and footwear is free of any seeds or mud before taking the hike.