

MARCH 2023

# THE NODDING ONION

*Newsletter of the  
Northeast Chapter of the  
Illinois Native Plant  
Society*

**WHAT'S IN THIS ISSUE:**  
Creating Awareness for Bogs Through Art  
Lessons Learned from Bell Bowl Prairie  
Native Cool-Season Groundcovers  
Recommended Upcoming Native Plant Sales

*Symplocarpus foetidus* (skunk cabbage)

# Northeast Chapter Events

View all event details and RSVP on the [Events page](#).

## Hike at Trailside Museum

April 23rd from 10AM-11:30AM  
783 Thatcher Avenue, River Forest, IL

## Hike at Crabtree Nature Center

June 4th from 10AM-11:30AM  
3 Stover Road, Barrington, IL

## Hike at Spring Creek (Near Trailside)

July 22th from 10AM-11:30AM  
Location TBA

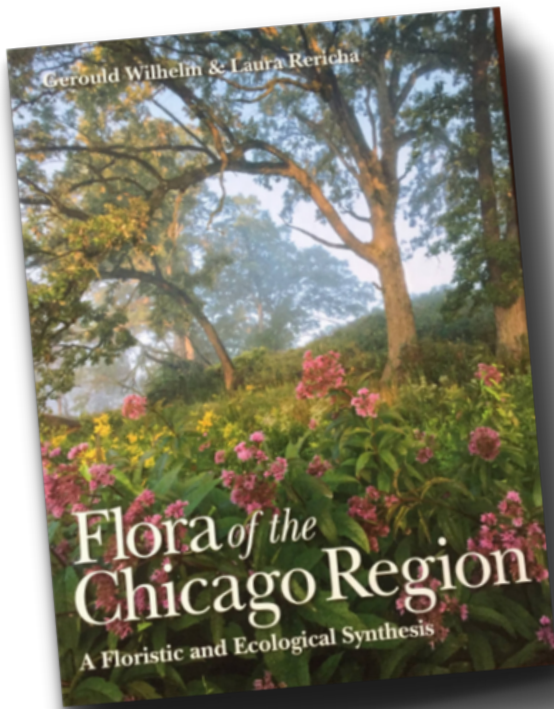
RSVP is required for events. Sign up at:  
<http://illinoisplants.org/northeast-chapter/events/>



*Prunus americana*  
(american plum)

*Viola pedata*  
(birdsfoot violet)

## Updates on the Awardees of Flora of the Chicago Region



In 2022, the Northeast Chapter awarded twelve (12) copies of the book *Flora of the Chicago Region* to budding botanists, naturalists, habitat restoration volunteers, and students of ecology or conservation-related programs to encourage their personal and/or professional development.

The primary goal of this initiative is to reduce the cost barrier to learning about local plants, as, at \$125, *Flora of the Chicago Region* can be cost-prohibitive for many people to purchase on their own.

We recently asked our awardees how receiving a copy of *Flora* benefitted them, and we are excited to share their responses! *responses were edited for clarity*

*"I have been able to use the key many times during survey work in Cook and Lake County. The keys in Flora often have traits not mentioned in other keys. It is also nice to have everything in one spot with this book. We have many online resources for plants; however, to have most of the information in one book is just remarkable and extremely convenient. Flora is highly specialized to the region we live in, which is extremely helpful in blurring out the noise you come across in broader sources."*

-Matt Finzel (M.S. Student at University of Illinois - Urbana Champaign)

*"My favorite thing about Flora is the habitat notes. These habitat notes have been helpful for me in making a native plant garden at the Northwestern University student garden. The associate's list also helped me pick out which plants to introduce to the garden based on what plants are already there. I also appreciate the dichotomous keys in the book. Sometimes I find species that travel-friendly keys do not help to identify a plant I am interested in. When this happens, I will take pictures of parts of the plant and then look at the keys in Flora to identify it when I get home."*

-Vlad Nevirkovets (Undergraduate Student at Northwestern University)

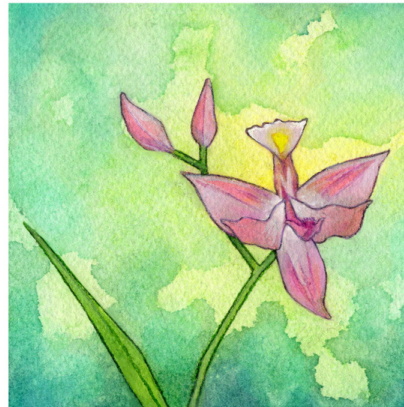
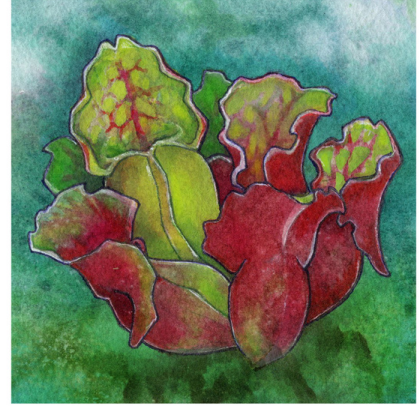
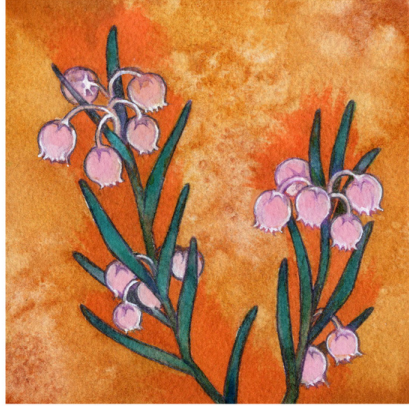
[illinoisplants.org/flora-giveaway](https://illinoisplants.org/flora-giveaway)



# Creating Awareness for Bogs Through Art

*Northwestern University's Cael Dant uses their incredible art skills to raise awareness for a rapidly disappearing Illinois habitat*

WRITTEN BY: MELISSA DUDA



## LOOK CLOSER NORTH AMERICAN BOG PLANTS

While Illinois is widely recognized for its tallgrass prairie habitat, Cael Dant would like people to look closer at bog ecosystems. Dant is a graduate student at Northwestern University/Chicago Botanic Garden, and they initially gained a fascination for bogs through growing carnivorous house plants in high school, “I was curious about where these unusual plants come from, and after learning that most of them came from bog habitats, I quickly became interested in this particular ecosystem,” said Dant.

Bogs are nutrient-poor wetlands characterized by the accumulation of acidic peat from dead plant material. Bogs provide habitat to plants that have adapted to these conditions, such as carnivorous plants, ferns, and some orchid species (1).

*Article continues on next page...*



In Illinois, you may come across species such as Northern pitcher plant (*Sarracenia purpurea*), round-leaved sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*), rose pogonia (*Pogonia ophioglossoides*), cinnamon fern (*Osmundastrum cinnamomeum*) and sensitive fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*) as you explore a bog.

Dant believes it is essential to exemplify these plants because it would make the ecosystem more engaging to the public. Dant said, “it’s a weirdly underappreciated ecosystem. When people hear the word bog, they probably just picture mud or something unappealing, so I wanted to change that image with this art piece”.

Sadly, our culture largely lacks the ability to notice plants in our environment, a term recognized as plant blindness. Dant wanted to overcome this concept by using their talent as an artist. Speaking about their art piece, “I went with something completely visual because I wanted to address the concept of plant blindness. I wanted to prompt people to look at these unique plants, consequently, to look more closely at bog ecosystems”.

Beyond catching some botanists’ attention, bogs provide many ecosystem services. “Bogs sequester significant amounts of carbon, which is always a growing concern because of climate change,” said Dant. Similarly, the IUCN stated in a report that bogs store more carbon than any other land-based ecosystem, making them a strong defense against the effects of climate change. Bogs also absorb excess water, which controls flooding in adjacent areas (2).

Dant intends to carry their interest in bogs to build their Master’s thesis. Dant said, “I am certainly interested in working with a carnivorous plant that is endemic to bogs for my Master’s thesis.” This upcoming quarter, they plan to narrow their focus to a specific species and research question. Dant feels like their thesis can provide even more attention to bogs; Dant joked, “Bogs do not have the best PR teams, so I would like to play a role in changing that.”

*Some quotes have been edited for clarity*



*Sarracenia purpurea*  
(Northern pitcher plant)



*Drosera rotundifolia*  
(round-leaved sundew)



*Osmundastrum cinnamomeum*  
(cinnamon fern)

# Lessons learned from Bell Bowl Prairie for grassroots organizing efforts

*Amy Doll and Matt Evans of the Friends of Illinois Nature Preserves focus on the positives after the loss of Bell Bowl Prairie*

WRITTEN BY: MELISSA DUDA

Much of Bell Bowl Prairie has been lost to the development of the Greater Rockford Airport Authority. Some pockets of the prairie remain intact, but Matt Evans, President of the Friends of Illinois Nature Preserves, worries that the prairie will disappear entirely due to ever-increasing land development. Despite bulldozers destroying the heart of the prairie, many involved in the grassroots initiative of “Save Bell Bowl Prairie” feel that so much has been gained along the way.

Grassroots initiatives around Bell Bowl prairie launched the issue into public awareness. “Without the grassroots effort, this prairie would have never been in the news, and being in the news was so important,” said Evans. Community members across the state became aware of the looming threat facing Bell Bowl Prairie, and many contacted “Save Bell Bowl Prairie” to support the cause. A key to the success of building awareness and action was the website [savebellbowlprairie.org](http://savebellbowlprairie.org). Speaking about the website Doll said, “There was one centralized place that anyone could visit to get all the information on the movement such as graphics, legal information, and contact information for movement organizers and local government officials.” These routes to spread information are something Evans and Doll think are key moving forward to conserve Illinois natural areas, “these conservation issues need to be regularly seen in our news, not just when there is a big problem like Bell Bowl prairie,” said Evans.

While American culture typically focuses on national politics, the preservation of Bell Bowl Prairie depended on local politics, and conservation organizations in Illinois are taking note. “We need to build local constituency because that is where the important conversations are happening,” Doll said while reflecting, “the local government officials need to hear it from their community members because that is where the decision-making was happening for Bell Bowl Prairie.” Maintaining the constituency gained from Bell Bowl Prairie is incredibly important. Still, it is not a simple task, especially for organizations powered mainly by volunteers, because it is a continuous process. Doll stated, “Keeping that constituency means educating new people, new officials, new staff and talking to them repeatedly, and it is a never-ending process, but we need to build that culture for every natural area out there.”

The grassroots movement also greatly benefitted from the financial backing of the Natural Land Institute (NLI). “The NLI spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees on this; it was crucial. The prairie would have been gone long ago without the NLI,” said Evans.

*Article continues on next page...*



Financial resources for conservation efforts are critical, as are the financial incentives for landowners to conserve natural lands. Without this financial backing promised for all grassroots efforts, Evans said, "Conservationists will have to find a way to work with regulators to incentivize landowners to preserve natural areas, similar to the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)."

Most importantly, the volunteers of "Save Bell Bowl Prairie" and grassroots partner organizations were the movement's lifeblood. Volunteers helped organize meetings, disseminate information to the public, and promote the movement via social media. Ambitious volunteers, Evans said, "Dug to the bottom of the Endangered Species Act until there was nothing left to dig" to save the prairie for the rusty-patched bumblebee, a federally endangered species. But Evans also remarked about the Endangered Species Act, "It has become evident to me that we need a stronger way to protect these natural places that are surviving from the ancient world to the modern world."



Volunteers hold up a banner near Bell Bowl prairie in October 2021

However, Doll and Evans do not think changing laws, such as the Endangered Species Act, is the answer to saving places like Bell Bowl Prairie in the future. Doll and Evans' goal through the Friends of Illinois Nature Preserves, "is to build a local constituency for Illinois natural areas because if there is a sufficient amount of constituency for these preserves, where people understand the meaning and importance of them, everything falls into place on its own," said Evans.

Local conservation organizations, like Friends of the Illinois Nature Preserves, want to use the awareness and momentum gained from Bell Bowl Prairie in hopes of changing things for unprotected natural lands. To exemplify this, Evans said, "14 acres of prairie habitat brought together thousands of people for 18 months, and now, we are talking about how we move forward. We know something good will come from Bell Bowl Prairie; it connected people to make a broader impact in the future." Ultimately, Evans and Doll want to inspire a culture shift where people value the ecological and societal benefits of natural areas. After all, Evans remembers his wise friend commenting 18 months ago that, "in the far future, we may not need airports, but we will still need remnant prairies."

*Some quotes have been edited for clarity*

# Use These Plants in Garden Design

**Horticulturist Ken Williams discusses designing gardens with native cool-season groundcover plants to create beauty and help with maintenance**

WRITTEN BY: KEN WILLIAMS

This starts my sixth gardening season since I first heard about using native cool-season groundcovers as a design element and maintenance tool. I believe I've figured out what great tools these plants are, but still, I am probably underestimating them.

*Planting in a Post-Wild World* by Thomas Rainer and Claudia West describes these tools so well that Doug Tallamy refers to the book as "The universal how-to guide to sustainable landscaping we have all been waiting for." So I highly recommend the book. Please remember that we are discussing ecological gardening here, not ecological restoration. Gardening means caring about aesthetics in a different way.



Prairie smoke (*Geum triflorum*) covering ground in April. Later in the season, these red patches remain short, accentuating adjacent taller, bigger plants.

A swath of remnant prairie has a sublime beauty that translates poorly into our front yards. Front yards benefit from bold splashes of color, shape, and texture. They also need plants that stay where we put them. Prairie plants crave the feel of the crowns of other plants against them. When planted with space between them, they fill that space with new plants. All those new plants destroy the legibility of the original composition.

The trick is to fill in between all the feature plants with a blend of native plants that cover ground in March as soon as the snow melts. This helps prevent weeds and other volunteer plants and, therefore, can lock your composition into place. Some of these plants are true groundcovers, while others eventually grow tall but have robust green rosettes of leaves under the snow every year. Living mulch, awaiting its role.

*Article continues on next page...*





A third-year native garden. That fleeting moment while the original composition was still legible. After ten years, this garden only looked like this for a few days. Groundcovers encourage such beauty to better persist.

These groundcovers start blooming by April. Most prairie gardens are brown in April and even in May. Meanwhile, the neighbors' lawns are lush. We can do better than the neighbors' lush green lawns. Native plants allow us to create beauty in any season. Include the species listed below in every prairie garden design.

#### Native-Cool Season Groundcovers

- **Prairie smoke** (*Geum triflorum*) - gorgeous blooms in April/May; smoke-like seed heads in June
- **Pussytoes** (*Antennaria plantaginifolia*) - prefers a well-drained site; forms a dense mat; blooms in May
- **Robin's plantain** (*Erigeron pulchellus*) - a woodland fleabane that performs well in more sun; covered in white daisies in May
- **Canada wild ginger** (*Asarum canadense*) - bullet-proof in a shady spot
- **Wild strawberry** (*Fragaria virginiana*) - supports numerous native caterpillar species; delicious fruit
- **Wild violets** (*Viola spp.*) - often show up on their own; easily removed if needed to be
- **Allegheny spurge** (*Pachysandra procumbens*) - a robust pachysandra; native to the Northeast U.S.; useful in a formal setting
- **Sedges** (*Carex spp.*) - essential to our natural hydrologic cycle; a few species are overly aggressive

*Article continues on next page...*





Groundcover matrix in May. Mixing different groundcover plants into a matrix provides a diversity of root growth patterns and improves soil composition. It also looks great!

#### Also Cover Well

- **Foxglove beardtongue** (*Penstemon digitalis*) - a June blooming plant that emerges from winter with nice basal rosettes; reseeds especially well on garden edges
- **Prairie alumroot** (*Heuchera richardsonii*) - our native coral bells; blooms in June but has large rosettes in spring
- **Golden alexander** (*Zizia aurea*) - this plant can be overly aggressive; it should often be deadheaded
- **Purple poppy mallow** (*Callirhoe involucrata*) - dense green rosettes in spring; sprawling purple blossoms later in the season
- **Prairie dropseed** (*Sporobolus heterolepsis*) - not green at all in spring, but last year's foliage provides an excellent mulch
- **Bee balm** (*Monarda spp.*) - most species cover ground densely in spring
- **Wild geranium** (*Geranium maculatum*) - although a woodland species, these plants grow well in full sun and suppress weed growth throughout the spring
- **Virginia bluebells** (*Mertensia virginica*) - these beauties dominate areas throughout spring and then completely melt away, which allows for pairing with plants that develop later in the season

*Connect with the author...*



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# Recommended Upcoming Local Native Plant Sales

## Lake County Forest Preserves Native Plant Sale

[www.lcfpd.org/plant-sale](http://www.lcfpd.org/plant-sale)

Date of Sale: Saturday, May 20th and Sunday, May 21st from 10 am - 12 pm

Location: North Bay Pavilion at Independence Grove in Libertyville

Notes: Customers can order plants from a link on website.

## The Wildflower Preservation and Propagation Committee Native Plant Sale

[www.thewppc.org/event/the-event-will-be-sunday-may-7-2023-from-12pm-to-3pm/](http://www.thewppc.org/event/the-event-will-be-sunday-may-7-2023-from-12pm-to-3pm/)

Date of Sale: Sunday, May 7th from 12 pm - 3 pm

Location: McHenry County College in Woodstock

Notes: Be sure to arrive early, as many species sell out quickly!

## Citizens for Conservation Spring Native Plant, Shrub and Tree Sale

[www.citizensforconservation.org/cfc-events/spring-native-plant-sale/](http://www.citizensforconservation.org/cfc-events/spring-native-plant-sale/)

Date of Sale: Saturday, May 6th and Sunday, May 7th from 9 am - 3 pm

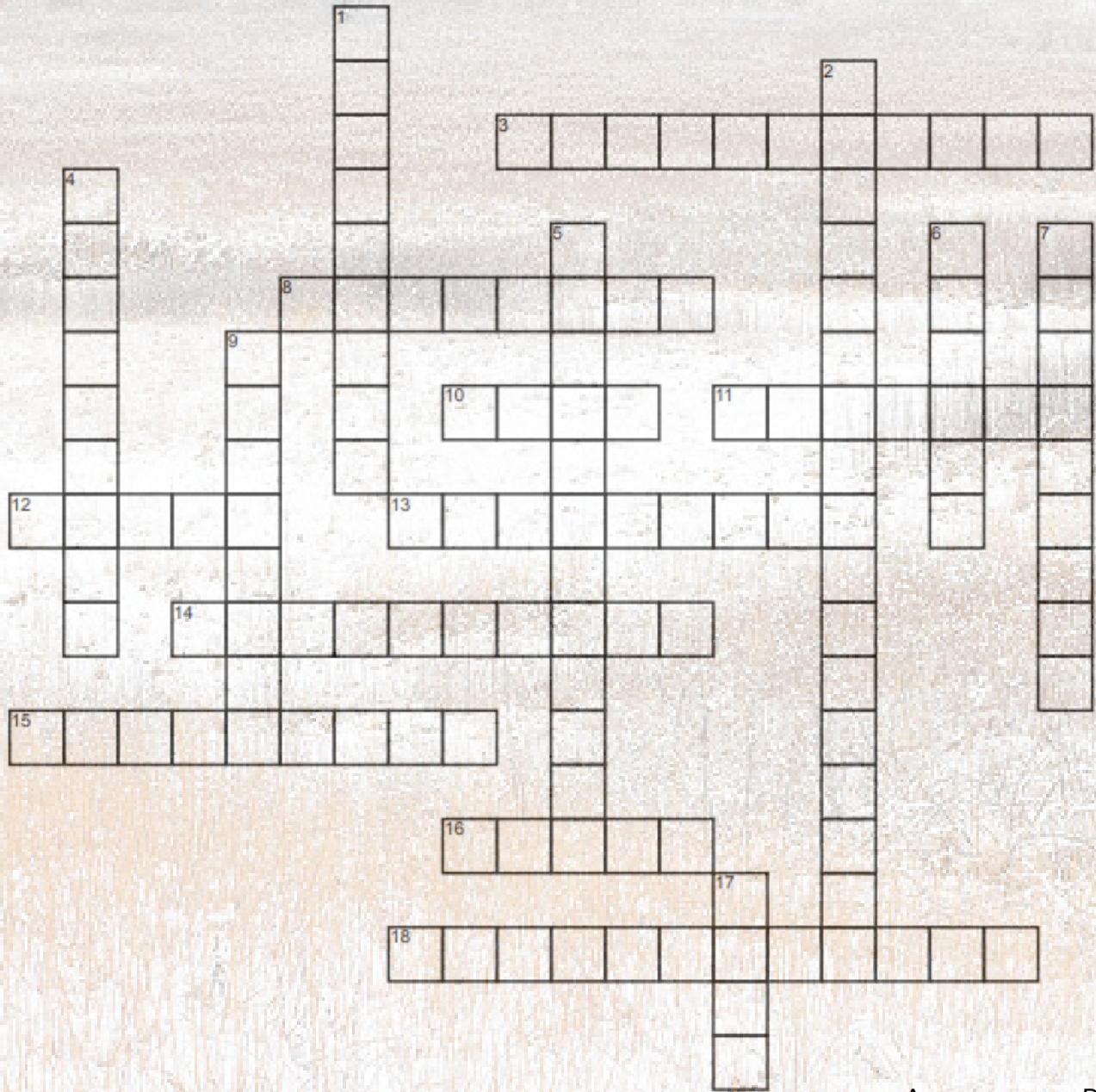
Location: Hill 'N Dale Preserve in Barrington Hills

Notes: Online orders are accepted until April 16th (closes when capacity is full).



*Echinacea purpurea*  
(pale-purple coneflower)

# Spring Flora Crossword Puzzle



Answers on Page 13

## Across:

3. Where is Jack?
8. Habitat where bloodroot grows
10. Skunk cabbage can melt this
11. Habitat where prairie smoke grows
12. Genus that our native violets belong to
13. Plant typically recognized as a host plant for American-painted lady butterflies
14. A term for perennial plants that actively grow through spring, flower briefly, and go dormant by mid-summer
15. Family sharp-lobed hepatica belongs to
16. Month when spring begins
18. The plant that appears in the INPS logo

## Down:

1. Genus that spring beauty's belong to
2. Woodland flower resembling trousers
4. Lily with a fishy name
5. Plant named after a divine dream Jacob had
6. Genus that Canada wild ginger belongs to
7. Light-blue flowers with Virginia in its name
9. Woodland plant that looks like a mini-umbrella with white flowers and produces "apples"
17. Insect that most spring ephemerals rely on to disperse their seeds





## Contribute to *The Nodding Onion*

We're looking for submissions!  
Do you have an article, artwork,  
photos, or other content you'd like  
to share with the *Nodding Onion*?  
Or, do you have ideas for content  
you'd like to see?

Contact us at:  
[northeast.inps@gmail.com](mailto:northeast.inps@gmail.com)

## Northeast Chapter Board

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# Join/Renew/Follow



*Geum triflorum* (prairie smoke)

The Illinois Native Plant Society is a volunteer-led, member-based organization with dues comprising the majority of our revenue. Please renew and encourage friends to join. Join or renew on our website:

**<https://illinoisplants.org/member>**

**As a member of the Illinois Native Plant Society, you contribute to our mission of promoting the appreciation, conservation, and study of the native flora and natural communities of Illinois.**



*Viola pedatifida* (prairie violet)

As a member, you receive:

*Erigenia*: our peer-reviewed scientific journal

*The Harbinger*: the statewide newsletter

*The Nodding Onion*: our chapter newsletter

Notification for and priority RSVP for events, including the statewide Annual Gathering, guided field trips, lectures, workshops, and other events.



*Caltha palustris* (marsh marigold)

**Follow the Illinois Native Plant Society on social media:**

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[twitter.com/ilplants](https://twitter.com/ilplants)

**Northeast Chapter:**

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Crossword answers: ACROSS 3. inthepulpit 8. woodland 10. snow 11. prairie 12. viola 13. pussytoes 14. ephemeral 15. buttercup 16. march 18. shootingstart DOWN 1. claytonia 2. dutchmansbreeches 4. troutlily 5. jacobs ladder 6. asarum 7. bluebells 9. mayapple 17. ants



# Photo Credit and References

Cover Page: *Symplocarpus foetidus* (skunk cabbage) by Dave Schwaegler

Page 1: *Prunus americana* (american plum) by Dave Schwaegler; *Viola pedata* (birdsfoot violet) by Dave Schwaegler

Page 3: (1) International Union for Conservation of Nature. (2021, November). Peatlands and climate change. Retrieved from <https://www.iucn.org/resources/issues-brief/peatlands-and-climate-change>

Page 4: (2) Friends of Volo Bog. (n.d.). What is a bog?. Retrieved from <https://www.friendsofvolobog.org/what-is-a-bog>; *Sarracenia purpurea* (Northern pitcher plant) retrieved from <https://seedsworld.online/products/purple-northern-pticher-seed>; *Drosera rotundifolia*

(round-leaved sundew retrieved from <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/drosera-rotundifolia> ; *Osmundastrum cinnamomeum*

(cinnamon fern) retrieved from

<https://gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org/species/osmundastrum/cinnamomeum>

Page 6: Volunteer Bell Bowl Prairie image retrieved from

<https://www.savebellbowlprairie.org/shareables>

Page 7: Prairie smoke in a native garden by Ken Williams

Page 8: A third-year native garden by Ken Williams

Page 9: Groundcover matrix by Melissa Grycan

Page 10: *Echinacea purpurea* (pale-purple coneflower) by Melissa Duda

Page 14: *Geum triflorum* (prairie smoke) by Dave Schwaegler; *Viola pedatifida* (prairie violet) by Dave Schwaegler; *Caltha palustris* (marsh marigold) by Dave Schwaegler