

A Spring Hike in Ohio's Appalachian Foothills

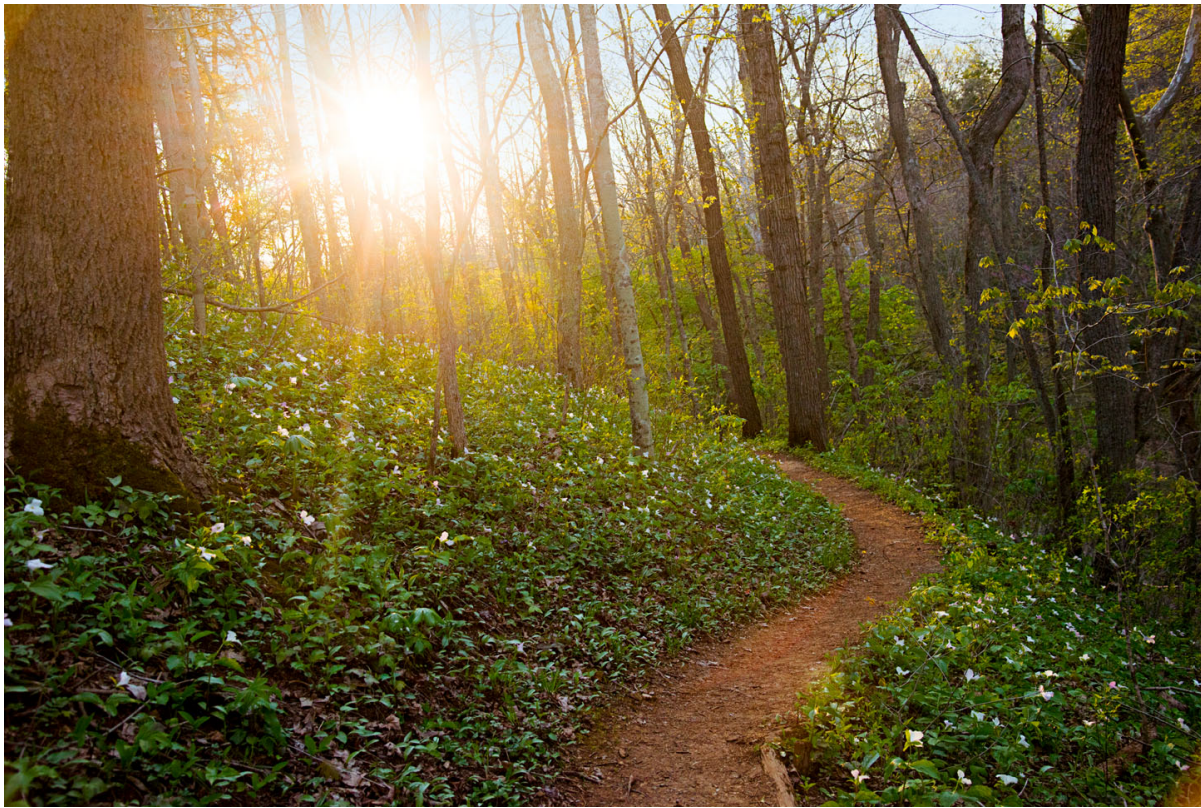
Each spring, the little-visited valleys and hillsides of southern Ohio erupt into a showcase of ephemeral blooms.

Writers: Amanda Glazebrook and Zac Richardson; Photographer: Randall Lee Schieber



The wildflower education begins at the foot of Spruce Hill, where delicate sun-yellow blooms flourish between the thick, rough-barked roots of an ancient oak. “You see these yellow guys? They’re trout lilies,” John Jaeger says. He’s a field naturalist and guide on the three-day [Arc of Appalachia Wildflower Pilgrimage](#) [1]. “These flowers are tenacious. A colony might be decades old, and an individual flower can wait up to seven years [for the right conditions] to bloom.” He asks the group of hikers with him to stay quiet and listen for a moment. The air carries a distinct trilled “drink-your-teaaaaaaa” song. “That’s an eastern towhee,” John says before leading the group up the hill. It’s not long before he stops again and walks a few feet off the trail, stepping over logs and ducking under branches to reach a patch of snow-white, three-lobed flowers lighting up a pool of shade. “Trillium!” John says.





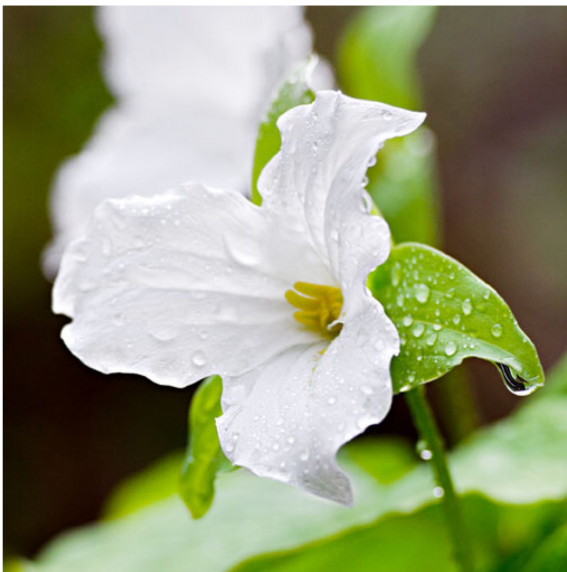
Among the peaks and valleys along the Ohio-Kentucky border, ephemerals (those delicate wildflowers that bloom for just a few weeks each spring) flourish under the semibare branches of maples, oaks, hickories and poplars. It's this sort of fragile beauty that inspired the Arc of Appalachia, an organization devoted to protecting the Eastern forests here and the human histories contained within. Fifteen preserves in the region protect rivers and gorges, Native American effigies and ceremonial sites, meadows and flower-filled woods. The narrow trails through the preserves are open year-round to everyone, but on the annual [April Wildflower Pilgrimage](#) ^[1] (\$135, plus lodging), 150 flower-seekers get a weekend's worth of hiking with knowledgeable guides, taking in flower-filled vistas and learning to tell bluets from violets, rue anemone from false anemone.



Far-reaching drifts of blue-eyed Mary bloom in April and May.

If you can't make it to Appalachia this spring, you likely won't have to go far to find ephemerals: They thrive in mature forests across the Midwest. To spot the blooms, keep your eyes on the ground as you hike a trail through ravines and undisturbed woods during April and May.

The first wave of blooms might include rue anemone, hepatica and bloodroot. At the showy height of spring, great white trilliums, Canadian columbine, dwarf crested iris, celandine poppy, wild geranium and jack-in-the-pulpit emerge. Then the rear guard arrives, bringing mayapples and spring orchids like pink and yellow lady's slippers. Not sure what to look for? Get help with a wildflower field guide book or app (the National Audubon Society does a nice job with both).



WHAT'S THAT BLOOM? *Clockwise above, from top left* To find **dwarf crested iris**, get low. The white-patched purple blooms reach 6–9 inches tall. Search for bunches of vibrant yellow, slightly cupped **celandine poppy** along stream banks and in moisture-trapping valleys. Whether they're rosy pink or scarlet, the pointed blooms of **Canadian columbine** stand out against the greenery of the woods. Identify **great white trillium** by the number three: a white, three-petaled flower rises above a trio of wide green leaves.

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