



# Spring Wildflowers

## Spring Wildflowers along the Bruce Trail: *From the exotic to the exquisite and everything in between*

Story and images by: Kerry Jarvis

*As the earth warms up from its long winter slumber, a new life is ready to awaken. Slowly and gradually, and right on cue as if orchestrated and choreographed, spring wildflowers emerge through the still cold ground to welcome the crisp, cool spring air.*

They come in all sizes, shapes, colours and with a variety of scents - some delightful and some, like skunk cabbage, with a pungent aroma to attract pollinators. In a cascading order of appearance, spring wildflowers grace the Niagara Escarpment with their beauty. They range from the exotic looking (Jack-in-the-Pulpit and Dutchman's Breeches), to the exquisite (Little

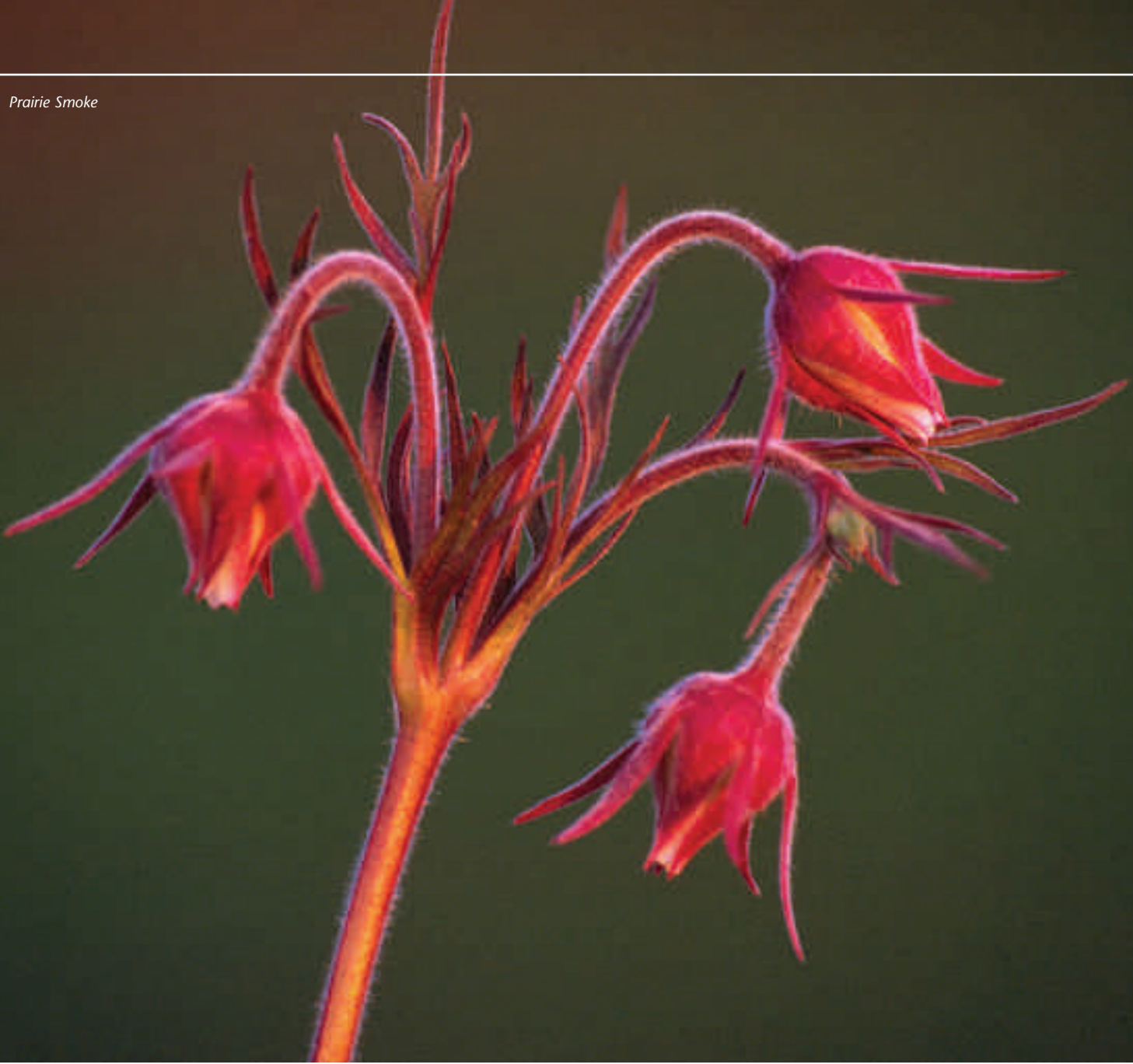
Blue-eyed Grass), to the down-right stunning orchids (Calypso and Ram's Head Lady Slipper). Spring hikers along the Bruce Trail will be rewarded with a dazzling display of wildflowers.

The Niagara Escarpment is an oasis of different plant habitats. Each habitat supports and nurtures wildflowers unique to that area. From forest floors, wetlands, fens,

bogs, marls, creeks, rivers and rock crevices, there is an abundance of wildflower life. "I like seeing the diversity of wildflowers and other plants that become conspicuous in early spring when so many different forest floor species come into bloom," says Tim Dickinson, co-author of the Royal Ontario Museum Field Guide to Wildflowers of Ontario.



*Prairie Smoke*



*Wild Ginger*



*Calypso Orchid*



*Wild Columbine*



As Dickinson alludes, there are numerous wildflowers that populate the forests of the Niagara Escarpment. Our provincial flower, the Large-Flowered Trillium, turns the ground into a sea of white. The name Trillium is related to the Latin 'tri' meaning three: three leaves, three white flower petals, and three sepals. Toward the end of spring, keen observers will notice that the white flowers turn to a pinkish colour as they age. Hikers can encounter a variety of trilliums, including: red, purple, nodding and painted.



Bloodroot

The flower of Bloodroot makes a brief appearance as it loses its dainty white petals with the first strong wind. Bloodroot's single leaf hugs the stem, as if protecting it from the cool spring air. As it warms up it unfurls to expose white petals in a star formation.

Wild Ginger, another forest ground cover, blooms from April to May. Though it is not related to the ginger that we use as a spice, it does have a ginger fragrance. Its small maroon flower, located at the base of the stem, is often missed as it lies on the ground hidden by its heart-shaped leaves.

Trout Lily, whose leaves resemble the spots of a trout, are commonly found. Single leaves blanket the forest floor as it takes more than 5 years to produce a flower. Flowering plants have two leaves and its bright yellow, nodding flower blooms from April to May. These

bright, colourful flowers are a photographer's dream.

May-apple is another unique wildflower. Growing to a height of 45 cm (1.5 feet), the unfurling of its leaf takes on the appearance of sun umbrellas at a beach. A single cream coloured flower grows from the stem of the 2 leaves. By May a small yellowish, green fruit appears, resembling an apple.

Jack-in-the-Pulpit is one of our most unusual and exotic looking wildflowers. Its common name is refers to its similarity to the appearance of a preacher standing in a church pulpit. Throughout May and June, hikers can see it in bloom. Later on in the summer, a cluster of bright red berries will beckon hikers to take a second look.

Marsh Marigold, a member of the Buttercup family, is one of the first wildflowers to emerge in April. With its bright yellow flowers it brightens up roadside ditches, wetland areas and the edges of streams where it grows en masse. Take pleasure in viewing, but be careful not to touch the plant as it is poisonous.

Dutchman's Breeches, with its whimsical-looking "pants", is one of our more unique and striking plants. Gay Wings - or Fringed Polygala - with their cheery mauve flowers, brighten a hiker's path. Making a dramatic appearance, adorned with white or pink-streaked flowers, is the Sharp-Lobed Hepatica. This early flowering plant emerges in clusters and is often found near the base of trees. Prairie Smoke, found in prairie meadows and alvars in June, has nodding flowers that become feathery when in fruit. According to the *ROM Field Guide to Wildflowers of Ontario*, "The common name prairie smoke comes from the resemblance of the fruiting heads blowing in the wind to a prairie grass fire." Another nodding flower, is the dainty Wild Columbine with its jester shaped red and yellow hat. Hummingbirds and pollinating insects are often

## 10 WILDFLOWER PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS

Photographing spring wildflowers is a great way to capture their beauty and is useful for identifying them after a hike with a wildflower field guide.

1. Stay on the trail or designated boardwalks to minimize soil compaction and plant damage.
2. Use the macro setting on your point and shoot digital camera for close up images.
3. For single lens reflex cameras (SLR): use a tripod and a telephoto zoom lens of 200 – 300 mm. The tripod helps to eliminate camera shake. The telephoto zoom lens helps to make the background muted.
4. Avoid shooting in bright sunlight as the sun washes out the true colours of wildflowers.
5. If you do shoot on a bright sunny day, take off your hat and provide some shade for the plant. This way your images will not be washed out.
6. Best time to shoot is early morning when the light is not harsh and the wind is usually calm.
7. Overcast days or cloudy days are ideal for wildflower photography.
8. Photographing wildflowers right after a rain storm makes for more vibrant colours, and the added bonus of rain drops adds impact to your images.
9. Never use a ground sheet to photograph wildflowers as you will impact the surrounding area and compact the soil.
10. Avoid shooting wildflowers from above. Get down low and shoot from a different angle.



*Fringed Polygala*



*Large-flowered Trilliums*



## ORCHID FESTIVAL IN TOBERMORY

To learn more about wildflowers and orchids, plan to attend the annual Orchid Festival in Tobermory on May 29 and 30. With over 40 species of orchids, the Bruce Peninsula is a plant lovers paradise. This festival includes field trips, guest speakers and many opportunities to see, learn and discover about orchids and their habitats. For more information visit: <http://www.orchidfest.ca>

The spring wildflowers of the Niagara Escarpment are a treasure to behold. Their diversity, elegance, beauty and colour beckons all hikers to enjoy. This spring take the time to stop, look and observe the magic allure of spring wildflowers. Don't forget to bring along your camera, binoculars and wildflower guide.

seen gathering nectar from these flowers. Pussy-toes, named because its flower heads resemble the paws of a cat, is the larval food plant of the American Painted Lady butterfly.

There are many orchids that call the Escarpment lands home. In fact, the Bruce Peninsula boasts 44 species. Several of these orchids are in the genus of lady's slippers, named for their resemblance to a slipper. First-time observers of these gorgeous orchids are amazed at their beauty, fragility and elegance. In late Spring, look for Showy Lady's Slipper, the queen amongst orchids, as it can tower up to 1 metre (three feet) in height. They prefer a moist environment in

swamps, fens, bogs or on the fringes of these areas. Yellow Lady's Slipper comes in two forms, large and small, and are often seen individually or in small clumps. Other treasures are the exquisite Ram's Head Lady's Slipper and Calypso Orchid. Both of these orchids are renowned for causing hikers – those lucky enough to spot them - to pause awhile and soak in their beauty.

### Wildflower field guides:

A wildflower field guide is beneficial to have along the hiking trail. Today's field guides are lightweight, compact, and fit nicely in a hip pack, back pack or jacket pocket. There are many guides available to learn more about wildflowers and orchids. The *ROM Field Guide to Wildflowers of Ontario* (\$29.99) is a treasure. This guide is richly embedded with full page overviews on 550 plants. Descriptions of plants, habitats and natural history, information about the plant's habitat, description and the natural history is concise, factual and useful. With over 1000 colour images, the guide comes alive and makes for a worthy companion to help identify plant life while hiking the Bruce Trail.

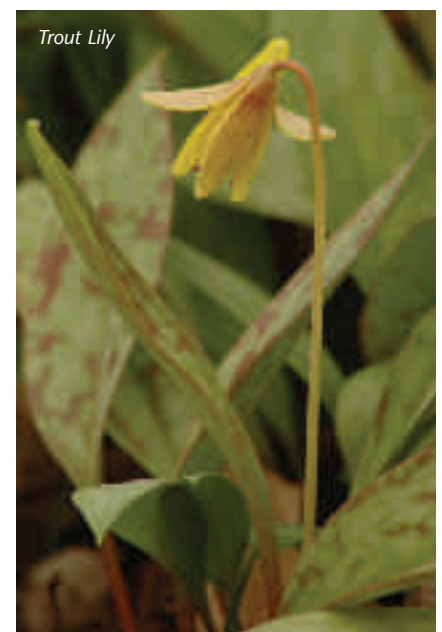
*The Orchids of Bruce and Grey* (\$15), prepared by the Owen Sound Field Naturalists, covers over 40 species of orchids. Each orchid is described in detail and is accompanied by illustrations and colour photographs to assist in easy identification. In addition, a handy chart shows the monthly flowering time of each orchid. For those hiking in Grey and Bruce counties, this book is a great reference to take on the trails.

### Wildflower etiquette:

Hikers need to be careful while enjoying the splendour of spring wildflowers and orchids. Ethan Meleg, naturalist and photographer, has spent a great deal of time exploring the Niagara Escarpment. According to Meleg, "The biggest impact that well-intentioned hikers

have is the cumulative trampling around individual flowers or accidental trampling of the actual flower. An individual flower in a popular spot may be viewed by dozens or even hundreds of people. If each person gets close, it destroys the habitat around the flower which may prevent it or other individuals of the same species from coming up in subsequent years." Meleg advises hikers, "To stay strictly on trails and view with binoculars or photograph with longer lenses." Dickinson agrees that staying on the trails or boardwalks minimizes the compaction of the soil and stresses not to pick flowers. In some areas, picking or digging up of wildflowers is a major problem. Doing so, prevents others from enjoying the flowers, disrupts the ecosystem and even if planted elsewhere, chances are that the plant will not survive as it requires unique soil conditions. •

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