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Contributed by Janet Mackey

## SPRING EPHEMERALS

April offers up a garden treat: the flowering of spring ephemerals in woodlands. Some of my favorites are Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*), Spring Beauty (*Claytonia virginica*), Dutchman's breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*), and the ever-popular Virginia Bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*).

Spring ephemerals are plants that pop up through leaf litter on the forest floor early in the spring. They flower, quickly set seed, and then disappear until the following spring. This approach allows the plants to take advantage of sunlight before deciduous trees put out their leaves, and then the plants go dormant before the hot and dry times of summer.



*The pink buds of Virginia Bluebells open into clusters of lovely blue flowers.*



*Bloodroot and Spring Beauty are two of the earliest native flowers to bloom.*



*Dutchman's Breeches are named for the flowers that look like pantaloons hanging out to dry.*

Many native spring ephemerals have an interesting way of dispersing their seeds. Ants seek out the seeds to take back to their nests where they feed on the fatty coating of the seeds (called elaiosomes). The ants discard the seeds near their nests where the ephemerals can sprout and grow without having to compete for nutrients with the parent plants.

**Adkins Arboretum is a great place to see a variety of spring ephemerals in their natural setting.**

All photos taken by Janet Mackey.