

The Writings of Eloise Butler



Bloodroots, Marsh Marigolds, Adder's Tongues and Dutchman's Breeches Among Spring Blooms that Delight Eye and Heart - May 7, 1911

Within the last fortnight the red swamp maple (*Acer rubrum*) has glorified the lowlands with its flowers of brilliant hue, forming a pleasing contrast with the ash-gray stems. It is strange that this tree is not more often used for decorative planting, for it will adapt itself to drier sites, and would well take the place of the much admired red-bud growing farther south. The flowers of the maple are succeeded by the scarlet wings of the pendulous fruit, and, before the summer is over, the leaves will take on more gorgeous tints than the autumnal colors of other trees.

When the red maple blooms, here and there along the river, we find a shrub still bare of leaves but covered with tiny yellow flowers. This is the Leatherwood, (*Dirca palustris*). If you strip down the bark and try to pull it from the stem, you will understand the significance of the common name and its value to the Indians, who use the bark for thongs.



Leatherwood
Dirca palustris.



Marsh Marigold
Caltha palustris L.

Now is the time that we are enticed to buy from children on the street big bunches of the cheerful Marsh Marigold (*Caltha palustris*). For she always sits with her feet - roots - in the water, and only a barefooted boy is likely to reach her, although "enough for everybody and to spare" is her motto. The plant is wrongly called "cowslip." The true cowslip is a European primrose and resembles the marsh marigold only in color. Wordsworth's Peter Bell would have stopped to pick the young leaves of the marsh marigold for greens - something more substantial than mere yellow flowers. Both the primrose and marsh marigold are familiar flowers in Europe and both are named in Jean Ingelow's "Songs of Seven."

With the advance of May, Mother Nature's spinning wheels whir faster and faster, and the earth-carpet - the most lovely product of her looms - is woven with intricate designs of flowers in bewildering profusion. But from them all we single out the dogtooth violet or adder's tongue [now called Trout Lily] for special admiration. The latter name, due to the tongue-shaped, brown-blotched leaf, is more appropriate, for the plant is a species of lily and of no kin to a violet. It has two shining leaves which spring from a deeply buried bulb. Between the leaves arises a beautiful cream colored bell slightly tinted with mauve at the



White Trout Lily *Erythronium albidum*

base [she refers here to the White Trout Lily [*Erythronium albidum*].

The yellow flowered adder's tongue [Yellow Trout Lily, *Erythronium americanum*] is common in the Eastern states. A smaller species [Minnesota Dwarf Trout Lily, *Erythronium propullans*] with a rose colored flower is also found in Minnesota. This genus flowers best in alluvial soil.

Far more common is the Dutchman's breeches [*Dicentra cucullaria*]. Everyone is familiar with the pretty pale pink or yellowish flowers arranged along a slender stalk. The divergent nectaries of the flower have given rise to the ludicrous common name. The single pale green leaf, finely divided into many segments, adds to the delicate beauty of the plant. On Big Island, Lake Minnetonka, protected from marauders by an un-climbable barbed wire fence, grows another member of the same genus, the squirrel corn [*Dicentra canadensis*], similar to Dutchman's breeches except that the flowers are usually white and shaped like those of another relative, the bleeding heart of the gardens. The squirrel corn is developed from subterranean tubers, round and yellow like grains of Indian corn. [See NOTE 1. below.]



Dutchman's breeches
Dicentra cucullaria



Yellow Trout Lily
Erythronium americanum



Squirrel Corn, *Dicentra canadensis*. Photo
©Elizabeth Parnis,
Wisconsin Flora.



Wild Ginger
Asarum canadense

Many will not observe the flower of the Wild Ginger [*Asarum canadense*.], although they cannot fail to see the large round leaves. But when one has learned the habit of the plant, he will stoop to look between the leaves for the purplish-red flower-bell bent down to the ground and tricked out with three slender horns. The enigma is easily interpreted: If the curious should lift up the flower to gaze upon it, the horns would protect it from the "evil eye." With closer approach one perceives another charm - the delightful aromatic odor. Some persons carry about with them a piece of the thick rootstalk as a specific for bodily ills.



Bloodroot
Sanguinaria canadensis

Who does not know the Bloodroots [*Sanguinaria canadensis*]- babes in the wood - each closely wrapped in the swaddling blanket of a quaintly fashioned grayish-green leaf? As the leaf unrolls the flower bud is disclosed, ensheathed in two thin, pale yellowish green sepals, which fall as the snow white corolla expands. The petals, some eight to twelve, are evanescent and will not endure rough handling or a long journey. Hence let us leave them to light up the woodland. The flower passes quickly from infancy to maturity. Presently nothing is left but the seed pod. But the leaf continues to grow lustily. It is an attractive feature with its odd lobation and prominent reddish veins. The red fleshy subterranean stem is the origin of the name – bloodroot. The relationship of the bloodroot to the poppy is shown by the two sepals which fall so easily.

Notes:

1. NOTE: The full details of the collecting of Squirrel Corn were written up in Eloise Butler's unpublished history of the Wild Botanic Garden. It is found in the article "Experiences in Collection - 1911" on the website.
2. The text of this article, along with a photos of Wild Ginger, Bloodroot, Dutchman's Breeches, Marsh Marigold and Adder's Tongue Dogtooth Violet (all by Mary Meeker), was published on Sunday May 7, 1911 in the *Sunday Minneapolis Tribune*. It was one of a series of weekly articles Eloise Butler published in 1911 to help acquaint the public with her newly established Wild Botanic Garden in Glenwood Park Some of the plants she discusses are extant in the Garden today. In brackets within the text, and in the notes, have been added the necessary common name or scientific name, that she did not list in her article. Nomenclature is based on the latest published information from *Flora of North America* and the *Checklist of the Vascular Flora of Minnesota*.

Photo of Eloise Butler, ca. 1920, at top of page courtesy Minneapolis Public Library. Other photos ©G D Bebeau or as credited.

The Wild Botanic Garden in Glenwood Park, became the "Native Plant Reserve" and was then renamed the Eloise Butler Wild Flower Garden in 1929.