



April 2021

Woodland Wildflowers

The forest looks very different depending on the season. In summer, the forest is thick with green leaves. In fall, you'll see a variety of colors. The winter forest is bare and snow-covered. But in spring the forest is full of flowers for you to discover.

These flowers don't last long. In fact, they will disappear before the trees even have their leaves. Because these flowers are so short-lived we call them spring **ephemerals**. These flowers only have a short window of time to grow, flower, be **pollinated**, and produce seeds. Once the trees in the forest have their leaves, the leaves block the sun from reaching the forest floor and it is too shady for these little flowers to grow.

Insects have many important roles in the lifecycle of spring ephemerals. Early in the spring, not many flowers

have bloomed and **pollen** and **nectar** are scarce. Bumble bees depend on the pollen and nectar from spring ephemerals to feed their young (Anzelone). While the bumble bees collect pollen for their young, they are also pollinating the flowers.

Ants also depend on spring ephemerals to feed their young. Ants do not collect the pollen or nectar, but they collect the seeds. The seeds of spring ephemerals have a fatty food source covering them. The ants bring the seeds back to their nests and feed the fatty covering to their young. The ants only eat the fatty outer part and they discard the seed. When they discard the seed underground, they are actually planting it to help more spring ephemerals grow (Anzelone).

Head to the forest and see if you can find any spring ephemerals before they're gone. Just remember

not to pick any. These are delicate flowers that we want everyone to be able to enjoy for many years.

Think about it...

When the ants collect seeds from spring ephemerals does it help the ants, the flowers, or both?

Definitions:

Ephemeral: lasting for a very short time

Pollinate: transfer pollen grains from one flower to another

Pollen: fine powder produced by plants to aid in making seeds

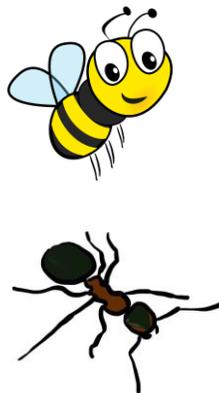
Nectar: a sweet liquid made by the flower of plants

► Matching

After reading the article, match the insect to the part of the plant that it would visit.



Makin, Julie



Smith, R.W

► Featured Plant: Bloodroot

Bloodroot is a spring ephemeral that gets its unique name from the red-orange liquid inside its stem and roots. Many Native Americans would use the red liquid inside the plant as a dye or paint.

The white flower grows on a separate stem from the leaf. The flower will open in the sunlight and close at night (Lady Bird

Johnson Wildflower Center). Like many spring ephemerals, the flower will only last a few days. The leaves will persist longer than the flowers so it can be useful to learn to identify this flower by its uniquely shaped leaf. The leaf has 3-9 lobes and scalloped edges.

lobe: a rounded portion of the leaf.



Photo by [Doug Sherman](#)



Photo by [All About Birds](#)

► Featured Animal: American Robin

Another sure sign of spring is the robin. This bird is well-known for its orange belly and dark brown back. It also serves as Michigan's state bird.

Many robins can be found in Michigan throughout the winter, but they spend more time in trees. In spring, robins are seen on the ground looking for worms. They also draw attention to

themselves by singing to attract mates. This is why people often associate the sudden appearance of robins with spring.

Robins nest in tree branches, but are also likely to form nests in gutters and other structures. They lay 3-5 blue eggs at a time. They may lay eggs up to 3 times per year (The Cornell Lab).

► Try at Home: Feed the Birds

Visit Project Feeder Watch at <https://feederwatch.org/learn/common-feeder-birds/> and use their interactive list of Common Feeder Birds to determine the best food sources and feeders for the birds you want to attract.



Spring Ephemeral Scavenger Hunt

White Trillium



Virginia Bluebell



Bloodroot



Spring Beauty





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► References

Anzelone, M. (2010, April 10). *Native Spring Ephemerals*. Brooklyn Botanic Gardens. https://www.bbg.org/gardening/article/native_spring_ephemerals

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. *Plant Database*. https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=saca13

The Cornell Lab. *American Robin*. All About Birds. https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/American_Robin/id