

Spring Beauties



Bluet

DNR Archive Photo

By John Beckman

After a long winter, an invigorating walk in the woods to look for spring wildflowers is one of the best cures for cabin fever. Here are three favorite spring plants that can be seen in just about every county throughout West Virginia.

Trout lily *Erythronium americanum* is a forest lily that grows 6 to 12 inches high. The leaves are 1 to 2 inches wide and 4 to 7 inches long. The name trout lily comes from the brown and purple mottling on the drab green leaves that vaguely resembles the color scheme of a trout. The flowers of a trout lily are about 1-½ inches in diameter with one bright yellow flower per stem.

The flower consists of three petals and three sepals that are of equal size. This makes the flower look like it has six petals.

Trout lilies are found in moist woods all over the state. Popular places to look for trout lilies are

wooded floodplains, creek bottoms and cove forests. The trout lily is also called yellow fawn lily or dog's tooth violet by some naturalists.

Spring beauty *Claytonia virginica* looks similar to a white lily, but it actually belongs in the purslane family. Spring beauty plants grow 3 to 12 inches high. The leaves are less than ½-inch wide, but can grow up to 6 inches long. The small flowers have five petals and two

sepals. The sepals are pale green, while the flowers are white with pronounced pink veins. Several flowers appear on one stem during the spring.

Spring beauties are found in rich moist woods throughout West

Virginia. Since this species shares the same habitat as the trout lily, they have often been observed growing together on the forest floor. The Carolina spring beauty, *Claytonia caroliniana*, is a closely related species with similar flowers, but with



Spring Beauty

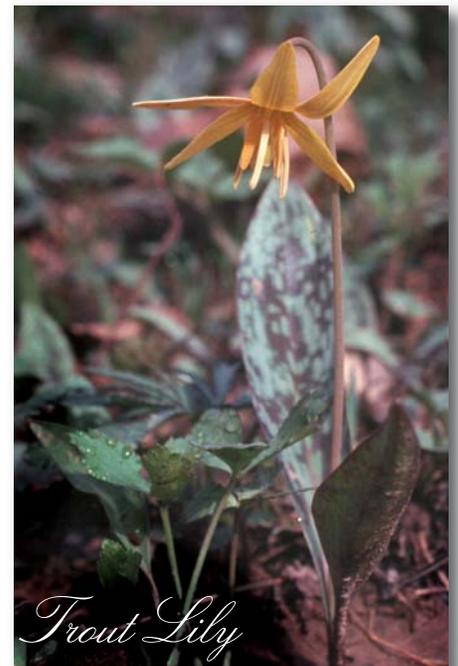
DNR Archive Photo

leaves that are less than 2-½ inches long and almost oval in shape.

Bluet *Houstonia caerulea* is a very tiny and delicate plant, and would be easily overlooked if not for the clumps of blue flowers it produces. Bluets appear from April through June. The plant is 2 to 6 inches high, with leaves both at the base of the plant and on the stem. Stem leaves are less than ½-inch long and are arranged in opposing pairs. Bluet flowers range from violet and blue to almost pure white. No matter what color the outer petals, all flowers have a yellow center. The flower is a tube that splits open into four distinct petals. The whole flower is less than ¼-inch in diameter.

Bluets occur in open, grassy areas throughout the state, but have also been seen growing in lawns, between ruts on dirt roads, or even coming up through patches of moss in sunny spots in the forest. There are four other species of bluets known from the state, but *Houstonia caerulea* is the only West Virginia bluet with a yellow center.

John Beckman is a former DNR wildlife biologist.



Trout Lily

DNR Archive Photo