One of the great riches of the Sourland forest is its diversity of spring wildflowers. Many of these diminutive herbs arise, bloom gloriously, and go to seed before forest canopy trees have fully leafed out. They have a rhythm all of their own, basking in the mounting April sun, feeding the queen bumblebees and other native pollinators.

Many spring wildflowers benefit from unusual seed dispersers like ants and turtles – or employ variations of catapult-like seed propulsion to spread. Though small, woodland wildflowers can grow in large clones and be quite long-lived, slowly spreading through mature woods. A few are bigger and more tolerant of disturbed habitats~ tough customers like Jack-in-the-pulpit and mayapple. Many are reduced in their blooming or eradicated altogether by the overpopulation of deer.

This guide features common spring wildflowers of the Sourlands, plants many residents of the Sourlands will have growing near their homes or just slightly farther afield.

Become a Sourland Steward: find these plants in the Sourlands, and share photos and stories on our Sourland Stewards Facebook group!

**WOOD ANEMONE** *(Anemone quinquefolia)*

Blooms: White
Leaves: Divided into 3 to 5 leaflets/lobes

Grows in small, tightly knit colonies, usually in moist soil in mature, diverse woods.

**JACK-IN-THE-PULPIT** *(Arisaema triphyllum)*

Blooms: Green and brown
Leaves: Divided into 3 leaflets

Found as individuals in moist to wet woods and openings. Flower and spathe are cobra-like in silhouette. Deer resistant, with animal-dispersed seed, so it gets around these days quite well.
**CUTLEAF TOOTHWORT** *(Cardamine concatenata)*

**Blooms:** White  
**Leaves:** Palmately divided and deeply toothed

Found in rich woods and slopes, with exposed soil required for regeneration from seed. A rare species, *Cardamine angustata*, is also found in the Sourlands. Foliage is ephemeral, disappearing by June, and somewhat resembles *Cannabis*.

**SPRING BEAUTY** *(Claytonia virginica)*

**Blooms:** White, often striped with pink  
**Leaves:** Grass-like blades

Found in woods, meadows, even lawns, often prolifically. Pink stripes are pollinator “landing strips”. Foliage is ephemeral, arising in winter and dormant by June. Pollinated by small native bees, flies, and honeybees. If you’re lucky, ants dispersed the seeds to your lawn. Thanks ants!

**TROUT LILY** *(Erythronium americanum)*

**Blooms:** Yellow  
**Foliage:** Strap-like, mottled

A colonial wildflower of low and moist places. Often seen just as foliage, especially under heavy shade or where deer are abundant. Foliage is ephemeral. Pollinated by bees and bee flies, seed dispersed by forest ants.

**SHOWY ORCHIS** *(Galearis spectabilis)*

**Blooms:** Purple and white  
**Foliage:** Broad, tongue-like

A beautiful orchid of rich woods, it blooms in early May. Locally common in the Sourlands, sometimes found in large quantities. Don’t bother trying to dig one up, it won’t transplant. Orchids rely on specific forest soil fungi not present in garden soil, nor even all forest soils.

**WILD GERANIUM** *(Geranium maculatum)*

**Blooms:** Lavender  
**Foliage:** Deeply lobed into 5+ segments

A big showy bloomer of open woods and meadow edges. Attracts some of the earliest butterflies of the season.
**ROUND-LOBED HEPATICA** *(Hepatica nobilis var. obtusa)*

**Blooms:** White to blue  
**Foliage:** Evergreen, divided into 3 rounded lobes

The ornate and mottled leaves are visible year-round. The furry-stemmed flowers arise in earliest spring; fur on the stems and new leaves protects against April cold fronts. Pollinated by solitary bees, seeds dispersed by forest ants.

**FALSE SOLOMON’S SEAL** *(Maianthemum racemosum)*

**Blooms:** Starry and clustered  
**Foliage:** Oval, dark green

Arching stems with alternate leaves and a cluster of flowers at the end, which turns to speckled fruit. The terminal blooms distinguish it from Solomon’s seal. Can be a big and showy plant where deer are not overpopulated.

**GOLDEN RAGWORT** *(Packera aurea)*

**Blooms:** Yellow with orange centers  
**Foliage:** Oval basal leaves, lobed stem leaves

Most of the year, its small, vaguely heart-shaped basal leaves are found as an evergreen groundcover in wet meadows and young woods. In May, ragwort’s cheerful daisy-like blooms can be extremely prolific, brightening entire meadows. Deer resistant.

**DWARF GINSENG** *(Panax trifolius)*

**Blooms:** White, spherical  
**Foliage:** Divided into threes

A diminutive plant, usually found along streamsides in mature woods. It is a reliable indicator of older forests that have not been recently disturbed. Its spherical flowers are notable, though small. It is a close relative of the ginseng of medicinal fame.

**MAYAPPLE** *(Podophyllum peltatum)*

**Blooms:** Diaphanous white  
**Leaves:** Whorl-shaped

Looking like a colony of notched umbrellas, Mayapple stems arise from vast and venerable underground rhizomes. Fruits feed box turtles and seeds are almost twice as likely to germinate after passing through the digestive tract of a turtle.
**SOLOMON’S SEAL** (*Polygonatum pubescens*)

Blooms: Greenish white  
Leaves: Oval, light green  

A common herb of well-drained woods. Sometimes one can find its long rhizomes growing in cracks in diabase boulders, stems perched improbably above rock. Congener *Polygonatum biflorum* is also occasionally found in the Sourlands.

**BLOODROOT** (*Sanguinaria canadensis*)

Blooms: White  
Leaves: Rounded crescent with notched lobes  

An early spring flower with showy, large blooms and interesting foliage. Usually found growing on slopes in rich forests, sometimes along Sourlands roadsides near forest. Pollinated by native bees and flies, seeds dispersed by forest ants.

**SKUNK CABBAGE** (*Symplocarpus foetidus*)

Blooms: Red, purple, green, and heavily patterned  
Foliage: Large and broad  

A dominant presence in swamps and stream edges until it goes dormant in summer. The blooms are enclosed within a spathe and arise from the mucks in late winter. Deer resistant.

**RUE ANEMONE** (*Thalictrum thalictroides*)

Blooms: White  
Foliage: In threes with rounded lobes  

A small but tough herb, often on small well-drained mounds or slopes without deep leaf litter, alongside oak sedge. Blooms for an extended period in April to May.

**COMMON BLUE VIOLET** (*Viola sororia*)

Blooms: Light blue to purple  
Foliage: Heart-shaped  

One of several violet species common in the Sourlands, common blue violet is present in woods, fields, gardens, and lawns. It is a host plant for the caterpillars of fritillaries. Other species of violet in the Sourlands include *Viola pubescens*, *Viola labradorica*, and the rare species *Viola rostrata*, which is locally common.