

Spring Beauty (*Claytonia virginica*)

Spring Beauty, one of our earliest spring wildflowers, often pushes its delicate blossoms up through the dry leaf litter that covers the woodland floor from the previous fall.

A low-growing perennial, Spring Beauty features clusters of star-like flowers, 3/4" wide, with 5 white to pinkish petals, darker pink veins, 5 stamens, and pink anthers on thin stems. These flowers welcome sunshine, but close and nod downward at night and during cloudy weather. Emitting a pleasant scent, this flower is spectacular in large patches.

The leaves of Spring Beauty are dark green, opposite and narrow (grass-like), with a single mid-rib. The plant is to 4-6" tall at bloom time (March –May), but continues to grow after blooming, reaching 9-12" before disappearing as it goes into dormancy in early summer. The root system consists of small round tubers (corms) and secondary roots. The corms are edible, having a sweet, chestnut-like flavor which was relished by Native Americans.

Establishment of this native plant in a new location can be somewhat difficult. Each fertilized flower produces a short 3-valved capsule containing several tiny seeds enclosed by 2 sepals. When ripe, the seeds are propelled with a force that carries them several inches from the parent plant. Therefore, to collect seeds, the seed heads must be wrapped before the seeds are propelled to the soil. Then, the freshly harvested seed must be immediately sown, since stored seeds have a tendency to rot. Another tactic is to dig up and transplant the corms as the plants go dormant.

Once established, Spring Beauty naturalizes easily by bulb offsets and self-seeding, and typically suffers no serious insect or disease problems. It fits well in rock gardens, woodland or wildflower gardens, and naturalized meadows. It may also be naturalized in lawns in a similar manner as spring crocuses. Spring Beauty prefers dappled sunlight during the spring, tolerating a variety of soils, but with abundant organic matter.

Spring Beauty is found throughout much of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan and in some areas of the Upper Peninsula. In the wild, it grows in rich, moist woodlands and valleys, meadows, and somewhat dry upland woods. The flowers are sought by various kinds of bees, butterflies, flies, and skippers for nectar and pollen. The flowers and leaves are eaten by deer and elk. The presence of Spring Beauty is a sure sign that local woodlands are full of wildflowers. When conspicuously absent, the area has likely been subjected to plows or bulldozers at some point in the past.

Claytonia caroliniana which often goes by the name of “Carolina Spring Beauty” is very similar to *Claytonia virginica* and is also native to Michigan. However, *Claytonia caroliniana* has broader, oval to oblong leaves. The scientific name *Claytonia* honors John Clayton (1694–1773), an early American botanist who supplied material for an eighteenth-century book on the flora of Virginia.

More photos and information are available at:

<http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=CLVI3>

http://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=CLVI3

http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/woodland/plants/spring_beauty.htm