“Almost every person, from childhood, has been touched by the untamed beauty of wildflowers.”

~ Lady Bird Johnson

More than 850 species of flowering plants grow in Shenandoah National Park. About 70% of them are native. Many native woodland wildflowers thrive in the dappled forest sunlight of springtime. They race to bloom and attract pollinators before overhead trees become fully leafed out and shade engulfs them. Hot summer sunshine is too strong for them. Now is their time.

Please help to ensure that wildflowers will be around for generations by leaving them unharmed. A flower that is picked misses the chance to spread thousands of seeds. A plant that is dug up is gone forever, and the loss affects insects, wildlife and everything else that’s connected to it. If you love them, leave them.

Meet Our Guest Naturalists and Program Leaders

Sam Droege is a wildlife biologist and head of the USGS Native Bee Inventory and Monitoring Lab at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, MD. He coordinated the North American Breeding Bird Survey Program and developed the Bioblitz and Frogwatch USA programs. His team is currently developing manuals and on-line identification guides for North American bees and producing public-domain, high-resolution images of insects and flowers.

Betty Gatewood, a retired middle school teacher, is a watercolor artist and Virginia Master Naturalist. She has provided cover art for the Virginia Native Plant Society’s “Wildflower of the Year” brochures and has illustrated the children’s books, Salmon Matters (2018) and Milkweed Matters (2017) and provided illustrations for Bobby Whitescarver’s Swoope Almanac (2019).

Bob Pickett retired from the U.S. Naval Academy as supervisor of the gardeners and greenhouses. He was the first naturalist for the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, and leads hikes, writes articles and maintains trails for the group. He has also led hikes for the Maryland and Virginia Native Plant Societies.

Jack Price is a Virginia Master Naturalist and is on the steering committee for the statewide Virginia Master Naturalist program. He is a 14-year member of the board of directors and past president of the Shenandoah National Park Association. Jack leads educational seminars sponsored by SNPA and is an active Shenandoah National Park volunteer.

Ann and Rob Simpson are biologists, professional photographers and naturalists. Rob is retired professor of natural resources at Lord Fairfax Community College. Ann teaches general biology and anatomy & physiology, as well as nature photography at LFCC. The Simpsons are authors of numerous books on national parks that promote environmental stewardship.

Jean Stephens is a Virginia Master Naturalist and president of the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club’s Southern Shenandoah Valley Chapter. As a Park volunteer, she works on projects aimed at invasive plant removal and protecting trees from the emerald ash borer. Jean is an avid hiker and wildflower enthusiast.

Robin Williams is a Virginia Master Naturalist and past board member of the Piedmont Chapter. She is also a board member of the Piedmont Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society. Robin regularly volunteers on a Park exotic invasive plant removal project. She initiated the NABA Fourth of July Butterfly Count in Washington, VA.

Kristin Zimet worked as a nature guide for Clarke County Parks and Recreation and Smithsonian Journeys. She is a docent for The Nature Conservancy at Ice Mountain Preserve, WV, and for the State Arboretum of Virginia. She is a Virginia Master Naturalist and board member of the Virginia Native Plant Society’s Piedmont Chapter.
Saturday, May 9

Meadows School Meander
9:00 to 11:00 a.m.
Look for bellwort, bishop’s cap, and other beauties on this former fire road. Meet at Meadows School parking area, mile 56.8 (west side of Skyline Drive). 1 mile. Elevation change: about 400 ft. Limited parking.
Mara Meisel, Park Ranger

Wonders of the Mill Prong (repeats Sunday with different hike leader)
9:00 a.m. to noon
Trillium, jack-in-the-pulpit and many more can be found along this trail that never fails to delight wildflower lovers. 2 miles. Elevation change: about 400 ft. Meet at Milam Gap parking (mile 32.4).
Kristin Zimet and Rob Williams, Guest Naturalists

Hike to the Highest Peak (repeats Sunday afternoons)
9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
Seek out wood anemone, purple clematis and more as you hike to the Park’s highest summit, Hawksbill Mountain (4,050 ft.) and a great view. 3 miles. Elevation change: about 200 ft. Meet at Fishers Gap Overlook (mile 49.3).
Mara Meisel, Park Ranger

South River Falls Hike
1:30 to 5:00 p.m.
Look for early saxifrage, wild geranium and more flowers on this trail to a viewpoint overlooking an 83-ft. waterfall. Steep 3.3 miles. Elevation change: about 900 ft. Meet at trailhead in South River Falls picnic area (mile 62.5).
Bob Pickett, Guest Naturalist

Franklin Cliffs Stroll
2:30 to 3:30 p.m.
An amazing variety of wildflowers is just a few steps from your car! ½ mile. Franklin Cliffs Overlook (mile 49).
Ann and Rob Simpson, Guest Naturalists

Sunday, May 10

Bearfence Mountain Hike
9:00 to 11:30 a.m.
Wild pinks and birdfoot violets are among the flowers we hope to find on this hike to a 180-degree view. 1.5 miles. Elevation change: about 300 ft. Hike does not include Bearfence Rock Scramble. Meet at Meadows School Fire Road parking (mile 56.8, west side of Skyline Drive). Limited parking.
Mara Meisel, Park Ranger

Spring Birds of Pocosin
9:00 to 11:30 a.m.
Listen and look for cerulean warblers, scarlet tanagers and other migrants near the spring and surrounding woods. You might discover a few wildflowers along the way. Easy ½–1 mile stroll. Bring binoculars. Meet at Pocosin Cabin parking (unmarked, mile 59.5, east side of Skyline Drive). Limited parking.
Alan Williams, Park Ecologist

Wonders of the Mill Prong (repeat of Saturday hike, different leader)
9:00 a.m. to noon
Look for trillium, jack-in-the-pulpit and more along this trail that never fails to delight wildflower lovers. 2 miles. Elevation change: about 400 ft. Meet at Milam Gap parking (mile 52.4).
Jean Stephens, Guest Naturalist

Passamaquoddy Loop Hike
9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
Look for moss phlox, trillium and more along the Appalachian Trail to Little Stony Man Cliffs and the Passamaquoddy Trail. Great valley views. Very rocky and steep in places. 3 miles. Elevation change: about 560 ft. Meet at Stony Man Nature Trail parking (mile 41.7, north entrance of Skyland Resort).
Bob Pickett, Guest Naturalist

Book Signing with the Simpsons
Noon to 12:45 p.m.
Chat with naturalists & authors Ann & Rob Simpson as they autograph your purchases. Books are for sale in the Shenandoah National Park Association book store, or bring your own. Dickey Ridge Visitor Center (mile 4.6).

Ramble on the “Layton Sisk Plateau”
1:30 to 3:30 p.m.
We may find puscitites, trillium and perhaps a surprise or two in the fields and woods as we take the Skyland-Big Meadows Horse Trail to a former home site. 1 mile. Elevation change: about 150 ft. Meet at Upper Hawksbill parking area, mile 46.7.
Mara Meisel, Park Ranger

Snead Farm Stroll
1:30 to 4:00 p.m.
Take a leisurely, out-and-back walk along a trail that leads through a former apple orchard and home site with standing barn. There may be some surprises! 1.4 mile. Elevation change: about 190 ft. Meet at Dickey Ridge picnic area (mile 4.7).
Ann and Rob Simpson, Guest Naturalists

Reminders
• Wear sturdy shoes and bring water on all hikes.
• Evaluate your personal fitness and health to choose an appropriate program.
• Please don’t bring pets on programs. Service animals are welcome.
• Come prepared for wet weather. Walks may be conducted in light rain, but will be canceled in case of thunderstorms.
• Length of trail listed is for entire hike.
• More about Shenandoah’s wildflowers at our website: www.nps.gov/shen

Featured program
Botanical Art Workshop
1:30 to 4:00 p.m.
Learn a few botany basics, pick up tips on observation and composition, then sketch and use watercolors to paint what you see. No art or science background is necessary – just come and have fun! Meet at Byrd Visitor Center auditorium (mile 51). Rain or shine. Wear walking shoes and long pants. Be prepared to sit on the ground, or bring a folding chair. All art supplies will be provided.
Betty Gatewood, Artist and Naturalist

A Touch of Wilderness
1:30 to 4:00 p.m.
A variety of wildflowers may be seen on this section of the Skyland-Big Meadows Horse Trail, leading into a section of the Park’s designated wilderness. 1 mile. Elevation change: about 200 ft. Meet at Fishers Gap Overlook (mile 49.3).
Mara Meisel, Park Ranger

Millers Head Hike
1:30 to 4:00 p.m.
Lyre-leaved rockcrass and other uncommon plants might be seen on this hike to an observation platform and view of the Shenandoah Valley. Very rocky and steep in places, with uphill return. 1.5 miles. Elevation change: about 250 ft. Turn in at south entrance of Skyland Resort (mile 42.5) and follow signs to amphitheater at top of hill.
Stephen Paull, Biological Science Technician

South River Falls Hike
1:30 to 5:00 p.m.
Look for early saxifrage, wild geranium and more flowers on this trail to a viewpoint overlooking an 83-ft. waterfall. Steep 3.3 miles. Elevation change: about 900 ft. Meet at trailhead in South River Falls picnic area (mile 62.5).
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Ann and Rob Simpson, Guest Naturalists

“Youth Art in the Park” Contest Recognition Ceremony
Noon to 12:30 p.m.
Join us to congratulate the winning artists in the Park’s wildflower art contest. Byrd Visitor Center auditorium (mile 51).