
SUNNYSIDE THYMES

Volume 32, Issue 2

“Helping Others Grow”

February 2023

Know Your Natives

By Jean Wolph, SMG Member

Shade-Loving Native Perennials of Southern Indiana

Having a backyard that is largely shady, I am always on the hunt for perennials that both love the shade and bear flowers. These are ones that I've been able to find at online nurseries and have ordered for spring planting. You can find more information at <https://www.wildflower.org/>, the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, which also provided the photos.

- **Foamflower** (*Tiarella cordifolia*) spreads by underground stems and forms colonies, so it's a great groundcover for shady, wooded sites. The common name comes from the fact that the tiny flowers and stamens resemble foam. Flower stems are 6–16 inches long and have 15–50 flowers each, depending on the variety. It flowers March through July and is recommended because it doesn't have the invasive qualities that some other groundcovers do.
- **Celandine Poppy** (*stylophorum diphyllum*) is also called Yellow Wood Poppy because of its large yellow flowers. It has 12-14 inch leafy stalks.. Flowers are produced in clusters. It's found primarily in moist forests over chalky rock outcroppings and ravines. They flower from early spring to early summer.
- **Indian Pink** (*spigelia marilandica*) is in the Pink family, but its name doesn't mean that it is pink in color. Pinks have a distinctive almost star-like bloom and pink roots. The Indian Pink flowers in June. It likes moist woods, ravines, and stream-banks and thrives in partial or full shade. It will grow up to 2 feet high.
- **Solomon's Seal** (*polygonatum biflorum*) is a good choice for a background plant as it can get quite large. Stalks are from 1-5 ft. long. The greenish-white, bell-like flowers produce blue berries. The

name comes from the fact that when the leaf stalk breaks away from the rhizome, it leaves a distinctive scar said to resemble the official seal of King Solomon. Interestingly, Native Americans and early settlers used the starchy rhizomes as food.

- **Virginia Bluebell** (*mertensia virginica*) is found in rich, moist soils and even in rocky areas. It blooms from March to June, named for its lavender-blue bell-shaped flowers. Seeds can be planted six weeks before the last frost date. After flowering, seeds can be collected from the yellowish-brown fruit that appears in late June. Rhizomes can be divided while the plant is dormant.
- **White Turtlehead** (*chelone glabra*) is especially recommended because it blooms July through September. It's a large plant, 1-4 (or more) feet tall, and has spikes of white flowers that, as the name suggests, resemble tortoise heads. Seedlings germinate after one year and flowers appear after two. It prefers marshy areas, stream banks and wet ditches. It will tolerate sun and partial shade, as well as shade.
- **Jacob's Ladder** (*polemonium reptans*) blooms in April and May and likes moist, rich soil and stream-banks. Plants generally grow 10-15 inches tall. The flowers are favored by native bees and bumblebees.

A full brochure on “Landscaping with Plants Native to Indiana” is available from the Indiana Native Plant and Wildflower Society at <https://www.in.gov/dnr/nature-preserves/files/np-LandscapingNativePlantsBrochure.pdf>. There you'll find additional categories such as winter interest, erosion control, bird habitat, ground covers, rain garden, butterfly food, autumn color. There are also sections by location: grasslands (sun), water's edge (sun), wood's edge (part shade), and woodland (shade).
