

MUDDY BRANCH
ALLIANCE



WILD WANDERERS

PLANT
FINDERS
CHALLENGE



WILD MUDDY BRANCH WANDERERS ALLIANCE PLANT FINDERS CHALLENGE

Welcome, wild wanderer! Thank you for being a member of the Alliance!

WE STAND TOGETHER TO PROTECT THE EARTH!

Before you start this forest adventure, please write the following words on your heart:

I promise to be a nature protector. On our trails, I will leave no trace behind me, and when I can, I'll try my best to leave things better than I found it. When I'm out there exploring, I'll leave the plants I find to grow, so that they can live free, just like me.

Signed,

Nature protector, Very Cool Person

These plants can be found throughout our trails, and many of them in our backyards. Some you might even find in unexpected places! We're excited to share this challenge with you and introduce you to these plant friends growing around us all the time. Print this and use as a coloring book and explorer's journal! Record your finds in the scientific report box at the top of each page. Remember to keep the last page digital, to view color photos of these plants on your phone.

Please share your forest adventures with us! Take a picture of your wild self with your plant finds, and tag us on Instagram [@MuddyBranchAlliance](#) and Facebook at [Facebook.com/MuddyBranchAlliance](#) using the hashtag [#MBAWildWanderers](#).

Please enjoy the wild outdoors, be safe, and teach to others what the plants teach you!

VIOLETS

Viola sp.

<input type="checkbox"/>	SCIENTIFIC REPORT
DATE	____-____-____
LOCATION:	
OBSERVATIONS:	

Violets are one of the first flowers to bloom in springtime. Usually, flowers are an important step in plants making seeds, but not for violets. Their first flowers don't make seeds. If you check back later in the season, you'll see that violets grow another, less noticeable type of flower which does produce seeds. It looks like a small, three-cornered star.

When we think of violets, we may remember the Valentine's rhyme. But violets are not always blue and purple! Violets can also be white in color, or bright yellow. See if you can find these special violets.



Leaves are heart-shaped or oval, with scalloped edges.

Flowers are nodding and have five petals; the top four sit above the largest, bottom petal, which has some dark veins or stripes.

There is one leaf or one blossom per stem.

The whole plant grows no larger than 6 inches tall.

Violets like to grow in damp, shady woodland and sunny lawns.

JACK IN THE PULPIT

Arisaema triphyllum

SCIENTIFIC REPORT

DATE _ _ _ _ _

LOCATION:

OBSERVATIONS:



Jack-in-the-pulpits grow all over our trails on the forest floor.

You might spot the three-part leaf—or maybe you see Jack first. He is the flower stalk (called a *spadix*) looking out from his seat of honor inside the flower's *spathe*, which is the big, green, petal-like leaf that curves around and over Jack like a pulpit.

This flower starts blooming in May, but may show up earlier if the weather is warm. Jack comes up first, and his pulpit follows.

This plant can reach 1-2 feet in height. Sometimes the spathe is striped and is both purple and green. Check back in late summer to see the red berries that will form on the flower stalk.

What do you think Jack might be talking about from his pulpit?

SPEEDWELL

Veronica sp.

SCIENTIFIC REPORT

DATE ____-____-____

LOCATION:

OBSERVATIONS:

The scientific name of this plant is *Veronica*. We bet lots of people never knew they were named after this plant.

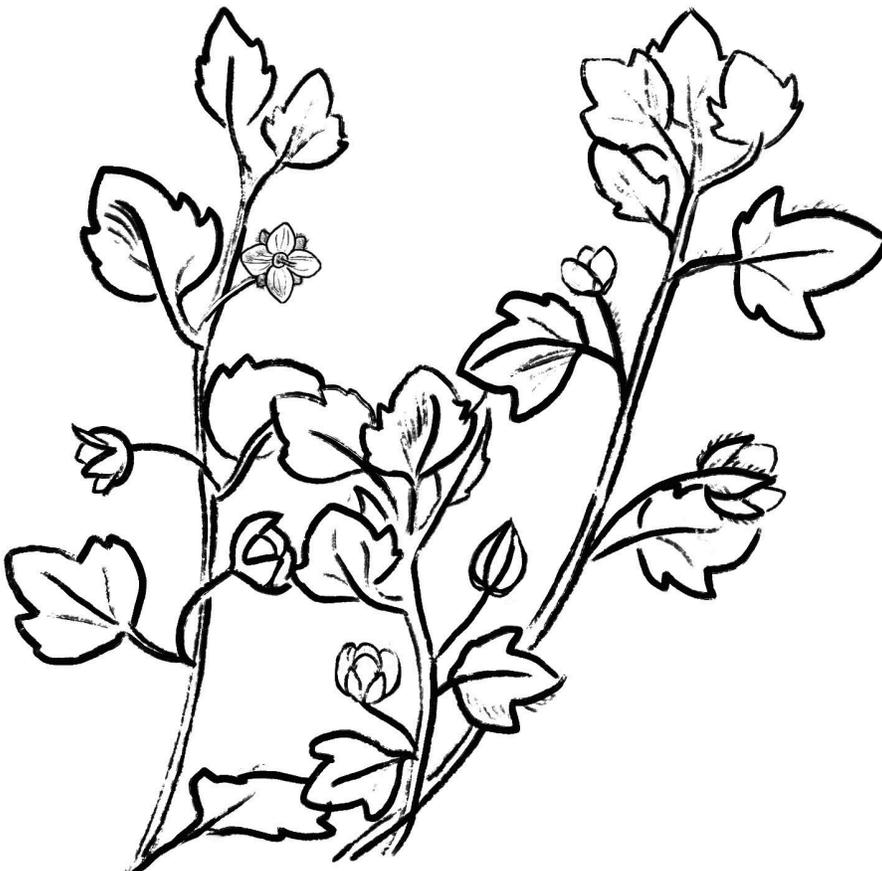
This little plant grows along the ground. The leaves vary in shape according to the species of speedwell. You might notice the whole plant is all covered in little fuzzy white hairs.

It has tiny blue flowers with four petals. Usually, the flowers are light blue and have dark blue stripes; and the center of the flower has a touch of yellow. When this plant grows in big clumps, all the little flowers look like flecks of fallen sky.

You can find this plant in sunny fields and alongside paths, almost anywhere you look.

Plants have two different types of names: scientific names, and common names. The scientific name, for example, *Veronica hederifolia*, has two parts: the genus and species. Scientists use these names to categorize all plants and animals into groups, based on their similarity to each other. The genus is always capitalized, and the species is lower case. These names are the same in every language, so that everyone across the world can communicate about each specific plant without getting confused. Plants have also have common names, like Speedwell. Sometimes, there are several common names for the same plant. They usually have to do with what the plant looks like, or what people use the plant for, either historically or nowadays. Speedwell probably got its name because it's a speedy grower.

See if you can identify what kind of speedwell you've found by looking at the shape of the leaf.



FLOWER



IVY LEAF

V. hederifolia



THYME LEAF

V. serpyllifolia



BIRDEYE

V. persica



FIELD

V. agrestis

SKUNK CABBAGE

Symplocarpus foetidus

When someone says flower, what do you imagine?
Something soft, colorful and fragrant?

Well, this plant has flowers that smell like a skunk!

This plant comes up early in the spring. First a big, waxy, speckled maroon leaf pops out of the ground. This leaf is a *spathe*, and grows to shelter and protect the plant's flower. It's as if the flower has its own little room to keep it safe.

When you spot this plant, peek inside the spathe and see if you can spy the flower: it looks like a spikey ball.

In mid-spring, after the flower is done blooming, the plant grows big, shiny green leaves about as long as your arm!



SCIENTIFIC REPORT

DATE ____-____-____

LOCATION:

OBSERVATIONS:

Why would a flower want to smell like a skunk?

It's to attract flies! Flies pollinate the skunk cabbage when they fly around between the stinky flowers.

Bees are famous for pollinating our flowers, but many other insects, even ones we think of as pests, are very important pollinators.

Insects such as flies, ants, moths, wasps, and beetles are all essential to the life of the forest. Without pollinators, nothing could grow!

Pollinators and plants have a **symbiotic** relationship. They both provide what the other one needs. They are independent and rely on each other to thrive.

You can find the skunk cabbage in low-lying wet areas.

One impressive spread of skunk cabbage sits on the Muddy Branch trail behind Dufief Pond. Enjoy traipsing through this field of giant leaves in the late spring, or look out for spikey flowers hiding in their spathe houses in early spring.

Let us know what these stinky flowers smell like to you!

SPRING BEAUTY

claytonia virginica

SCIENTIFIC REPORT

DATE ____-____-____

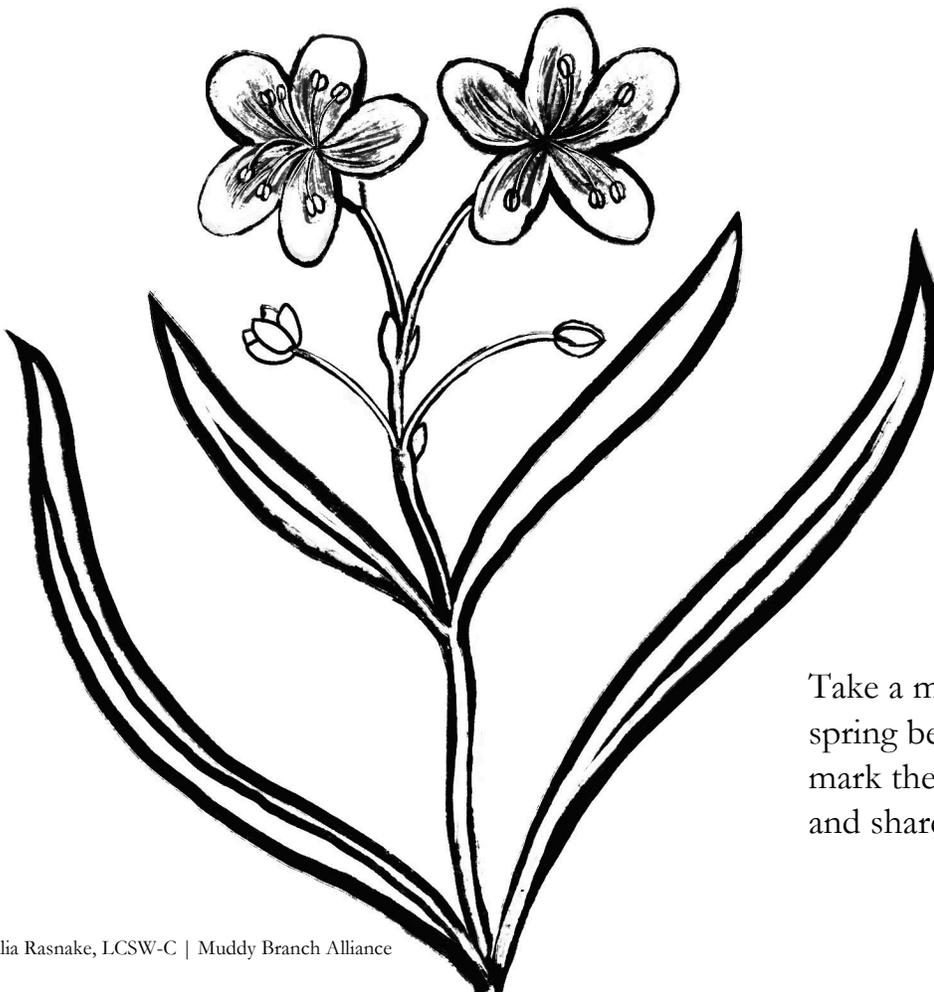
LOCATION:

OBSERVATIONS:

Spring beauties have small, five-petaled flowers in white and pink that grow on delicate round stems. If you get down to eye level, you can see how intensely colorful these little path-side flowers can be.

The leaves look like green blades of grass. They grow in sunny fields and shady forests, and sometimes so many grow together that it looks like someone rolled out a carpet of tiny white flowers.

These plants are perennials, which means they survive the winter underground and come up year after year. During warm, sunny months, they store nutrients in their specialized roots, called *corms*. In the winter, the leaves wither away, but the roots survive. The corms sprout new leaves and flowers when the warmer months come back, and the cycle repeats.



This plant is sometimes known by another name--fairy spuds!

Those corms look like tiny potatoes, just the right size for a fairy to eat.

We especially enjoy the carpets of these flowers on the Muddy Branch trail between Blockhouse Point and Pennyfield Lock during the spring months.

Take a minute to build a fairy house near these spring beauties, and make a stack of stones to mark the spot—make sure to snap a picture and share it with us!

BLOODROOT

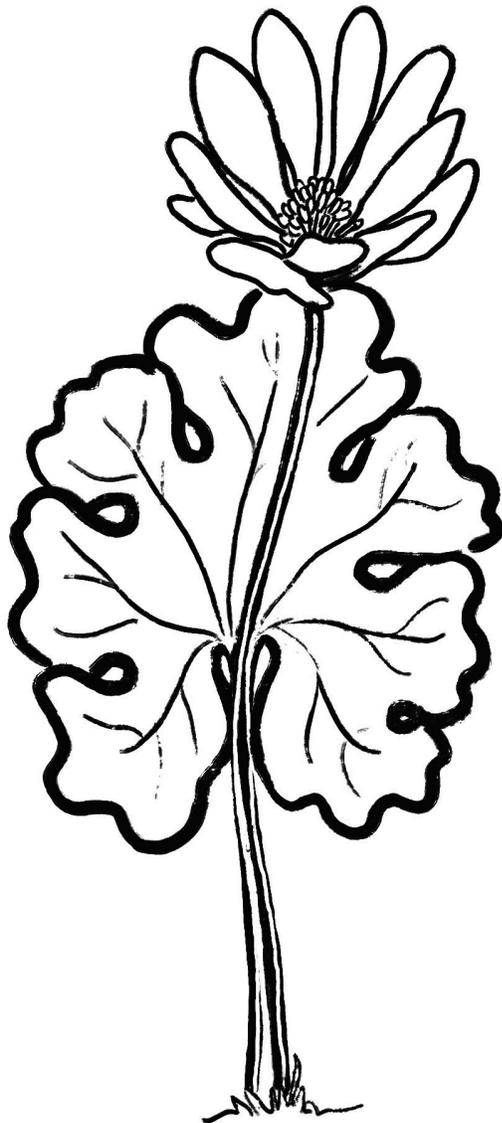
Sanguinaria canadensis

<input type="checkbox"/>	SCIENTIFIC REPORT
DATE	__-__-__
LOCATION:	
OBSERVATIONS:	

This amazing plant blooms on the forest floor in early spring, and it has a very unique leaf and flower.

First, a wavy, lobed leaf emerges, clasping and protecting a delicate flower stem. The flower opens to show 8-12 white petals surrounding a puff of yellow *stamens*. Stamens are the part of the flower which produces pollen.

After blooming, the fantastic leaf continues to grow and open towards the sun. It can grow up to ten inches across! This flower is spring *ephemeral*, meaning it shows up only very briefly beneath the trees.



Bloodroot sounds a little gory. How did this beautiful flower get such a bloody name?

As it turns out, the name comes from the bright red color of its root, hidden under the soil. There are many types of roots, but this plant has a *rhizome*, which is more like a big underground stem. Every year, the plant stores food in the rhizome and the rhizome gets bigger.

In the winter, the leaves fall off, but in the springtime, the rhizome sends up new leaves and flowers. It can grow horizontally and can send up shoots in new places.

Look carefully along the forest floor, and you may spot one! Please don't dig up the root; that will hurt the plant.

TROUT LILY

Erythronium americanum

SCIENTIFIC REPORT

DATE ____-____-____

LOCATION: _____

OBSERVATIONS: _____

Trout lily leaves are speckled with purple and brown spots, just like the scale pattern of the fish they are named after.

This plant has a bright yellow, six-petaled flower. The flower nods forward and the petals curve backwards from the center of the flower.

It grows from a bulb deep beneath the soil. Each bulb grows only one leaf--unless it's blooming; then it has two.

You can find it on the forest floor in early spring before the trees' leaves come out and block the sun.



Once you spot one trout lily leaf, you may realize you see tons of them! These plants grow in colonies, which are sometimes hundreds of years old.

Those little green leaves that sprout and wither within one year can actually be part of a huge, ancient network of plants.

We spot these plants frequently along the Muddy Branch Trail, in rich shady soil near the creek. Let us know how many you can count!

LESSER CELANDINE

Ficaria verna

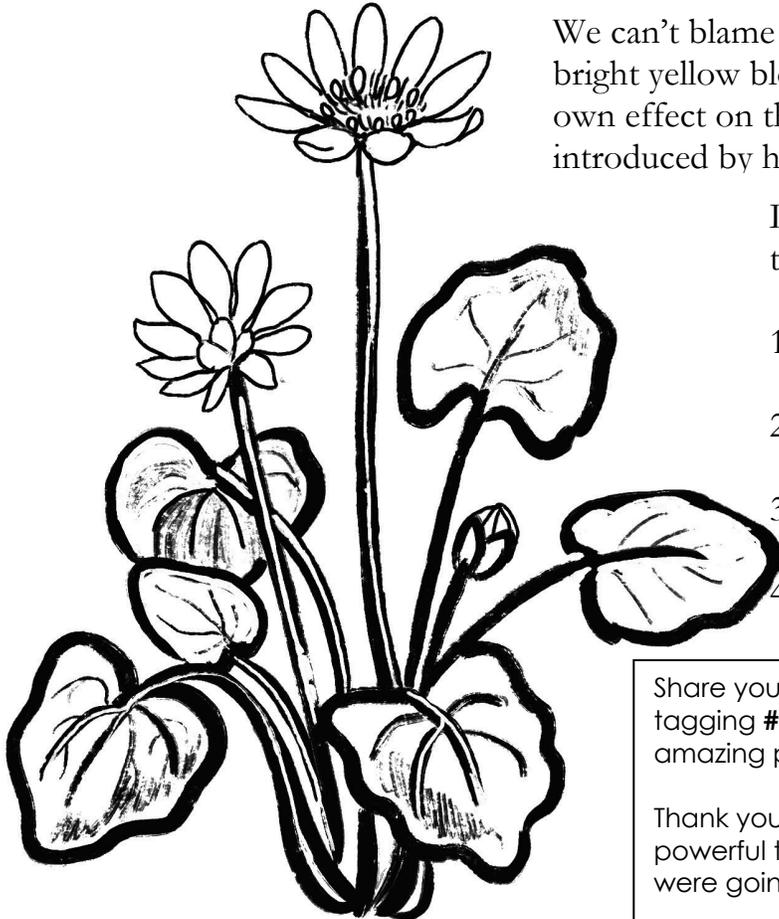
<input type="checkbox"/>	SCIENTIFIC REPORT
DATE	____-____-____
LOCATION:	
OBSERVATIONS:	

This early spring wildflower will draw your eye with its bright, glossy yellow flower. It has many smooth green leaves that are shaped like a lily pad or upside-down heart, and it grows in spreading clumps, often forming a carpet. It loves to grow along riverbanks in sandy soils and can be spotted near creeks throughout our trail system.

This plant is considered **non-native**, or **invasive**, which means it came to our ecosystem from somewhere else, and is growing out of control.

Why is that a big deal? Well, all of nature is connected in an **ecosystem**. All plants, insects, animals, and fungi in one area evolved together millions of years and rely on each other for food and resources in a cycle of life.

But when people introduce a plant to a new area, it isn't part of that cycle. Insects, birds, and other animals can't really use it, eat it, shelter in it as well, or rely on it to live. It takes up all the sunlight, water, and soil, but it doesn't give much back to the ecosystem that other members can use. It doesn't even have any predators, so it grows out of control, making the problem worse. Ecosystems need a LOT of time to adjust to even small changes, so invasive plants can really damage an ecosystem in a short period of time. Lesser celandine pushes out plants like bloodroot and spring beauty on the forest floor.



We can't blame a flower for growing, but we can take the bright yellow blooms as a reminder to think about what our own effect on the environment is. Invasive plants are introduced by humans, after all!

Let's make a list. What are four things you do to take care of the earth?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Share your answers with us online @**MuddyBranchAlliance** tagging **#MBAwildwanderers**! Telling others about our amazing planet is a great way to take care of the earth!

Thank you for being a nature protector—your voice is a powerful tool to protect our ecosystem! Did you know you were going to help save the world today?

Thank you, wild wanderers!
Stay safe and keep exploring!

Color photos – sourced from Wikipedia.com.

Please be reminded that this is NOT a definitive source of plant identification, but rather a learning activity, and you should absolutely not use this guide in order to collect or forage plants for any purpose. Some plants are even toxic. Thank you for your attention to this warning!

Violets: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viola_sororia



Jack In the pulpit:
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arisaema_triphyllum



Speedwell:
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veronica_persica



Spring Beauty:
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claytonia_virginica



Bloodroot:
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanguinaria



Skunk Cabbage:
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symplocarpus_foetidus



Trout lily:
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erythronium_americanum



Lesser Celandine:
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ficaria_verna

