

## **Wildflower Favourites**

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Manitoba is known for the beauty and diversity of its wildflowers and many hundreds of species are found in Whiteshell Provincial Park. I have written about a few of my favourites including everyone's favourite orchid, the Showy Lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium reginae*).

Prairie Crocus (*Anemone patens*) is one of the first flowers to appear in the spring and is Manitoba's floral emblem. The wide-open, mauve flowers are pressed against the earth like fuzzy ears listening for signs that the earth is waking up from its winter sleep. They must hear the tinkle of water trickling over the soil from patches of melting snow and ice. If they listen closer they will also hear the faint rustling of an ant colony coming to life as the sun warms the anthill and the scrabbling of little feet as the first ants cautiously peek out to see whether it's a good day to start spring-cleaning.

The Common Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) will also be found in every sunny, sheltered spot of ground. Some people consider dandelions a weed but they must never have tasted a wonderful spring salad made from their young, tender green leaves and soft white roots, or the rich and mellow "coffee" that can be made from roasting and grinding the mature roots. The flowers themselves can be made into a golden coloured wine that will get you through a cold winter and serve as a spring tonic. Children enjoy making bracelets and chains from the flowers and playing with the fluffy seedheads. I don't know about you but I like to admire and eat dandelions rather than spend my time poisoning them.

Wild Roses (*Rosa* spp.) with their sweet-scented five-petaled flowers in pink, red or white tell us that summer is really here. The fresh petals taste a bit like pink bubblegum and make a refreshing nibble on a hot day or a soothing cup of tea in the evening. When dried these same petals and hips add interest to potpourri mixtures. The fruits or hips make an excellent jelly and a good emergency food that is high in Vitamin C. Care should be taken to eat only the outer red flesh as the hairy seeds found inside irritate the throat and other mucus membranes. The tender leaves are a favourite of young white-tailed deer. There are several species of wild roses including the thorny, pink and sweet-scented Prickly Rose (*Rosa acicularis*) and the Smooth Rose (*Rosa blanda*) that has very few thorns. My favourite is the Low Prairie Rose (*Rosa arkansana*). It blooms in July along sandy roadsides. The large flowers come in all colours including pink with red stripes.



Photo 1: Low Prairie Rose



Photo 2: White-tailed deer - fawn

The gorgeous Showy Lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium reginae*) is everybody's favourite native orchid. The tall plant with its large pink and white flowers and fuzzy leaves can be found growing along the side of the highways and the edges of cedar bogs in the Whiteshell. It is one of our most admired, photographed and sought-after native plants and is becoming less common. Please do not pick the flowers or attempt to transplant this lady's-slipper.



Photo 3: Showy lady's-slipper

In the late summer and fall the Fringed Gentians (*Gentiana crinita*) appear. This plant with its brilliant blue flowers and paired opposite leaves can be found in wet meadows, damp woods and sometimes in gravelly ditches. There are several species of gentians including the less common Closed Gentian (*Gentiana andrewsii*) with its blue, purple or white closed flowers being found at the top of the flower spike and in the leaf axils. Large bumblebees are the pollinators and are the only insects strong enough to force their way inside the closed petals. Gentians were named for King Gentius in Illyria on the Balkan Peninsula. He is said to have discovered a cure for digestive ailments in a yellow-flowered gentian found in southeast Europe.

Native Orchid Conservation Inc. leads field trips to take people to see wildflowers including native orchid species. Please look at our website at [www.nativeorchid.org](http://www.nativeorchid.org) to learn more. ~~This year we will once again lead a field trip in Whiteshell Provincial Park for cottagers on Sunday, June 12th at 10:00am.~~ Please meet us at the trailhead near the riding stables in Falcon Lake and we will take a hike along the Falcon Creek Trail. The walk is approximately 2km long and takes about two hours. It is moderately strenuous and involves climbing up steep slippery rocks and over windfalls and some parts of the trail may be wet. Please dress appropriately and bring a hat, insect repellent, sunscreen and water. The geology of the area is very interesting and you might like to pick up a brochure on this trail from the Conservation Office in Falcon Lake or visit the geology exhibits at the West Hawk Lake Museum beforehand.

You may sign up for this field trip at the Whiteshell Cottagers Annual General Meeting on ~~March 16th~~ or phone our field trip coordinator ~~Bob McGillivray at 261-8347.~~ We usually go rain or shine but if we are forced to cancel due to weather conditions we will make every effort to contact you and reschedule the hike. I hope to see you there.