

Spring 2025

# TheParkNextDoor

*magazine*



For The Love Of Spring

Look Inside For: Signs Of Spring, Camping Local, Celebrating Earth Day, Springtime Photo Walk Fun, Spring Reads, Spotlight on Schoen Laufen Park, and more!



## Greetings, All ~

Well, March has arrived, and a year has passed since the very first issue of *TheParkNextDoor* Magazine went live. Four seasonal issues later, we've come full circle and landed on the precipice of spring again. Ahh, glorious spring. I'm definitely ready for it. How about you?

Another year on and I'm still in love with our Wisconsin nature. With our parks, preserves and forests. There's plenty more to explore and discover across the state, so let's get to it.

I recently had the opportunity to partner with local naturalist Danielle Pahlisch for a late winter walk at Forest Exploration Center. We were looking for hidden treasures of the winter wood, and we found plenty. We had a great group of enthusiastic nature lovers along on the trail. You can see what we found in *Secrets Of The Winter Woods*.

If you're a fan of our National Parks (as I am), you'll be saddened to know that access to many of them may be cut off this year due to large staff reductions. Let your voices be heard, and let your representatives know how much they mean to you. But remember that Wisconsin has a great deal of natural beauty to offer as well.

Make plans to visit your Wisconsin State Parks, and your neighborhood and local community parks. Enjoy pitching a tent, or escaping in a camper? *Camp It Up!* has got some great ideas for you, and you won't have far to travel.

Spring and summer bring lots of color to the Wisconsin landscape. I'm a novice gardener, but I have been working to learn a bit more each growing season. I'm excited to apply what I've learned from last year's efforts to this year's garden. I share some of my successes from last summer in *Easy Bloomin'*. If I can grow it, you can, too.

I'm hoping to take a long weekend trip this summer and explore and document parts of natural Wisconsin I've yet to visit. If you have a favorite spot, please feel free to share. I'm looking for ideas. :)

If you're a birdwatcher, take note, **birdcast.info** is now live, with daily migration forecasts, and tallies of how many birds passed over the night before. Type in your city and state and see what's flying by.

After a long winter, it's going to feel amazing to be outside enjoying the fresh air, the warm breezes, and to hear the magic of birdsong overhead. These days pass quickly by. Don't miss them.

Happy Spring!  
~Kimberly



A traveler, singer, novice photographer, humane gardener, and nature lover. Documenting and sharing the beauty that is Wisconsin since 2014.

Cover photo taken on  
my backyard lawn  
in West Allis, WI  
[theparknextdoor@outlook.com](mailto:theparknextdoor@outlook.com)



# What's Inside

Take heart, folks, spring is on the horizon! We've crossed the threshold into March. Daylight saving time begins on Sunday, March 9 and the added daylight we've been treated to so far will grow even longer. What a relief! Although there's still a chance we could get snow, chances are it won't hang around long. As we head closer to the actual Spring Equinox (March 20), take note - you'll feel the change in the air, hear the sound of returning birds, and spot buds starting to pop on the trees. Aahh, there is something so lovely about spring!

One of the first signs of this spectacular season is the rise of dandelions in lawns and fields. Whether they bring you cheer, or you could do without them, consider the possibility of making peace with them. **For The Love Of Dandelions** pleads the case.

In this issue our spotlight park is **Schoen Laufen Park** in Germantown. It's a lovely park in all seasons, with easy walking trails, and great birdwatching. Make a plan to visit soon and get to know this local gem.

The teeter-totter of weather patterns in March can be frustrating. So be prepared, and make plans to **Book Toward Spring With A Good Read**. We've highlighted three books in a variety of subjects that you can turn to on a less than lovely afternoon.

As spring fever takes hold, explore your creative side and get outside for some **Springtime Photo Walk Fun**. We've got a list of prompts for you, but you can, of course, come up with your own as well.

If you're dreaming of a garden filled with colorful blooms, start making plans. **Easy Bloomin'** provides some great ideas for starting your own flower filled sanctuary. Whether you have a garden plot or a charming patio with a few containers, you can sow a bouquet from seed. This feature offers your green (or not so green) thumb the opportunity for success.

It's not too early to make plans for a weekend in the wilderness. There are plenty of campgrounds available in the surrounding areas that don't require traveling a long way north. **Camp It Up!** has over 20 ideas to inspire a local camping adventure.

Did you know that 2025 marks the 125th anniversary of Wisconsin State Parks? There will be celebrations throughout the parks, throughout the year. Check out **Happy 125th Anniversary Wisconsin State Parks** for details and links for more information.

Honor the earth this April, and **Celebrate Earth Day**. We've got some ideas for you.

If you enjoy birdwatching, you'll want to check out **Celebrate World Migratory Bird Day**. We've got details on some of the celebrations taking place in Wisconsin this migration season.

If you're a fan of peony blooms, you'll want to read up on peony festivals, farms, and museums in the state. **Peony Love** has got it covered.

Smartphones are ubiquitous these days. So, no matter where you are, let your inner photographer shine. **The Camera In Your Pocket** can make art of your everyday world.

It's not too late to celebrate the beauty hidden in the winter woods. I attended a group nature hike at Forest Exploration Center on March 1. It was cold and windy, but very sunny. A perfect day for a group of 20 to go in search of the **Secrets Of The Winter Woods**. We found some, too.

Looking forward, **What's Splashin'** will fill you in on a few notable dates on the spring calendar.

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# FOR THE LOVE OF DANDELIONS

Come spring our backyard is a sea of dandelions and I am in love with it. After all those months of gray winter weather, the landscape turns lushly green, with bright yellow, cheerful blooms everywhere. It's like someone spun a color wheel and it landed on dandelion.

While I'm sure some of my neighbors "tsk-tsk" the clusters of bright yellow popping up in our wild lawn, I have noticed there are more yards in the area blooming with these dandy plants than there used to be.

Maybe it's a sign of acceptance, a decision not to use chemicals on the lawn, or simply a financial decision - having a service spray your lawn for weeds and insect prevention is not only poisonous, it's expensive.

It's certainly healthier for all creatures to avoid the chemicals.



Not only do pollinators enjoy dandelions as a first bloom of the season, rabbits eat the stems and leaves, and, when the blooms are fading, lots of birds (including spring migrants) eat the seeds as well.







As a child I'm sure, once upon a time, that I picked more than my share of bouquets of these colorful blooms to gift to my mother. Sadly, the picked blooms tended to fade fast, barely making it into a recycled jelly jar.

I read somewhere that if you cut them (instead of pulling them from the ground) like you would any other cut flower, there is a better chance of them hanging on a bit in an arrangement. So, I decided to give it a try.

I picked some of the tallest ones, cutting them with garden clippers, and put them in water right away. Then I filled a mini vase with them.



The fresh vase of blooms closed up that night, but the next morning, placed in sunshine, the blooms reopened.







If you're looking for an easy, scenic walk, no matter the season, Schoen Laufen park, in Germantown, has got you covered.

It is indeed a beautiful walk (which is the English definition of the park name). The park is 39 acres, located along the Menomonee River. There are multiple easy gravel trails winding through the beech/maple forest. Educational markers along the trail provide details on the wildflowers and trees that bloom and grow here.

There are plenty of park benches along the the river, as well as along the walking trails. Perfect for relaxing and enjoying the scenery. A quick check on [ebird](#) will tell you that spring and fall migration brings lots of birds to the area. We tracked the gravel trails at just over a mile.

Location: N108 W18500 Lilac Lane, Germantown, WI (Washington County)



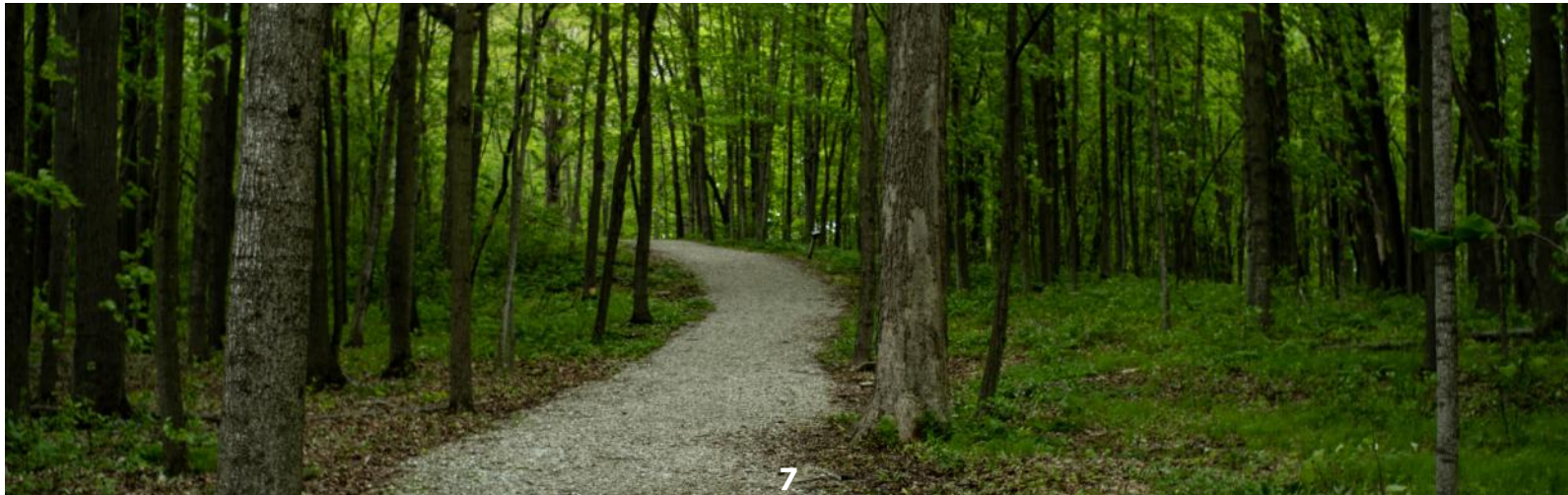
Native eastern redbud trees greet visitors at the park entrance.







Features include a picnic shelter, which is rentable, and a portable restroom available during the warmer months. There is a parking lot on site, and it is just minutes away from Hwy 41. If you're a bird watcher, you'll want to put this park on your list from spring migration through fall migration. The birding is spectacular.

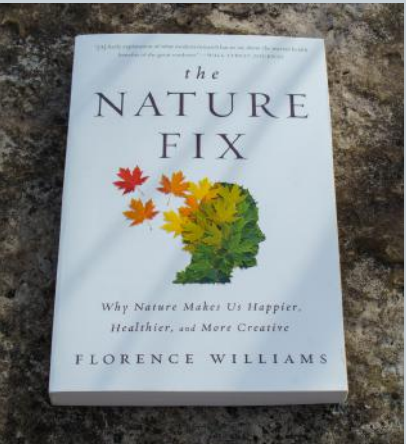






A Late Winter Day at Paradise Springs Nature Trail

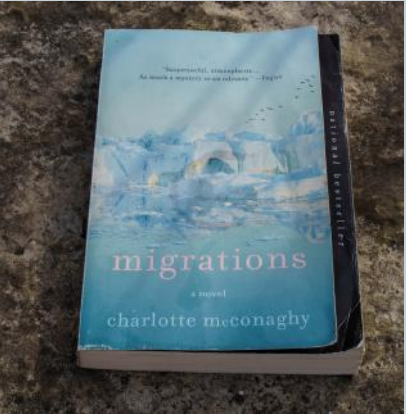
When spring fever strikes, but the last bits of winter are hanging on, a good book can get you through. Whether you're looking to understand the relationship between peace of mind, good health, and nature, a history of flowers and their meanings, or dig into a fictional adventure of the world of bird migrations, we've got a few good ideas to get you through to warmer, greener days.



**The Nature Fix**

Author: Florence Williams  
Published 2017 by Norton

I'm very familiar with needing a "nature fix", but Florence Williams' book digs deeper into the need for communing with nature. From South Korea to Finland, Washington D.C. to Idaho, she takes us along on her journey to find peace in nature, and to understand the science behind it, and the encroachment of the modern world on it as well.



**Migrations**

Author: Charlotte McConaghy  
Published 2020 by Flatiron Books

I first read Migrations back in 2021. Since that time it has stayed with me, and I recently decided to pick up a used copy and read it again. The story of a woman making peace with her past and searching for hope on a planet that is losing its natural wildlife to mass extinction, it's a powerful story of sadness and hope.



**The Complete Language Of Flowers**

Author: S. Theresa Dietz  
Published 2020 by Wellfleet Press

Whether you're a novice or master gardener, a floral arranger, or just enjoy a beautiful bouquet, you'll enjoy this beautifully illustrated guide to over 1,000 flowers. With details on name variations, special meanings, uses, folklore and facts, it's a fun resource to keep on the shelf.





# Springtime Photo Walk Fun



If you've never gone on a photo walk scavenger hunt, spring is a perfect time to give it a try. You can go with a friend, a group, take the kids, or go solo. Take a walk in the neighborhood, the local park, wander your backyard, or spend the day in one of our great Wisconsin State Parks. Make a list of ideas to snap photos of, grab your camera of choice - smartphone, instant, film, or digital camera - and let your imagination run wild. Follow the prompts, and then interpret them in your own way. There's no right or wrong way to snap. When you're done, have fun sharing the results of your exploration.



Following is a springtime photo list to get you started. Do you hear, do you see...

1. Do you hear a robin singing?
2. Blue sky, smiling at me...
3. It's raining, it's pouring, the puddles are forming.
4. I've looked at clouds from both sides now.
5. Chicks and ducks and geese gonna scurry.
6. Hey, pretty butterfly.
7. I've been having dandelion dreams.
8. Splish splash, birdies in the (bird)bath.
9. Spring blooms along the path.
10. Branches of buds, leaves and blossoms.
11. Baby bunnies hopping by.
12. Do you see a redbird? Cardinals love spring.
13. It's nesting season. Can you spot a bird nest?
14. Wildflowers on the prairie.
15. Do you hear the buzzing of the bees?







# Easy Bloomin'

## Colorful, Simple & Pollinator Friendly

You don't have to be a master gardener to add color and beauty to your world. I was definitely not born with a "green thumb", but I have had some success in building a bright and beautiful garden in our humble backyard. While I often pick up annuals at some of my favorite garden centers for containers on the patio, I have tried my hand the past couple summers at sowing some of the garden from seed. Sometimes it goes well, sometimes not. There's plenty of trial and error.

Turns out some of my best successes are with native plants, and tried and true, pollinator friendly annuals. Two summers back I started with a wildflower mix that included zinnias, cosmos, black-eyed susans, purple coneflower (echinacea), calendula, and some sunflowers.



Zinnias have since become one of my favorite blooms. They come in so many colors and varieties, they are cheerful, look fabulous in a bouquet, and they bring lots of bees and butterflies to the garden. Hummingbirds, too. And once the season is over, the seed heads make great food for the wild birds through the fall and winter.







Black-eyed Susan's are native to the region, and prolific bloomers. They will return year after year. Seed can be sown in earliest spring, about 6 weeks prior to the last frost.

Though they might not fill up the garden bed the first year, they come back strong in the second year. I was a bit disappointed the first year I sowed the seeds, but the following spring they bloomed profusely, from summer to fall.



From prairies to backyards, the trusted purple coneflower (echinacea) is tried and true. The blooms are a favorite landing spot for butterflies, and the seed heads are favored by goldfinches come autumn. They're a perfect native perennial.



Sensation cosmos

The garden will buzz with beauty when cosmos are blooming. These striking flowers will blossom one after another all summer. They are available in a variety of colors, including a bright lights orange that fits well in a fall bouquet. The double click cosmos features a fuller flower with doubled petals. Lovely!

Bright lights cosmos



Double click cosmos

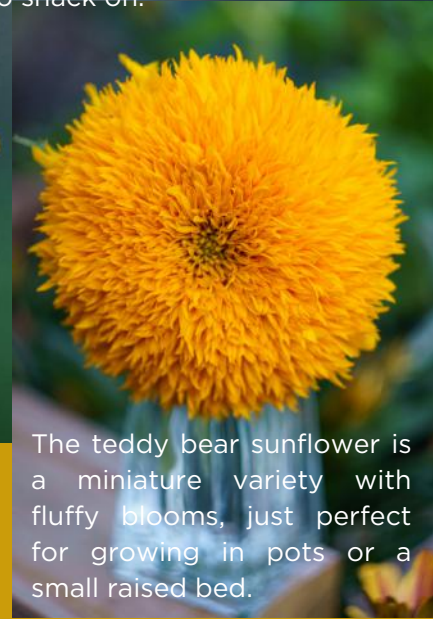






No garden is complete without at least a few sunflowers. Native to the United States, and available in a wide selection of colors and sizes, you're sure to find one you'll love. The smaller varieties grow well in pots, too.

Grow some for bouquets, leave some for the bees, and for the birds to snack on.



The teddy bear sunflower is a miniature variety with fluffy blooms, just perfect for growing in pots or a small raised bed.



Calendula flowers are not native to the United States, but they are a popular annual in the midwest region. Pollinators like bees, butterflies, and ladybugs enjoy them. They are unique in that the petals close up at night, or on cloudy days, but open in sunshine.





## A Few More Dependable Blooms



Nasturtiums are colorful, low growing blooms, with unique leaves. They are great container fillers, border plants, and look great in arrangements, too.



Blanket flower is a native, drought tolerant, perennial. It's part of the aster family, and an easy to grow species.



Bee Balm is a native perennial, comes in a variety of colors, and makes a great companion to purple coneflower and black-eyed susan.







# CAMP IT UP!

A walking path beckons at Harrington Beach State Park

Walking woodland trails in our local and state parks and trails can invoke that "Up North" feeling, without having to actually go "Up North". Sometimes the opportunity for a long trip to the great north woods just isn't possible. But if you're yearning for a quick weekend escape, a weekend of hiking, beaches, and a bit of camping, you won't have to go far from home to find it. Here's a quick guide with plenty of nearby options.

## WASHINGTON COUNTY



**Glacier Hills County Park - Hubertus** - Founded in 1976, and bordering Friess Lake, the vast hills and trails encompass 140 acres of glacial formations, forest, wetlands, and a beach for swimming. Reservable cabins are perfect for a quick weekend away.



**Pike Lake State Park - Hartford** - 522 acres in the heart of Washington and Dodge counties. Part of the northern Kettle Moraine State Forest, it features nine miles of hiking trails, a swimming beach, along with camping, day hikes, and educational park programs for the whole family.

## DODGE COUNTY



**Astico County Park - Columbus** - This 100 acre park about 3 miles east of the City of Columbus spans both sides of the Crawfish River/Danville Mill Pond. A great spot for camping, fishing, hiking, and canoeing. There are 63 campsites available.



**Harnischfeger Park - Ixonia** - At 132 acres, there are several miles of hiking trails, including an 800-foot boardwalk through wetlands leading to the Rock River, a disc-golf course, volleyball, horseshoes, and even a baseball field. Camping is also available on-site (9 sites, and 1 group site).



**Ledge County Park - Horicon** - The park is 82 acres, and lies along the Niagara Escarpment. This natural rock ledge divides the park into upper and lower areas. Plenty of scenic hiking trails, along with picnic sites, and 45 camp sites, with nearby showers.



WAUKESHA COUNTY



**Muskego Park - Muskego** - Muskego Park is 193 acres of green, featuring woodlands, wetlands, a beach for swimming, camping, hiking trails, fishing, and more. A short trip from Milwaukee offers a bit of peaceful wilderness.

DANE COUNTY



**Lake Kegonsa State Park - Stoughton** - Features include a family friendly beach, marked hiking trails, and picnic areas. The park has both family and group campsites. There are 96 sites, 68 of which are reservable, 29 with electrical hookups.

WALWORTH COUNTY



**Big Foot Beach - Lake Geneva** - 270 acres of green space adjacent to the shoreline of Lake Geneva. The park has over 5 miles of hiking trails and a total of 100 camping spots, including 34 with electrical pedestals.

RACINE COUNTY



**Bong State Recreation Area - Kansasville** - Over 4,000 acres, with great hiking trails, beautiful vistas, and a very popular campground with 217 family campsites, and 6 group camp sites. Get reservations in early.



**Cliffside Park - Caledonia** - 233 acres with a combination of sports amenities, hiking trails, woodlands, picnic spots, and reservable shelters. There are 92 reservable campsites, and 3 large group sites.

SAUK COUNTY



**Devil's Lake State Park - Baraboo** - One of the state's largest parks at 10,000 acres, it offers great scenic views with hiking, camping, fishing, winter sports, and more. With 423 campsites, and 9 group sites.

CALUMET COUNTY



**High Cliff State Park - Sherwood** - Located along the shores of Lake Winnebago, on the Niagara Escarpment. Hiking trails, picnic spots, swimming, and more. With 112 family, 2 accessible, and 8 group campsites.

FOND DU LAC COUNTY



**Mauthe Lake State Recreation Area - Campbellsport** - Year-round camping is offered at Mauthe Lake. There are 135 mostly wooded spots. Hiking trails, fishing, swimming, picnic spots, and more.

MARINETTE COUNTY



**Goodman County Park - Athelstane** - 240 acres on the Peshtigo River, the park features hiking trails, ski trails, trout fishing, an ATV/UTV trail access spur, campgrounds, and a day use lodge.

WAUPACA/PORTAGE COUNTIES



**Hartman Creek State Park - Waupaca** - This 1,500 acre state park on the upper Waupaca Chain O'Lakes offers swimming, fishing, boating, canoeing, hiking, biking, picnicking, equestrian trails, snowmobiling and cross-country skiing. They offer family and group campgrounds.



**MANITOWOC COUNTY**



**Point Beach State Forest - Two Rivers** - Point Beach offers 11 miles of hiking trails, four miles of biking trails, 127 campsites, an indoor group camp, outdoor group camp, and two rustic campsites. They also feature picnic areas, a sandy beach, two reservable shelters, and a lodge building that can be reserved as well.

**OZAUKEE COUNTY**



**Harrington Beach State Park - Belgium** - This 715 acre park features 69 family campsites, along with one group site. Electric hook-ups are available for 31 of the campsites. An accessible cabin for guests with disabilities is available for rental. Hiking, fishing, a swimming beach, picnic spots and more. Great bird watching!

**SHEBOYGAN COUNTY**



**Kohler-Andrae State Park - Sheboygan** - Located on Lake Michigan, the park features hiking, swimming, picnic spots, a nature center and more. There are 137 family campsites, two group campsites, an all-accessible cabin, and year-round camping opportunities. The beach front boardwalk is amazing!

**DOOR COUNTY**



**Potawatomi State Park - Sturgeon Bay** - A 1200 acre park with about 9 miles of hiking trails, in addition to fishing, kayaking, boating, canoeing, and bicycling trails as well. There are a total of 123 campsites, including four group sites. A fully accessible cabin is also available for rent.



**Peninsula State Park - Fish Creek** - A multi-featured park, and a highlight of Wisconsin's State Park system, Peninsula features over 460 campsites, three group camps, a summer theater, an 18-hole golf course, sand beach, bike trails, a lighthouse and eight miles of Door County shoreline.



**Newport State Park - Ellison Bay** - A 2400 acre park at the far end of Door County, it's the only Dark Sky Park in the state. It offers 17 rustic (hike-in) backpack camping sites. Other offerings include swimming, hiking, and fishing. If you enjoy stargazing, you should go.



**WANT MORE OPTIONS?**

There are over 6,000 campsites within the Wisconsin State Park System. Visit the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources website to search further for more options.

A valid/current vehicle admission sticker is required, in addition to any campsite fees.

**Wisconsin DNR Camping  
and Reservations**







# HAPPY **125TH** ANNIVERSARY WISCONSIN STATE PARKS 2025

This year marks the 125th anniversary of the Wisconsin State Park System. The DNR will be celebrating this momentous anniversary throughout the year. So stay tuned for events being held at state parks throughout all parts of the state.

Visit the *anniversary celebration* page of the DNR website for up-to-date news of events.

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS:** The ANNUAL FREE FUN WEEKEND in Wisconsin State Parks is held the first full weekend in June. From *June 7-8* free admission is open to all state parks and recreation areas. No admission sticker will be required.



# CELEBRATE EARTH DAY

**TUESDAY, APRIL 22, 2025**

The modern movement to cleanup the planet, conserve and sustain our natural resources, and all that inhabit it, officially began in 1970. Wisconsin Junior Senator, Gaylord Nelson, witnessed the damages done by a massive oil spill in Santa Barbara, and wanted to find a way to raise public consciousness about air and water pollution. The movement grew from there, and has been ongoing ever since.

For a more detailed history of Earth Day, visit [Earthday.org](https://Earthday.org).

**Looking for Earth Day events near you?**

**Find options here:**



## **15 Ways To Celebrate Earth Day, Week and Month**

- Volunteer at a local park cleanup day.
- Donate to your local nature center.
- Plant a native plant or two in your garden space
- Introduce a friend to one of your favorite parks or preserves.
- Enjoy reading a book with a nature theme.
- Skip the chemicals on your lawn and let the birds and bees eat safely.
- Shop secondhand clothing and home goods first.
- Join in a tree planting event.
- Make your own chemical free household cleaner with vinegar and water.
- Shop your local farmers market.
- Go birdwatching at a local park, or on a guided birdwatching hike.
- Start composting and benefit your garden.
- Install a rain barrel as a water source for your garden.
- Make a homemade birdbath with a gently used planter pot and saucer.
- Do a seed swap with other gardeners.





# Celebrate World Migratory Bird Day

Saturday, May 10, 2025

What is World Migratory Bird Day? This annual event takes place on the second Saturday in May, in the United States and Canada. This event kicks off peak spring migration season, which brings birds in the millions north from as far south as Central and South America.

Migration tracking typically begins as early as March, and picks up steadily through spring and into early summer. You can follow the flight traffic on **birdcast.info** to get a better idea of when birds will be flying through your area, which is helpful in planning bird watching activities.

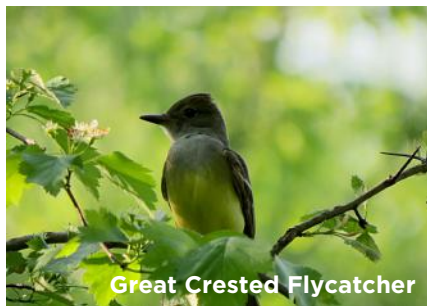
There are World Migratory Bird Day activities held at many nature centers and parks throughout Wisconsin.



Eastern Meadowlark



Indigo Bunting



Great Crested Flycatcher



Baltimore Oriole

**Horicon Marsh Bird Festival**  
May 9-11, 2025  
Registration Now Open

Horicon Marsh Boat Tours also available.  
Call 920-643-7072 for boat tour info.

**Brew City Birding Festival**  
May 9-18, 2025

Presented by: Urban Ecology Center  
1500 E. Park Place  
Milwaukee

**World Migratory Bird Celebration**  
Guided Birdwatching  
May 17, 2025  
Registration will go live in April

Presented by: Forest Exploration Center

**Audubon Bird Hike: Spring Migrants**  
May 10, 2025  
8am-9:15am  
Adults, Fee: \$8 - \$10

Schlitz Audubon Nature Center





# PEONY LOVE

Long considered an old-fashioned, or cottage garden flower (some plants can live to be 100 years old), the sight and scent of a peony fosters a sense of nostalgia for me. Typically blooming beginning around mid-May through mid-June, peonies are a true showcase in the garden. Bold, big, and available in a wide variety of colors, and petal patterns.

In recent years, fans of these fantastic blossoms can attend events like peony festivals, peony farm days, and peony museums located throughout Wisconsin. Blooming season passes quickly, don't let it pass you by.



## **5th ANNUAL WISCONSIN ARTS & PEONY FESTIVAL -**

**June 13, 2025 - June 15, 2025, 10am - 5pm**

**Beaver Dam, WI**

This 3-day festival includes tours of local peony grower **Ovans Peony Farm**. View over 100 different varieties of peonies, and thousands of blooms. Bring your camera, so you can photograph your favorites. Peony plants will be available for purchase, while supplies last. You can even have a picnic on the farm. There is a \$5 per car parking fee, but viewing the peony fields is free.

Other festival activities include an artist market, live music, food trucks, a yarn-bombing event, boutique shopping, special peony art exhibits, a quilt challenge exhibit, and more.

### OH MY PEONIES - Marion, WI

Peony Farm - Season Opens June 1 (weather permitting)

During peak season, stop in to enjoy the beautiful blooms at this Wisconsin peony farm. They offer "cut your own" peonies specials during peak season. They also offer potted plants for purchase as well. Visiting hours are Monday-Saturday, 9am-5pm, and Sundays, noon - 5pm. For further details, along with updates due to changing weather, visit their Facebook page.



### BOERNER BOTANICAL GARDENS -

PEONY EXHIBIT - Hales Corners, WI  
mid-May to mid-June

A visit to Boerner Botanical Gardens is a welcome experience all year, but during late spring/early summer, their peony garden features over 175 varieties of herbaceous peonies in all their blooming glory. If peonies are your thing, head to Boerner Botanical Gardens and enjoy them while the season lasts.

### PARKER'S PEONY & PERENNIALS FARM - Tomah, WI

Peak season: third week of May thru second week of June

Open to the public for tours, but by arrangement only. Over 1,000 varieties grown on the farm. Also breeding hybrid varieties.

Visit the website for more details.

### HOARD HISTORICAL MUSEUM -

Fort Atkinson, WI

Museum Hours Tuesday - Saturday,  
9:30am - 4:30pm

The museum features a garden display of intersectional peonies (a hybrid of tree and herbaceous types) established by Roger and Sandra Anderson, in 2010. It is the largest public collection of intersectional peonies in America.

It features 58 peonies developed by Anderson. There are 18 named intersectional varieties, and two tree peonies in the garden. The garden is typically in bloom from late May through mid-June. Admission is Free.





# The Camera In your Pocket



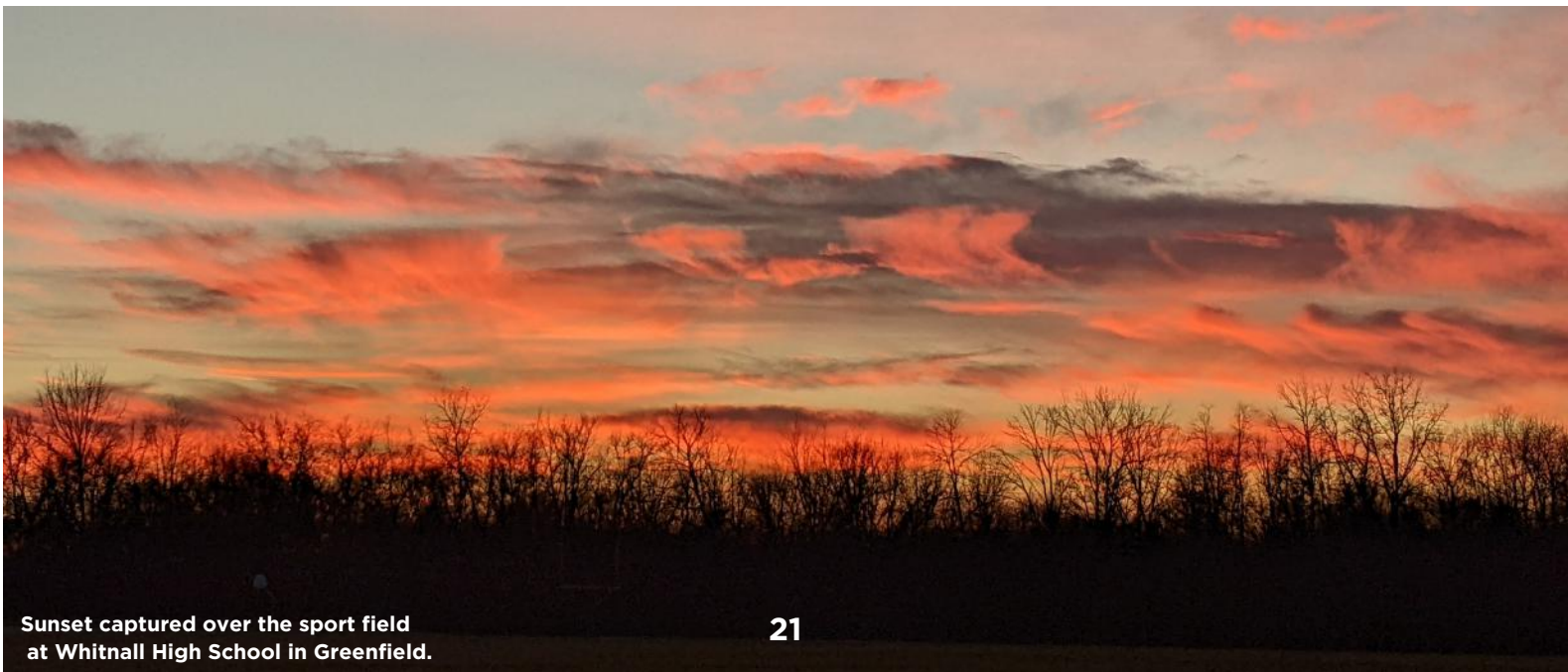
When out exploring, and documenting local nature spots for *TheParkNextDoor*, I'm usually wandering with at least one camera set-up, maybe a second lens, and sometimes even a separate bridge (zoom) camera for trying to capture wildlife from a distance.

I tend to use vintage lenses, as they are an inexpensive way to experiment with different focal lengths and looks. I enjoy using them. And, I've found lenses for as little as \$5 via eBay. Beautiful bargains!

But one device that I'm using more and more these days is my smartphone camera. The cameras have come a long way in recent years. And even the most basic ones offer creative benefits.

First of all, I always have it with me. They are easy to use. They do a good bit of the work for you, and you can capture unique perspectives easily. With one artificial knee, and a second "iffy" one, I can't get down on the ground to capture different camera angles, so a smartphone allows me to do that from an upright position.

And then there is the instant gratification of being able to post it to social media, or send it off to someone else easily. It's hard to argue with that.



Sunset captured over the sport field  
at Whitnall High School in Greenfield.



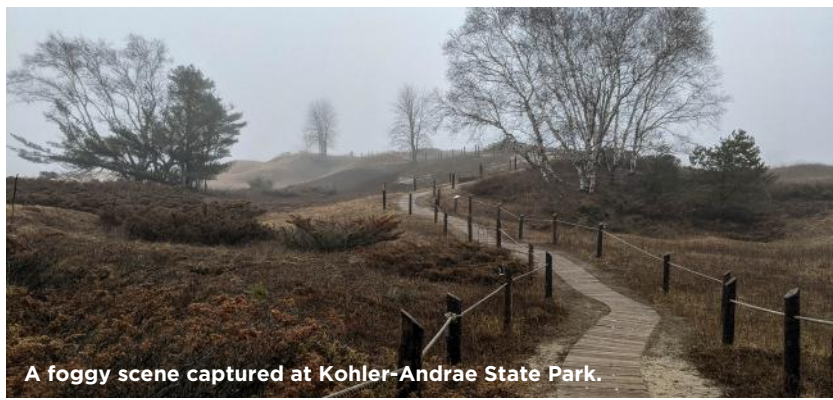
Most of us are familiar with taking family photos and selfies with our phones. The quality of photos and videos they can produce are perfect for on-the-go content creators and family documentarians alike. You don't need to have the latest and greatest phones out there to get great photos, either. Just a little patience and thoughtful composition goes a long way.

One of the great things about smartphone cameras is that they often have a wider view.

While I may be taking photos with a 50mm lens on my camera, the ability to capture a wider view of a scene with my phone, and not having to switch lenses is so helpful.

Without too much more effort, I can provide a variety of views of a park or nature preserve to share on the website. And while each device has its finer points, and limitations, I find they complement each other very well. At least for what I'm doing.

Occasionally, I'll be out and about and have the chance to make a quick stop to observe nature. Having my ever-present phone camera means I can take advantage of that unexpected opportunity. Some of my favorite photos have happened that way.



A foggy scene captured at Kohler-Andrae State Park.



Goodman County Park - Marinette County



Anclam Park - Door County



Cave Point County Park - Door County



Smartphone cameras do a great job at capturing rare Northern Lights sightings in Wisconsin.





Sunset over Green Bay from Ellison Bay Bluff County Park - Door County.

About a year ago, I had minor surgery on my arm, and I had to put away my camera gear for a few weeks. Thanks to my smartphone camera, I could still go out, enjoy the autumn color, and garner some great photos.


Even the best professional photographers out there use their smartphones as well. They apply their same artistic style and talents to get images, and capture experiences of great beauty, with their mobile devices. Their photographer's eye is always at work.



If you enjoy nature, and aspire to take photos documenting your adventures, whether it's a walk through your local park, working in the garden, or a longer, more arduous trip or hiking journey, great photos are at your fingertips. Learn as much about the camera features on your phone as you can, get outside, and let your inner artist shine.







# Secrets Of The Winter Woods

A Guided Walk Through The Forest Exploration Center

On Saturday, March 1, a brisk sunny morning, in a group of about 20, we gathered at the Forest Exploration Center to take a hike through the woods in search of secrets. Secrets of the winter woods. Minus snow, since it melted on warmer days earlier in the week, there was still plenty of the winter world to be uncovered.

With the guidance of naturalist Danielle Pahlisch, along with myself and FEC Director of Communications, Emily Glaser, we took to the trail. Along the way we discovered different kinds of lichen, moss, and fungi. We discovered insect patterns embossed in fallen trees, and trees with cavities big and small that provide shelter to birds, squirrels, and other small forest creatures.



Danielle turned over a fallen log and unearthed leaves, frost, teeny tiny snails, and the start of a tree seedling heading towards spring. There is life in the woods, frozen or not. Fascinating!



As we continued on, hikers stopped to get a closer look, taking photos of the textures, the patterns, the footprints of skunks and coyote. Subtle impressions on the muddy path. Some opened up naturalist apps on their phones and took photos to identify turkey tail fungi, and the bark of a white oak tree.





We passed decaying trees reminiscent of art sculpture, picked up leaves that showed signs of visible decay, along with insect galls sheltering eggs awaiting a spring hatch. Digging deep under a heavy patch of leaves revealed a queen bee nesting with her eggs, awaiting spring as well. Danielle covered them back up and let them return to sleep. Come warmer days, the forest will come alive with wildflowers nearby, providing food for these early pollinators and insects. And they, in turn, will provide food for the migrating birds as they begin to arrive in April and May.



We walked on in hopes of finding an owl nest, scanning the treetops for the chance to witness these winter nesters. Although Danielle did spot a nest, it did not appear to be occupied this time. Perhaps they found a different spot this year. There are plenty of large tree cavities perfectly suitable for raising young throughout the forest.

As we wrapped up our hike we walked past one of my favorite trees along the trail. There's a naturally occurring heart formed in the bark. One I photograph just about every time I visit the FEC. Why should this hike be any different?









The Forest Exploration Center hosts a wide variety of guided hikes, forest steward volunteer events, and other expert-led and self-guided experiences throughout the year. Milwaukee Riverkeeper will be hosting an Earth Day clean-up event on April 26 at the Forest. Further information will be available on their website soon.

The forest is located at 1800 Forest Exploration Drive, Wauwatosa. It is open to all, admission is free.

For more details, or to sign up for their email newsletter, visit their website at [www.forestexplorationcenter.org](http://www.forestexplorationcenter.org).







# What's Splashin'?

Notable Dates  
On The Spring  
Calendar



**Daylight Saving Time Begins:  
Sunday, March 9, 2025**



**First Day of Spring  
Thursday, March 20**



**Fishing Season Opens April 1, 2025**



**Art in the Green - April 26-27  
Mitchell Park Domes**



**MMSD Rain Garden Plant Sale  
Pre-orders by April 3, 2025  
Pick-up June 7, 2025**



**Friends of Wehr Native Plant Sale  
May 31 - June 1  
Pre-order by April 23, 2025**



# ART FOR YOUR WALLS FROM THE PARK NEXT DOOR

If you're a Wisconsin nature fan, you can decorate your walls, phone case, home decor, or stationery with images from the parks, nature preserves, and trails of Wisconsin featured on The Park Next Door.

Fine Art America is the world's largest art marketplace and print-on-demand technology company.

They have been helping artists sell wall art, home decor, apparel, and other products since 2006, and are home to hundreds of thousands of artists, photographers, graphic designers, illustrators, and iconic brands.



Want to support local artists in your area? They have a search feature to do just that! You can visit my online shop to see the current offering of images and custom products.

You can find my shop at: <https://1-kimberly-mackowski.pixels.com/>

## Simple Ways To Support The Park Next Door And It's Purpose

**Sign up for the website newsletter.** I generally send out one email per month. Occasionally, if there is something special to share, I may send another, or send it a little earlier than usual if content warrants it. I know how overwhelming a full inbox can be. [Sign up here.](#)

Feel free to **forward/share** the monthly emails with like-minded friends and nature enthusiasts. And remember, if you do subscribe, to open the emails. If they don't show as open, eventually the service suspends the email address.

**Share your discoveries.** If you've visited a local park or preserve that isn't yet on the website, let me know. I'd love the opportunity to check it out, and share it, too.

**Share a favorite feature, blog, or location listing.** If a specific feature page, blog, or location tickles your fancy, please share it with friends, or on your social media feed. Every little bit of exposure helps.

**Follow The Park Next Door on Instagram** for updates on everyday explorations and happenings. [@theparknextdoor](#)



Thank You for your support,  
and for your love of our parks and preserves.





**Where flowers bloom, so does hope**  
~Lady Bird Johnson