

Spring 2026

The Park Next Door

magazine



LIVE WILD, GO GREEN!

Look Inside For: Rainy Day Walks, Celebrating Earth Day, Going Native In The Garden, Springtime Photo Walk Fun, Spring Reads, Get Ready For The Birds, Spotlight on Washington Park, Bring On The Hummingbirds, and more!



Greetings, All ~

For a while there I wasn't sure spring would really arrive. First we had those very welcome, but unseasonably warm days. A friend of mine commented then "They turned the birds back on!" It was glorious. Fortunately, the birds have hung around, even though we got smacked with a couple nasty snowstorms again. At least it melted quickly. Have we seen the last of the snow? Jury is out, I'm afraid, but I hope so.

In any case, full speed ahead. Grass is greening up, leaves are budding out on trees, some of the wildflowers have started to peek through the saturated ground. If April showers really do bring May flowers, we should be awash in technicolor blooms next month! I'm looking forward to it.

I'm also looking forward to spring migration and the return of millions of birds for the spring and summer. The popularity of birdwatching continues to grow, and it's wonderful to see. Strangely enough, I've noticed our backyard is often busy with birds when it rains. It nudges me to get outside for *Rainy Day Walks*, something I muse about in this issue. And we've provided a list of 12 easy walks you can take in a gentle rain.

Over the past several years we have been trying to add more native plants to our garden habitat. It can be a challenge to find them. I was so excited to discover a new urban native plant nursery has opened in Wauwatosa. Check out the feature on *Root Down Wisconsin* this issue. If you're looking for native plants, I think you'll be as excited as I am to visit them when they have their big sale in early June.

And if gardening isn't your thing, the wildflowers along hiking trails, and in our parks can add some beauty to your day.

There are so many fun annual events coming up: Earth Day, World Migratory Bird Day, Peony festivals, a free fun weekend at Wisconsin State Parks. So much happening to welcome you outdoors.

If you're new to [The Park Next Door Magazine](#), please know all back issues are linked on the website. They are free, and can be downloaded to your devices, if you wish. There are plenty of features in previous issues that are still relevant. Feel free to share as well.

If you're looking for a new park, nature preserve or trail to hike, check out the [website](#) for lots of options.

Wisconsin has so much beauty to offer us. Just step outside.

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 at
Kinsey Park in Brookfield, WI
theparknextdoor@outlook.com

What's Inside

At long last spring has arrived. It's been a rainy one so far. But the need to get outside is strong. **Rainy Day Walks** muses on this conundrum. If you're ready to get out there in spite of the drizzle, **12 Easy Paths For A Scenic Walk In The Rain** offers a listing of local parks that fit the bill.

If you've been wanting to add some native plants to your garden, but don't know where to start, **Go Native In The Garden** has details and resources that will help. And if you're looking for a local live native plant source, check out the new Wauwatosa urban native nursery feature: **Root Down Wisconsin Is Buzzing With Native Plants**.

Milwaukee County has so many fantastic parks. This issue features a **Spotlight On Washington Park in Milwaukee**.

Join the movement and help to **Celebrate Earth Day 2026**. Join in a clean-up, or check out our list of 15 ways to celebrate earth day, week, and month.

Looking forward to spring birdwatching? **Celebrate World Migratory Bird Day** on Saturday, May 9. We've got a list of events and resources. Then **Get Ready For The Birds** with our tips and list of birding essentials.

Welcome hummingbirds to your yard this spring and summer. **Hummingbird Haven** will introduce you to native and annual plants that will invite them in, and keep them coming back.

Get outside for some creativity with our **Spring Photo Walk** prompts. Go solo, take the kids, or grab a friend for some fun photo ops.

Book Toward Spring With A Good Read. We've got books for kids on woodland adventures, birdwatching, and the beauty of a weedy garden. And a great lost-hiker mystery for the grown-ups.

If you love peonies, check out **Big Beautiful Blooms**, for a listing of peony farms, and details on the upcoming 6th Annual Peony Festival in Beaver Dam.

Every June our Wisconsin State Parks start off the season with an **Annual Free Fun Weekend**. We've got details.

What's Happening? - Notable Dates And Opportunities - a short selection of artful events, festivals, and field trips to consider.

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Rainy Day Walks

April showers bring May flowers, the saying goes. Same for snow? I know, we live in Wisconsin, and weather is a fickle thing. At the crossroads of winter and spring it plays with our emotions. We revel in the warmer days, then dive into a funk when snow and cold sneaks back onto the scene. Sometimes within less than 24 hours. It's maddening.

This is one of the reasons I find our neighborhood parks to be such blessings. When the weather literally changes minute to minute, there's still a way to get outside and sneak in a bit of fresh air, maybe a walk along a short paved trail, or a few laps around a pond. As long as it's a gentle rain, no harm done.

There's a hint of green peeking out on tree branches, and some of the spring migrants have begun to arrive - robins hunting for bugs and worms in the wet dirt, red-wing blackbirds calling from last summer's faded cattails.

In my anxiousness for true spring, warmer days, and wildflowers rising, in spite of the rain, I can't seem to stop myself from visiting one of several of my favorite local parks. Even if I just sit in my car and take in the view, the window cracked to hear the rain falling and the sound of birds calling.

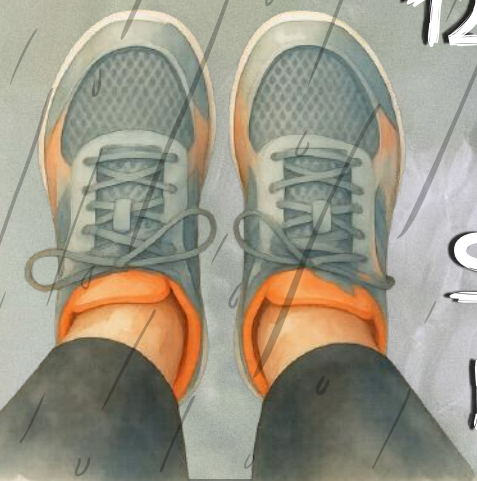
Sometimes it's just long enough for me to drink a bit of coffee, sort through my thoughts, maybe get through another chapter in whatever book I'm reading before I dig in to the rest of my day. While I'm safe and dry, ensconced in the drivers seat with my book and my thoughts, I witness several dedicated walkers doing laps around a pond in the rain. I try not to feel guilty.

Other days I'm better prepared with a rain hat, an umbrella, waterproof hiking shoes, and I get out and walk in the rain, squish through a muddy trail. I feel almost virtuous when I do this. Though others do it on the regular.

Soon, with luck, the warmer days will outnumber the cold, and I'll finally get outside to start work on the garden. My [Pinterest](#) board is loaded with ideas, and there is plenty of work to be done.

But then I'll be torn between heading out to a trail or working on our evolving habitat for wildlife. Not a bad dilemma to have, I suppose. I'm looking forward to it. Greener days are coming!

12 Easy Paths For A Scenic Walk In The Rain



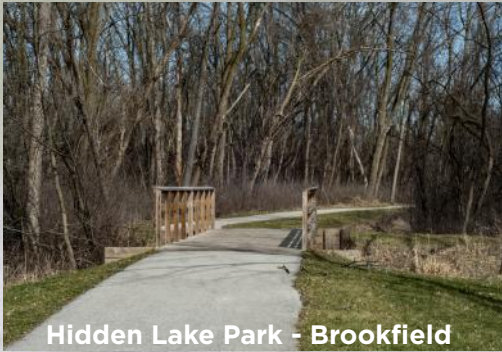
Elm Grove Village Park - Elm Grove



Honey Creek Park - West Allis



New Berlin Historical Park - New Berlin



Hidden Lake Park - Brookfield



Washington Park - Milwaukee



Brown Deer Park - Brown Deer



Humboldt Park - Milwaukee



Jackson Park - Milwaukee



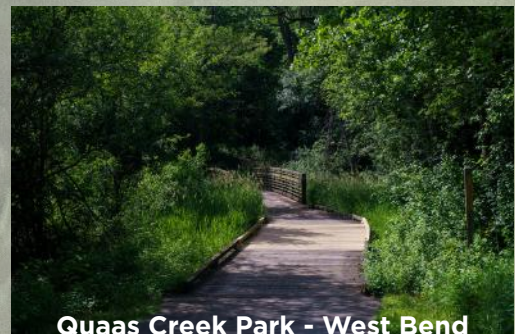
Pondview Park - Greenfield



Firefly Grove Park - Wauwatosa



Lime Kiln Park - Menomonee Falls



Quaas Creek Park - West Bend

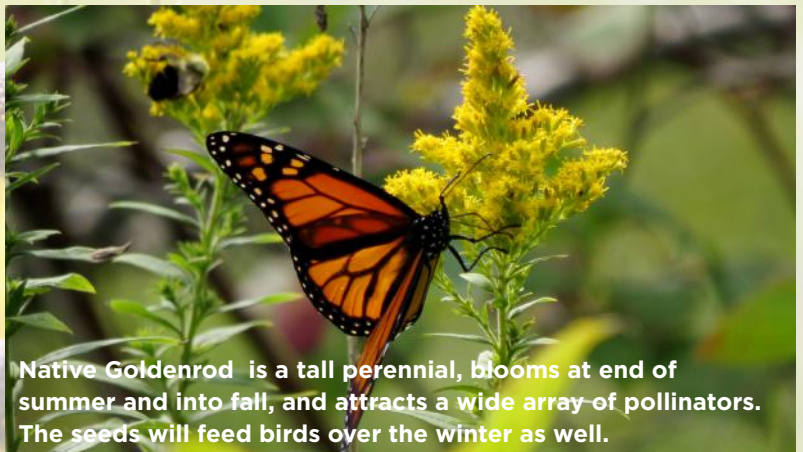
Go Native In The Garden

In recent years the need for planting native plants has been accepted widely. Gardeners of all varieties have been adding plants native to their region to their backyards and gardens. Native plants often require less work in the long run, and attract and support the native wildlife surrounding us.

Benefits of planting native include:

- Supporting Pollinators like bees, butterflies, caterpillars, moths, and more.
- Supporting other wildlife, including birds, rabbits, foxes, squirrels, deer and more. Many of these wild creatures eat the insects attracted by native plants, find shelter among the plants, and nesting areas, too.
- Native plants often have deeper root systems, which require less watering, and are often drought tolerant. They also sequester more carbon, by pulling it out of our atmosphere and storing it in the soil of these deep rooted plants.
- Native plants are less prone to pests, which helps to avoid use of toxic chemicals, which is healthier for the environment, animals, and humans alike.
- Native plants are often perennials, so they will come back year after year.

Wild Ones gardening groups are a great resource for native plant gardening information.



Native Goldenrod is a tall perennial, blooms at end of summer and into fall, and attracts a wide array of pollinators. The seeds will feed birds over the winter as well.



Gardening with Native Plants & Resources



Upcoming Native Plant Sales - follow links for details

[Elm Grove Beautification Committee](#)
[Plant Sale](#)

Saturday, May 16, 9am-1pm
Over 125 varieties

[Horicon Marsh](#)
[Wildflowers For Wildlife](#)

Saturday, May 16, 9:30am-1:30pm

[Friends of Wehr](#)
[Native Plant Sale Fundraiser](#)

Saturday & Sunday
May 30-31, 2026
10 am - 3:30 pm

[Friends Of North Prairie](#)
[Native Plant Sale](#)

Friday, May 8, 8am-3pm
Saturday, May 9, 8am-Noon

[Friends Of The Monarch Trail](#)
[Native Plant Sale](#)

Saturday, May 9, 11am-4pm
Sunday, May 10, 11am-2pm

[Friends Of](#)
[Lac Lawrann Conservancy](#)
38th Annual Wildflower and
Perennial Sale
Saturday, May 9, 9am - 1pm

[Schlitz Audubon Nature Center](#)
[Native Plant Sale](#)

Sunday, June 7
9am-1pm

[Geneva Lake Conservancy](#)
[Native Plant Sale](#)

Order Online by May 1
In-person Pick-up Friday,
May 22, 9am-4pm

[Great Lakes Bird Observatory](#)
[Native Plant Sale & World](#)
[Migratory Bird Day Celebration](#)

Saturday, May 30
9am-4pm

ROOT DOWN WISCONSIN is Buzzing with Native Plants

A native sweat bee feeding on the nectar of a native Figwort bloom.

If you've been trying to incorporate native plants into your gardens and habitats, you have probably discovered they are not always easy to find. Big box garden centers might carry a few, but if you're looking for something specific, it can be a challenge. Especially when looking for live plants. There are several regional native seed sources, but starting native plants from seed can be a bit intimidating.

Fortunately, more native plant nurseries are popping up. And native plant sales sponsored by nature preserves, nature centers, and other conservation groups are growing in number as well.

It was while researching the native plant sale schedules for this spring and early summer that I learned of **Root Down Wisconsin**, a new urban native plant nursery located in Wauwatosa. Color me excited! I contacted the owner, Andy Plamann, and asked if we could meet. I wanted to know more.

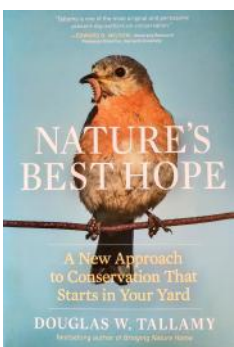


An everlasting beauty: Virginia Bluebells



Large Flowered Trillium are a sure sign of spring.

Andy's passion for gardening, especially with native plants, is evident. He grew up surrounded by nature, spending summers at his grandparents dairy farm, and learning vegetable gardening from his parents. He learned early on the value of leaf composting, and the benefits of insects and other wildlife.



Inspired in recent years by the book *Nature's Best Hope*, by Dr. Doug Tallamy, Andy wanted to include more native plants into his yard and garden. But he grew frustrated with the lack of availability of live plants. So, he ordered a variety of native seeds from a couple regional nurseries, learned about cold/moist seed stratification, and that winter began sowing seeds in milk jugs and putting them outside for cold stratification.

He sowed so many seeds that first winter, and had such success with germination, he had far more plants than he could fit in his own yard. A good problem to have.



Jack-in-the-pulpit is a favorite woodland perennial.

Together with his wife, they made up some signage and placed an ad on Facebook Marketplace for a one day yard sale. The morning of the sale there were cars lined up around the block. Folks coming from as far away as Illinois in search of native plants. From these beginnings **Root Down Wisconsin** was born.

In 2025 Andy enrolled in a Wisconsin Master Naturalist course offered through the Land Restoration School at Mequon Nature Preserve. He earned his certification, and developed an even stronger passion to promote native plant gardening, and to help in making native plants available to all.

The selection of native plants he offers is impressive. Over 100 different plants so far. You'll find several types of goldenrod, milkweed, bee balm, coneflower, bluebells, early spring bloomers like jack-in-the-pulpit and bloodroot, cardinal flower, native grasses, and so much more. You can peruse the available plants on the website, where you'll find photos and details on each one as well. There are seed offerings, too - 28 varieties so far.

The 2026 in-person Native Plant Sale will take place on June 6, 2026, from 8am - 3pm, in their backyard nursery at: 2578 N. 62nd Street, Wauwatosa.

An updated plant availability list will be added to the website in the weeks prior to the sale. Online orders can be placed after the in-person sale on June 6.

Additional pop-up sales are planned around Wauwatosa through summer and into fall. Follow Root Down Wisconsin on Facebook or subscribe to their mailing list to be notified of these events.

**ROOT DOWN WISCONSIN
2026 NATIVE PLANT SALE**

In-person Sale
Saturday, June 6,
8am - 3pm

Location: 2578 N. 62nd St. ,
Wauwatosa
Street Parking Only



**Over 100
different native
plants!**

**Visit their
website or
Facebook page
for updated
listings prior to
the sale.**



Andy Plamann, owner of ROOT DOWN WISCONSIN.



Washington Park and the Urban Ecology Center is 132 acres of beauty in the heart of Milwaukee. This historical park, which broke ground in 1892 (it was the original home of the county zoo, to put it simply), was designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, the landscape architect who designed and supervised the creation of New York City's infamous Central Park.

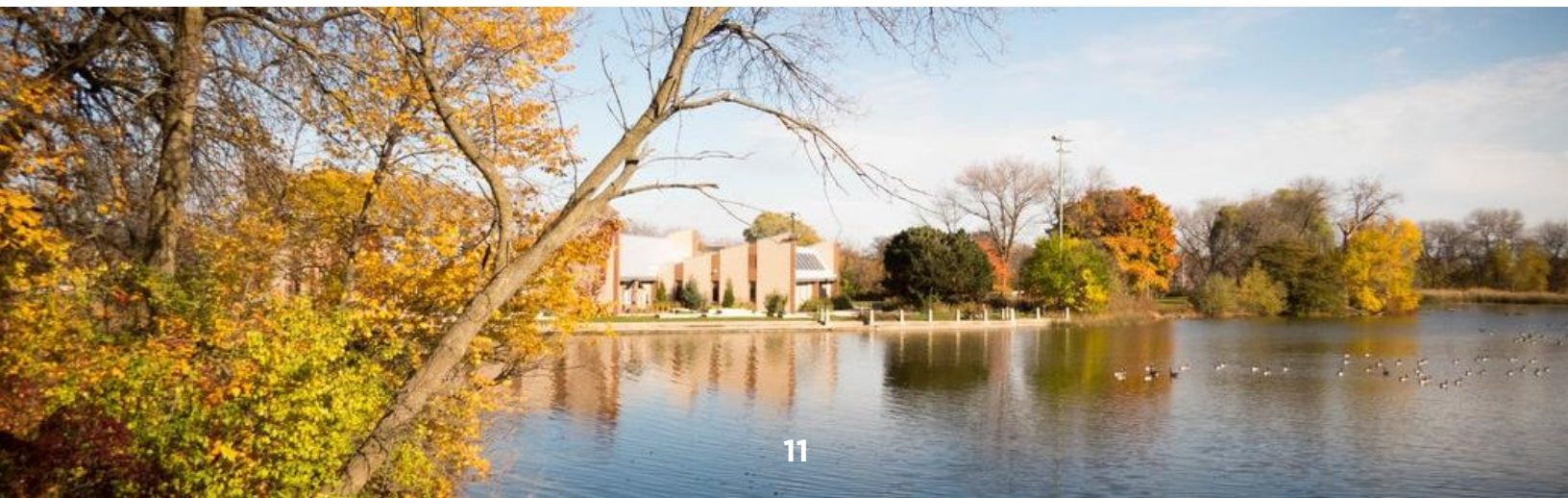
It has evolved over the last century (and then some), to include walking trails, a lagoon, fishing, sport facilities for basketball, soccer, and swimming, and, opened in 2007, the Urban Ecology Center, which provides neighborhood environmental education after school and community programs for the entire family. On top of that, it's a great local birding hotspot





Hours: Open daily, 6am - 10pm Free on-site parking available
Dogs permitted, on-leash.

Location: 1859 N. 40th St., Milwaukee, WI (Milwaukee County) For more information, [click here](#).



CELEBRATE EARTH DAY

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22, 2026

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.

Looking for Earth Day events near you?

Find options here:



Join in a
Milwaukee Riverkeeper
Spring Cleanup

Saturday, April 25
9am-12pm

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 9, 2026

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.

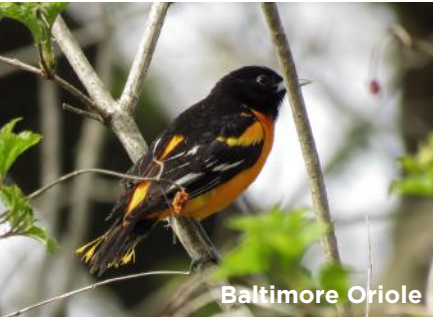
There are World Migratory Bird Day activities held at many nature centers and parks throughout Wisconsin.



Yellow Warbler



Northern Flicker



Baltimore Oriole



Cedar Waxwing

Horicon Marsh Bird Festival
May 8-10, 2026
Registration Now Open

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

World Migratory Bird Day Celebration
Saturday, May 9, 2026
Registration Required

Presented by: Urban Ecology Center
at Washington Park
1859 N. 40th Street, Milwaukee

World Migratory Bird Celebration
Guided Birdwatching
May 23, 2026
Registration will go live in April

Presented by: Forest Exploration Center

World Migratory Bird Day Celebration
May 9, 2026
Registration Required

Schlitz Audubon Nature Center
1111 E. Brown Deer Road, Milwaukee

Get Ready For The Birds!

The wonderful thing about admiring birds is that it can be done in a wide variety of habitats. Whether you live in urban or rural spaces, the opportunity to enjoy the sights and sounds of birds is all around us.

Of course, Wisconsin State Parks, trails and nature preserves are a great place to go bird watching, but don't count out your local neighborhood parks or your own backyard.

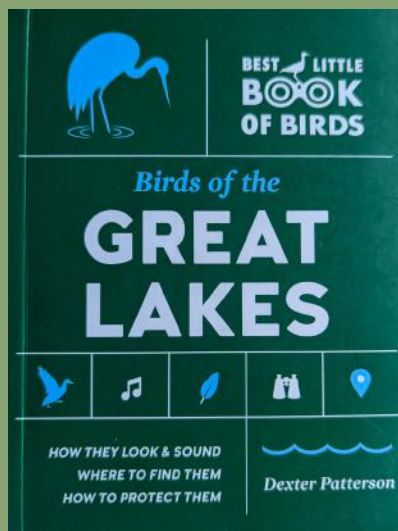
During migration, birds fly thousands of miles from places like South America, to the United States and Canada, where they will breed, nest, and raise their young over the spring and summer.

En route to these destinations, you can find them feeding and resting in green spaces all across the state of Wisconsin. If there's a park or yard with trees, bushes, a birdbath, a river, creek, pond or wetland of some sort, they will find it.

Equipment required is minimal: a pair of binoculars comes in handy, or a camera with a zoom lens. A pocket bird identification guidebook, or a bird identification [smartphone app](#), and a notebook, if you're keeping track of the species you see.



Binoculars and a small, portable notebook and pen keep it simple on the trail.



Birds of the GREAT LAKES

by Dexter Patterson

Published 2025 by Timber Press

A good, compact, bird guide is a must-have for learning about and identifying birds out in the field.

Birds of the GREAT LAKES, by Dexter Patterson, will guide you along your way.

Patterson's *bird joy* is contagious. His years of experience and knowledge are well-suited to putting together a guide that is designed to make birdwatching accessible to all.

You'll find tools and tips, photos and details of the traits and habitats for 150 birds, in 40 different bird families across the Great Lakes region.

Dexter Patterson is an educator, multimedia professional, and the cofounder of the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) Birding Club of Wisconsin.



Handsome Song Sparrow singing.



A Rose-breasted Grosbeak at the birdbath.

A simple birdbath invites birds to backyards.



American Goldfinch eating dandelions.

An Indigo Bunting and White-throated Sparrow eating dandelion seeds.



Got dandelions?

Many songbirds enjoy eating dandelion petals, seeds and stems. Rabbits enjoy them, too!

BirdCast Menu

Migration Dashboard

Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

Night of Apr 21, 2022

Live data feed begins each night after sunset.

231,700
Birds crossed Milwaukee County this night (est.)

Starting: Thu, Apr 21, 2022, 7:45 PM CDT
Ending: Fri, Apr 22, 2022, 5:55 AM CDT

[Learn more](#)

PEAK MIGRATION TRAFFIC
30,800 Birds in flight (est.) High
Direction: NNW Speed: 21 mph
Altitude: 2,500 ft



Eastern Bluebird

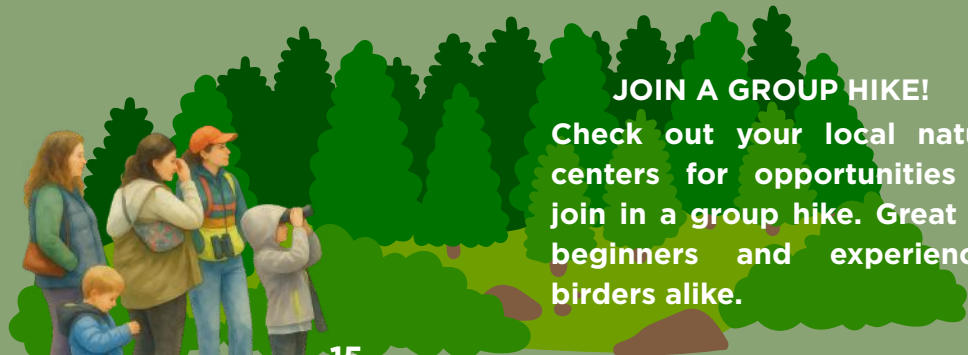
Find your next birdwatching adventure by flipping through the free GREAT WISCONSIN BIRDING and NATURE TRAIL guides, courtesy of the DNR.



Visit the International Crane Foundation in Baraboo.

Sandhill Crane nesting.

Keep track of what birds are migrating through your area, and when they are passing over. Visit BirdCast.info and type in your location to get the details.



JOIN A GROUP HIKE!

Check out your local nature centers for opportunities to join in a group hike. Great for beginners and experienced birders alike.

Hummingbird Haven

Attract Hummingbirds To Your Yard
With The Right Blooms.



A female Ruby-throated hummingbird perched on a native honeysuckle vine.

If there's a celebrity in my garden each spring and summer, it's got to be the Ruby-throated hummingbird. Every time a hummingbird visits my yard I gasp in amazement. Such a thrill!

There are lots of plants you can add to your garden, or put in pots or hanging baskets that will invite these little miracles of nature to stop by. Over the years I've tried several. I typically have a mix of native perennials, and pollinator friendly annuals. The key is to purchase/grow plants that are not treated with pesticides. And to avoid pesticide use in your lawn and garden overall. If it kills the weeds, it kills the birds and the bees.



Annual - Vermillionaire
Firecracker Plant - great in
hanging baskets, or pots.



Native perennial - Purple Coneflower
is a classic wildflower.



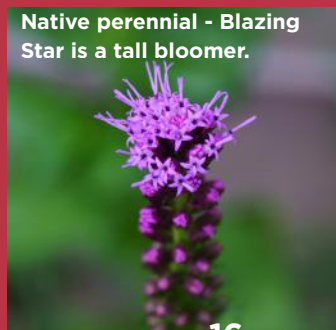
Native biennial - Black-eyed Susan is a
wildflower staple, and will self sow.



Native perennial - Purple Aster blooms into fall.



Native perennial - Wild Bergamot (bee
balm) is adored by pollinators.



Native perennial - Blazing
Star is a tall bloomer.



Native perennial - Jewelweed
likes moist ground and
woodland areas.



A female Ruby-throated hummingbird perched among Jewelweed at Lion's Den Gorge in Grafton.



Native perennial -
Yellow Coneflower



Native perennial -
Mexican Hat Coneflower



Native perennial -
Common Milkweed



Annual - Zinnias, many varieties
Easy to grow, a pollinator favorite



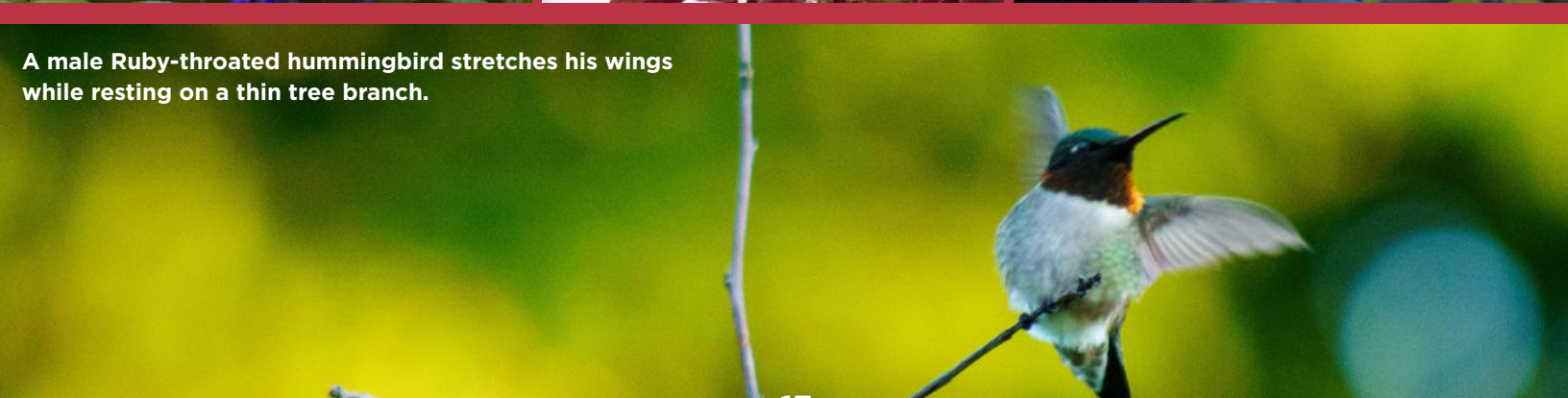
Annual - Black and Blue Salvia
Tall, great in pots



Annual - Coleus
Blooms in fall



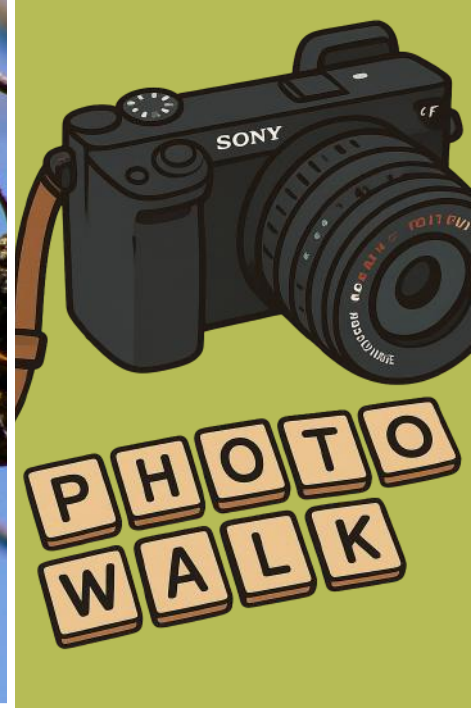
Annual - Calibrachoa, Comes in
many colors, great in pots or hanging baskets



A male Ruby-throated hummingbird stretches his wings
while resting on a thin tree branch.

A male Ruby-throated hummingbird resting on a thin tree branch at sunset.

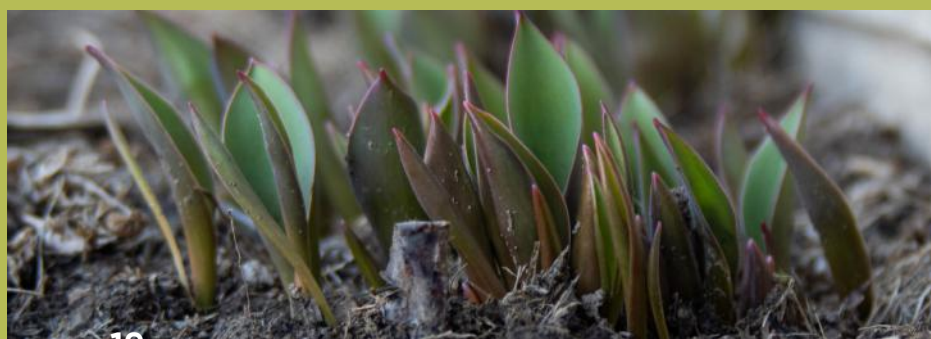




If you've never gone on a photo walk scavenger hunt, spring is a perfect time to give it a try. You can go with a friend, a group, take the kids, or go solo. Take a walk in the neighborhood, the local park, wander your backyard, or spend the day in one of our great Wisconsin State Parks. Make a list 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...

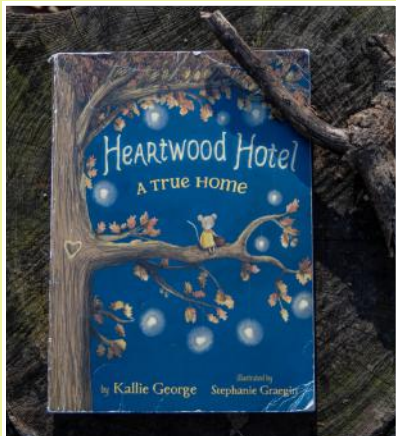
1. Do you hear a robin singing?
2. Watch for rainbows.
3. Have a splashing good time in a puddle.
4. I've looked at clouds from both sides now.
5. Chicks and ducks and geese gonna scurry.
6. Can you spot the shadow of leaves on a tree?
7. Pick a dandelion and make a wish.
8. Squirrels are busy collecting food to eat.
9. Spring blooms in the garden.
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 or egg?
14. Wildflowers on the trail.
15. Do you hear the buzzing of the bees?





Gear up for the spring and summer seasons with a good book. Whether you're cozying up inside during April showers, or basking in the sunny days of May, these titles will connect you with the natural world in one way or another.

From stories about woodland creatures, backyard wildlife, and wildflower gardens both children and adults will enjoy, to a thriller about a lost hiker on the Appalachian Trail that will keep you riveted until the end.

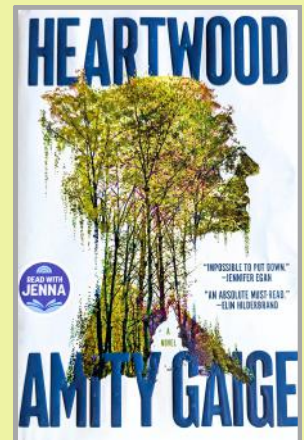


Heartwood Hotel - A True Home

by: Kallie George

Published 2017 by Disney Hyperion

Imagine there's a hotel exclusively for woodland creatures. Mona, an orphan mouse, is in search of a new home. During a big rainstorm she sets out to find a cozy, dry place to stay, and finds herself knocking on the door of the Heartwood Hotel. A respite for a variety of woodland creatures. This tale has both heart and imagination. Great for children 5 and up.



Heartwood

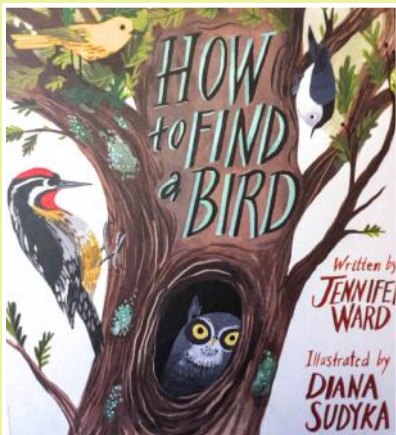
by: Amity Gaige

Published 2025

by Simon & Schuster

You don't have to be a long-distance hiker to relate to this story of a woman lost along the Appalachian Trail. If you've ever gotten turned around on a nature trail and felt the slight panic of not being sure where you are, or which way to go, you'll appreciate this thriller. I could not put it down.

It takes you inside the scope of the search and rescue mission, and into the heart and mind of a modern woman lost in the ancient woods.



How To Find A Bird

by: Jennifer Ward

Illustrated by: Diana Sudyka

Published 2020 by Beach Lane Books

This beautifully illustrated guidebook teaches children where and how to look for wild birds in our environments. Whether on a city block, along a lakeshore, or on a nature trail, birds are all around us. The book is artful and engaging. There's even an introduction to bird watching guide included!

THE WEEDY GARDEN:

A Happy Habitat For Wild Friends

By: Margaret Renkl

Illustrated by: Billy Renkl

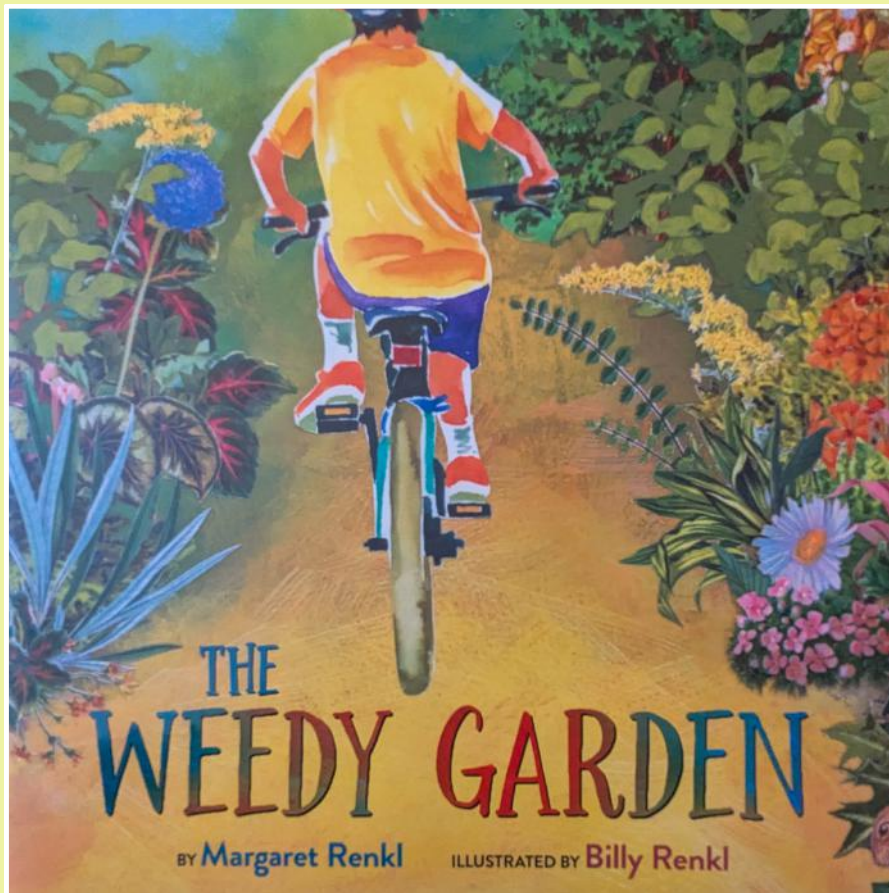
Published 2026 by Greenwillow Books

To read *The Weedy Garden* is to take a walk through a colorful garden on a summer day. Inspired by the book *The Comfort Of Crows - a Backyard Year*, by Margaret Renkl, *The Weedy Garden* introduces children to the joys of discovering nature in their own backyards and neighborhood parks and gardens.

Written by Margaret Renkl, and artfully illustrated by her brother Billy Renkl, the secrets and treasures of plants, insects, birds, and other wildlife are revealed. You'll meet squirrels, turtles, butterflies, rabbits, birds, and more.

The Weedy Garden shares an overall message of appreciation of the wild world around us, how to support it, and a perfect opportunity to read aloud and discover the simple joys of the written word combined with beautiful collage-art illustrations.

There's also a short guide to the residents of *The Weedy Garden*, along with tips on planting for wildlife with native plants, and an explanation of the collage art process, with a suggested project for readers of the book to create their own nature collage.



Meet the Book That Inspired The Weedy Garden

The Comfort Of Crows - A Backyard Year

by Margaret Renkl

Published: October 24, 2023

by Spiegel & Grau

This heartfelt diary of a year of noticing the wild world just outside her windows inspired me to appreciate even more the beauty of the natural world through mine.

Renkl presents her observations in prose that is both poetic and sincere. As a nature lover and wildlife enthusiast myself, reading *The Comfort Of Crows* left me, at times, overcome with emotion.



So much so, that I'm journaling my own way through the year with her companion release: *Leaf, Cloud, Crow - A Weekly Backyard Journal*.

Published October, 2024 by Spiegel & Grau



BIG BEAUTIFUL BLOOMS

Boldly blooming at Ovans Peony Farm, Beaver Dam

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 luscious 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.

6th ANNUAL WISCONSIN ARTS & PEONY FESTIVAL

June 10, 2026 - June 14, 2026, 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.

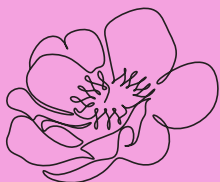
Other festival activities include an artist market, live music, food trucks, a yarn-bombing event, boutique shopping, special peony art exhibits, a quilt challenge exhibit, and more.



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. Guided tours available, registration required. \$5



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-4pm, and Sundays, noon - 4pm. 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.

WISCONSIN STATE PARKS

ANNUAL FREE FUN WEEKEND JUNE 6-7, 2026

MARK YOUR CALENDARS: The ANNUAL FREE FUN WEEKEND in Wisconsin State Parks is held the first full weekend in June. From *June 6-7* free admission is open to all state parks and recreation areas. No admission sticker will be required.

FEATURES INCLUDE:

No Admission Fees (no vehicle sticker required)

No Trail Passes required

Free Fishing (no license or stamp required)

Many parks will be holding special events and activities this weekend

Locations: All 50 Wisconsin State Parks, 15 State Forests, 44 State Trails

For more details check out the [Wisconsin DNR Website](#)

What's Happening?



Notable Dates And Opportunities

[Art in the Green - April 25-26](#)
[Mitchell Park Domes](#)



[Explore Wild Wisconsin in an organized group with NRF Field Trips.](#)
[Over 280 to choose from!](#)



Marl Lake, Waupaca

[Door County Festival of Nature - May 21-24](#)
[Bailey's Harbor](#)



The Ridges Sanctuary

[Woodland Wonders at Green Bay Botanical Garden - May 1, 2026 thru April 30, 2027](#)



[Paine Art Center, Oshkosh - Festival Of Spring](#)
[Free Admission - Saturday, May 16 9am-4pm](#)



[Spring Fresh Art Tour Wisconsin - Stockholm](#)
[June 6, 7, 8, 10am-5pm](#)



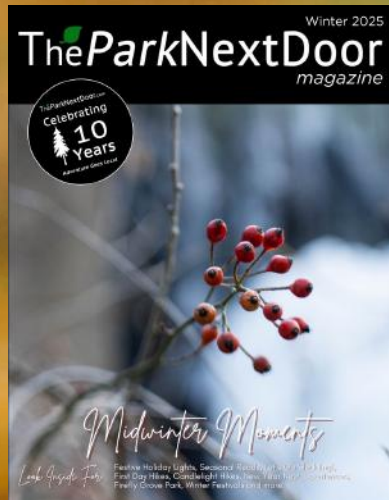
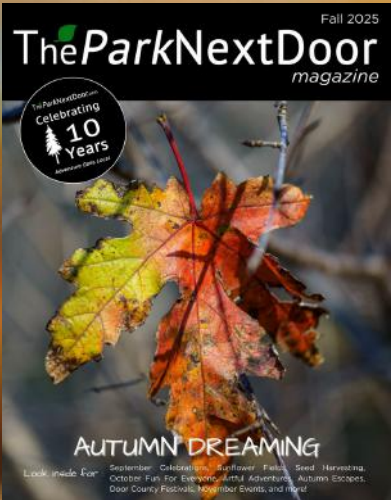
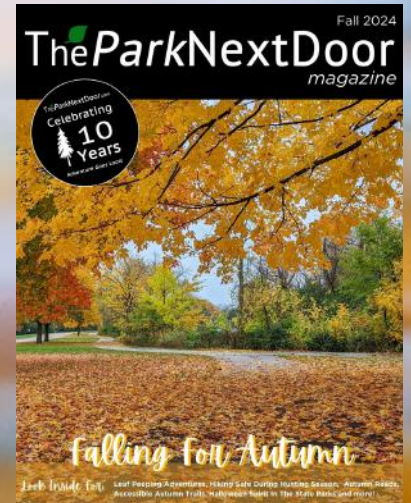
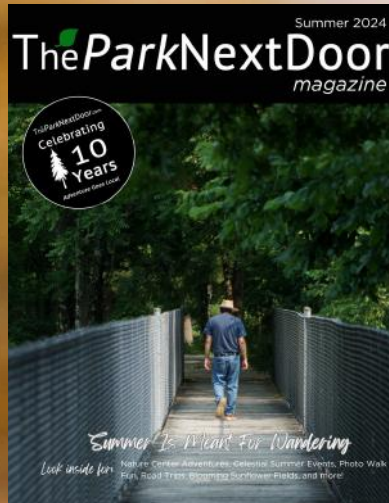


Exploring the local parks, state parks, nature areas, and other bits of wilderness in Wisconsin.

All Back Issues Available Online

The Park Next Door

magazine



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](https://www.instagram.com/theparknextdoor)



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



Native Pink Trillium grows along the woodland trail at Forest Exploration Center.