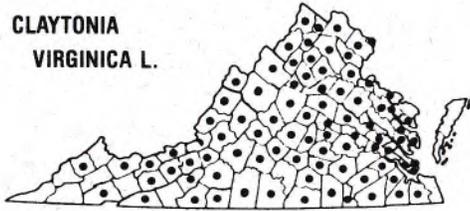


Where to See Spring Beauty

The dainty blooms of *Claytonia virginica* can be found in early spring in open woodlands from Newfoundland to Georgia and westward to the Rocky Mountains in Colorado, and Montana and southward to Texas. In Virginia spring beauty is known from nearly all counties except a few in the southwestern tip and on the Delmarva Peninsula. Broad-leaved spring beauty, *C. caroliniana*, with much wider oval leaves, is found in a few counties chiefly in the southwestern portion of the state. The map below, from the **Atlas of the Virginia Flora** (1986), shows the known ranges in the Commonwealth.

CLAYTONIA
VIRGINICA L.



Look for this flower in March or April on the floor of cold, moist deciduous forests or forest opening in shade or semi-shade. The flowers may be especially abundant under a high canopy of tulip poplars, beeches, maples, elms, and birches. Often interspersed among colonies of spring beauty are fawn or trout lily, Dutchman's breeches, hepatica, foamflower, bluebells, and violets.

Chapters of Virginia Native Plant Society sponsor many spring wildflower walks, providing opportunities to enjoy spring beauty and other wildflowers from the Coastal Plain to beyond the Blue Ridge. Check your local newspaper for dates and locations, or write to VNPS at the address below.

Dorothy Bliss, Author

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Barbara Stewart, Artist

Gardeners should be sure that spring beauty tubers and other native plants purchased for home gardens are nursery propagated, not wild collected. For a list of retail sources of nursery-propagated plants and responsibly collected seed, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to the address below.

Virginia Native Plant Society
P.O. Box 844
Annandale, VA 22003

1990 Virginia Wildflower of the Year

Spring Beauty
Claytonia virginica



Virginia Native Plant Society

Formerly Virginia Wildflower Preservation Society

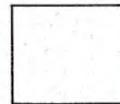
P.O. Box 844

Annandale, VA 22003

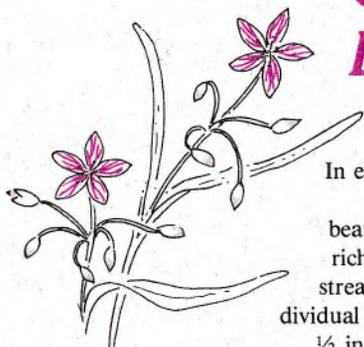
Spring Beauty
Claytonia virginica



1990 Virginia
Wildflower of the Year



Spring Beauty



In early spring the star-like pink flowers of spring beauty carpet many moist, rich woodlands and sunny stream banks. Although individual flowers are small, only $\frac{1}{2}$ inch across, their massed display is spectacular. The flowers, white to rose with red veins, are in loose racemes above a pair of opposite, narrow, fleshy leaves, 1-6 inches long, midway up the stem. This tiny ephemeral often sprawls on the forest floor, sending up as many as 15 blossoms from each underground stem.

The flowers of spring beauty, which may bloom for up to two weeks, open only in sunlight. Each is made up of 2 persistent green sepals, 5 petals, 5 stamens, and a 3-lobed stigma. As the blooms fade, a 3-6 seeded capsule develops. Soon the above-ground parts disappear, leaving only a deep-seated underground stem or tuber. These starchy tubers $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 inch in diameter, were a favorite Indian food. Another common name for this plant is fairy spuds, alluding to the tuber's resemblance to a miniature potato with many protruding eyes.

Spring beauty, *Claytonia virginica*, is classified in the Portulacaceae or Purslane family. Another species, *C. caroliniana*, also occurs in Virginia. The only other members of the Purslane family recorded in the state are three species of *Portulaca* and *Talinum teretifolium*, fameflower.

The name *Claytonia* was bestowed upon this genus by Linnaeus in honor of John Clayton, one of our earliest botanists (1693-1779), who lived in Soles (Mathews County), Virginia, and contributed plant specimens to Gronovius for his *Flora Virginica* (1739). The species name *virginica* refers to the colony of Virginia.

... In the Wild

In March or April, under the high canopy of still-leafless deciduous trees in flood plains or moist meadows, a breathtaking display of spring beauty's delicate flowers may spread across the landscape like a pink mist. While cold winds still whip through the bare branches of the trees overhead, the early spring sun warms the leaf litter, and dormant underground stems and roots are stirred to active growth. Soon the tiny tubers of spring beauty break dormancy, and fleshy leaves on wiry stems appear. For several weeks the forest floor is alive during sunlight hours with pink masses of spring beauty, intermingled with countless other spring flowers.

As the canopy leafs out and dense shade again settles over the woodlands, the flowers fade, the fruits or capsules mature, and their tiny seeds are dispersed. Within a few weeks the above-ground parts die down,

leaving the underground tuber with its stored food to remain dormant in the soil until the following spring.

Spring beauty reseeds readily in the wild, but although it is not endangered at present, its habitat is easily destroyed. It is this loss of habitat that threatens the continued existence of Virginia's great diversity of wild plants and animals. Clearing forests and meadows, draining and altering stream courses, and disturbing river flood plains can result in a drastic decline, or even extinction, of vulnerable species.

Leave wildflowers and native plants undisturbed in the wild. Dig neither plants nor dormant rhizomes, and avoid clearing, draining, or disturbing their habitats. Protection of the places where they grow will insure that spring beauty and other wildflowers will be there to bring delight and joy to future generations.

... In the Garden

The fragile beauty of this tiny plant may best be appreciated in the wild. Its small size and delicate color are most effective in expansive colonies, and its exuberant spread, rather lax habit, and early dormancy also limit its use in gardens.

A further caution: Much of the spring beauty offered commercially has been dug from the wild. For a variety of reasons, very few nurseries propagate it. Gardeners who want to use it should plan to spend some time finding sources of nursery-propagated plants, or to collect seed and grow their own. Purchased seed may not be satisfactory if it has been allowed to dry out.

Where the size and design of a garden can accommodate spring beauty, it is easy to grow in humus-rich soil in full or partial shade. It thrives in deep leaf mold with plenty of moisture, but it will grow in drier soil if given adequate moisture during active growth.

One effective use of spring beauty in the garden is as an informal groundcover under bolder plants that need not be disturbed frequently. As the spring beauty foliage fades and vanishes, plants such as ferns and later-emerging wildflowers will keep the area attractive.

Although spring beauty self-sows freely in the wild, collecting the tiny seeds takes close observation. They should be sown as soon as they ripen, in loamy acid or neutral soil in an outdoor bed. For sowing in flats or pots indoors, seeds should first undergo 6 weeks of cold in the refrigerator, in a moist medium such as sphagnum moss. In the fall, when plants are dormant, the small, dark tubers can be set out, 2-3 inches deep and 4-6 inches apart, in their permanent locations. Dormant tubers of established plants also can be moved or divided.