

VNPS Piedmont Chapter WILDFLOWER of the WEEK

WILDFLOWER #53 answer: **YELLOW FUMEWORT (*Corydalis flavula*)**

Not as delicate as it might seem, yellow fumewort thrives on disturbance. Fire and flood open the way for it. It can form big mats and grow up to 12 inches tall.

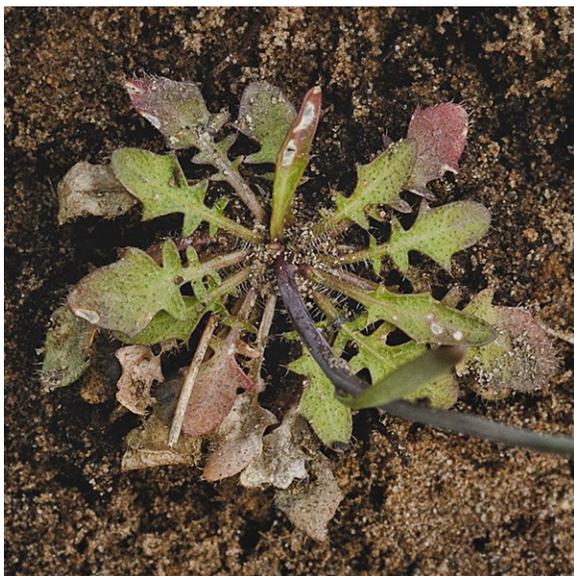
A “winter annual,” this native has a clever strategy. It flowers early and keeps on flowering for as long as a month. By June, the old, exhausted foliage lies flat, and the shiny black seeds are dormant in slim hanging capsules. Distributed by ants, seeds ripen with late summer heat. The need for heat limits the plant's northern range roughly to central Pennsylvania. Finally germinating in the fall, yellow fumewort overwinters as seedlings, poised to bloom again. This pattern makes it a good alternate host plant for the falcate orangetip butterfly, an early spring species.

Yellow fumewort has compound, lobed leaves like its fellow members of the Fumariaceae. The stem is reddish, with light hairs. The four petals are unequal, not quite folding into a tube. The uppermost petal has a short spur and a wavy toothy crest with wings, so you might imagine it resembles a bird. This is how it came to be called *Corydalis*, which means “crested lark” – a much more elegant name than the common names “yellow harlequin” or “scrambled eggs”.

Formerly classed in the Poppy family, this dainty flower has some powerful alkaloids with narcotic properties. Chinese practitioners have used the extract of a sister species as a mild sedative and to block pain.

WILDFLOWER #54

Clues: This delicate white flower has curvaceous basal leaves.



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