



By Russell Brunner  
Superintendent of Land Management

**Wild lupine** – This flower is abundant at the Stephen J. and Deirdre Nardi Prairie Preserve at 6651 N. River Road, Byron. Very abundant in the sand prairie plantings in the north 1/3 of the preserve. Best viewing time is mid-May.

## Full Glorious Bloom

Christopher Benda, botanist, photographer, author and president of the Illinois Native Plant Society, presented a great program at the Jarrett Prairie Center this winter on the rare natural areas of our state and some of the native plants to see within them. He talked about how he loves to photograph native plants in areas with mass blooms and at peak bloom. This means finding those high quality locations where there may be 100s or 1000s of the same flower in bloom at the same time. He used the expression “full glorious bloom, FGB” to describe those times when you encounter a species at the peak of its bloom and in large numbers. He said those words were used by Floyd Swink, a renowned botanist from the Chicago region, to describe his exhilaration upon catching a mass bloom of one of our native wildflowers at just the right time.

Many of our native plants may not match some ornamental flower beds in bloom size and density like the famed lilies at the Chicago Botanic Gardens, but once one comes to appreciate the beauty, rarity, and complexity of our local ecosystems and native wildflowers, one can find some pretty spectacular mass blooms in our local natural areas. The key to being witness to these “full glorious blooms” is being in the right place at the right time. This means two things, one must know where to look and when to visit. I am going to share a few of these with you for just a sampling of our native flora.

A good place to start looking is at Illinois Nature Preserves in our area. Most of our protected Illinois Nature Preserves contain high quality native plant communities so they are likely to have large populations of some of our showiest native wildflowers. At the same time, quality prairie plantings and other restored areas can also be home to some impressive floral displays. When to visit is really the trickier side of seeing these mass blooms. Many of our native wildflowers only bloom for a couple of weeks and peak bloom may only last a couple of days. I recommend visiting often. A quality natural area looks different every week with different flowers coming in and out of bloom. The more visits you make; the more likely you are to catch one of these mass blooms.

Alongside each photo is information about where and when to see these species in full flower. Dates vary year to year based very much on the weather, but other factors also influence bloom dates like whether or not the area was burned in the last dormant season. This is just a small sample of some of our local wildflowers that can put on spectacular displays, there are many more. Photographs are nice but not nearly as good as the real thing, so come out and enjoy them in person!

If you have any questions or are interested in helping in the Restoration Department, feel free to contact me at [russell@byronforestpreserve.com](mailto:russell@byronforestpreserve.com) or 815.234.8535 x219.

# land management



**Pale purple coneflower** – A signature wildflower of our dry hill prairies in this region. You can find nice populations at almost every Illinois Nature Preserve in our area. This photo is from the Loop Trail prairie overlooking PrairieView Golf Course. Wade Prairie Nature Preserve and Nachusa Grasslands are also excellent places to see mass blooms of this defining species. Best chance for peak bloom is the first or second week of June.



**Arrow-leaved aster** – A common wildflower of open oak woodlands. This display was photographed in a recently restored woodland in the southern end of the Nardi Prairie Preserve. Visit in early September to see the asters in full bloom.



**Bluebells** – The Howard Colman Hall Creek Preserve (12749 Weldon Rd, Rockford) has 1000s of these flowers located on both sides of the creek, the largest populations are in the center and north areas of the preserve on the west side of Hall Creek. Peak bloom is usually late April to the first week of May.



**Shooting stars** – You can find large populations of this spring wildflower in several area Nature Preserves. This photo is from the Loop Trail just downhill from the north shelter at the Jarrett Prairie Preserve. Best time to look for this mass bloom is mid-May.

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