

## **SE MN Prairie Partners Chapter Newsletter**

### **June 2025 Volume 14 issue 2**



Prairie Phlox. Photo by Dustin Demmer

## 2025 SE MN Prairie Partners officers

President – Barb Bolan  
Vice President – Nancy Schumacher  
Secretary – Polly Hendee  
Treasurer – Jim Sipe  
Membership Chair – LuAnn Raadt  
Newsletter Chair – open  
Webmaster & Social Media Lead- Matt Brueske  
Member-at-large – Breanna Wheeler  
Grant Manager – Jim Sipe

**Wild Ones Mission:** Native Plants, Natural Landscaping promote environmentally sound landscaping practices to preserve biodiversity through preservation, restoration, and establishment of native plant communities. Wild Ones is a not-for-profit environmental education and advocacy organization.

**Wild Ones National Address:** 2285 Butte des Morts Beach Road, Neenah, WI 54956  
[www.wildones.org](http://www.wildones.org)

**Membership:** Sign up/ renew online at <https://members.wildones.org/> or by mail: <https://members.wildones.org/renew-by-check/>. Cost is \$40 per year for a household (family) membership. Student and other membership types are also available.

**SE MN Prairie Partners Mission Statement:** To preserve, maintain and provide knowledge of native and restored plant communities in a way that fosters friendship.

## SE MN Prairie Partners online:

<https://semnprairiepartners.wildones.org/>

[Wild Ones: SE MN Prairie Partners | Facebook](#)

**Newsletter Committee:** Nancy Schumacher, Barb Bolan

## Submitting articles for the newsletter –

We welcome stories about natural areas, a native garden you have visited or designed, a nature-based vacation, a special flower, bird, butterfly, etc.

## Prairie Partners member local Services

*(Please let us know if you have one to list)*

**Whitewater Gardens Farm:** Lonny and Sandy Dietz [Whitewater Gardens Farm](#)

**Blazing Star Gardens:** Dustin Demmer [Blazing Star Gardens](#)

**Minnesota Native Landscapes (MNL):** Dwayne Vosejka [mnlcorp.com](http://mnlcorp.com)

**Bluff Land Wildlife Products:** Matthew Brueske [sales@blufflandwildlifeproducts.com](mailto:sales@blufflandwildlifeproducts.com) or [The Deer Cage](#)

**Enabling Healthy Habitats:** Dawn Littleton

**Friends of Nerstrand State Park:** Katy Gillispie [Friends of Nerstrand Big Woods](#)

**Friends of Whitewater State Park:** Joel Dunnette - [Friends of Whitewater](#)

**Zumbro Valley Audubon:** Joel Dunnette – Board member [zumbrovalleyaudubon.org](http://zumbrovalleyaudubon.org)

**River Bend Nature Center:** Packy Mader, Board of Directors [www.rbnc.org](http://www.rbnc.org)

**Halfpint Hollow Miniature Donkeys:** Rod and Sue White [halfpinthollow.com](http://halfpinthollow.com)

**CRP – Clean River Partnership:** Bill Jokela [Home - Clean River Partners](#)

Please let us know if you have something to add to this list. Thanks!

**2025 Chapter Events schedule** –*Inside, in-person events will typically be held in the Emmaus Church at 712 Linden St. North.*

**July 10th, 6pm** – Byllesby tour stops - Mary D and Tim & Sue B places – lakeshore restoration and native plantings

**Saturday July 26 afternoon** – Northfield yard tours - Jean N, Polly H, Will S, and more

**Friday August 1st, 7:30pm**, Family twilight walk - Look and listen for frogs, fireflies, moths, owls and more with Master Naturalists

**August 14th, 2pm** – Winona – Prairie tour and Whitewater Gardens visit/tour  
Plants available for sale!

**Saturday September 20th** - 10AM Seed harvest – location TBD.

**Sept, date TBD** - Koester prairie – help with seed harvest (Master Naturalists)

**Sep 11th 5pm-** Clean River partners – tour of a project – Anna Holmon  
anna@cleanriverpartners.org

**October 9th, 7pm** - Shelley Gorham, DNR – restorations/wildlife

**November 13th, 6pm** start – Seed share, led by Scott R., seed germination demo by Nancy S, plus appetizers, socializing

**December 11th, 11am** - Luncheon

## 2025 Plant Sale



Our 2025 Native Plant Sale was a huge success. A big thank you to Nancy Schumacher for leading, organizing, managing and growing plants for it and thank you to the volunteers that helped before hand and during the sale. It was at Nancy and Jim's place this year and people seemed to find it just fine. This is not only our fundraiser for the year, but also provides us with an opportunity to get more people putting in native plants and, hopefully, getting them hooked on them.

### Plant Profile - Spreading Jacob's Ladder (*Polemonium reptans*) by Pat Johnson



Spreading Jacob's Ladder is also known as Greek Valerian and Creeping Polemonium. It is a member of the family Polemoniaceae (Phlox). It likes moist, rich woods and light shade to shade. Found throughout southeastern Minnesota, it flowers from May to July and is easily mistaken for Virginia Bluebells.



Jacob's Ladder is a clump-forming plant that forms rounded mounds of pinnate leaves. These mounds can be up to 20 inches tall and wide. Leaves are compound, alternately attached with leaflets opposite or alternate. Lower leaves are up to 10 inches long and have 7-19 leaflets. Upper leaves become shorter and have fewer leaflets with simple leaves at the tips. Leaflets are ovate or oblong, pointed at the tip and up to 2 inches long. The plant is generally smooth throughout or with sparse short hairs on stems and leaf stalks. Erect branched stems, arising from the base, are hollow, green or purple tinged, soft and succulent.

In late Spring or early Summer, the stems bear terminal cymes of light blue or lilac-blue clusters of flowers that are bell-like with five oval petals that may be slightly pointed with somewhat wavy edges. Flowers have 5 stamens that are shorter than the petals and tipped with large white antlers. The style splits into 3 elements that extend beyond the petals. The calyx is fused with five triangular lobes about half as long as the floral tube, purple tinged and slightly hairy.

This is a plant that seems to do well for those of us who live in town and want to use natives throughout our yards. I had never seen Jacob's Ladder until our plant sale in 2024. I was looking for something for the upper edge of a rain garden that I maintain. I bought six plants and put them in that Spring. All have survived and spread nicely. They were in lovely bloom in May (2025) and now, in mid-June, have attractive seed pods. I bought three more plants this year and have placed them around a tree that I planted last Summer. This location has less shade than the rain garden. I look forward to seeing how they do.

## Rice County Roadside Prairie Project

Roadsides sometimes provide the only surviving stretches of natural prairies in an area. In addition to offering roadside beauty, they sustain a high diversity of plants and animals – butterflies, bees, birds and more.

A Public land survey 1847 to 1907 identified where different species could be found and where colonists could find their preferred land type – wooded, prairies, wetland... Less than 1% of the original prairie remains in MN.

In 2000, the DNR created an "Integrated Roadside Committee and funded a project to survey 820 miles of Rice County ditches, seeking out good quality remnant prairies. They identified the best 56 sites. 7.6 miles were selected with good numbers of native species.

In 2023 the Master Naturalists, led by Nancy Braker, initiated a capstone project that started looking at the sites again to see what management was needed to save sites, and determine which were still valuable as remnant prairies. Some have been mowed; others are overrun with invasives, but some are still good. We plan to help with this project this year to hopefully save some of these valuable sites.

**Link to Zoom presentation** - Nancy Braker and the Master Naturalists: [Video Conferencing, Web Conferencing, Webinars, Screen Sharing - Zoom](#)



Good shovel for removing Wild Parsnip without damaging other plants. NRG Pro Weeder.

## Rice County Roadside Prairie Project Work Day – June 17<sup>th</sup>

We joined with Cannon River Valley Master Naturalists to work on a Rice County roadside. Led by Nancy Braker we used specialized root digger shovels to pop out lots of invasive Wild Parsnip. Lots of work but also good fun and conversation! The sap of flowering wild parsnip is toxic, so it is very important to wear protective clothing, including gloves when removing flowering plants. If any of the sap gets on a person and the affected skin is exposed to sun, it will cause a nasty chemical burn.

### Member Profile – Dustin Demmer, Owner, Blazing Star Gardens

[www.blazingstargardens.com](http://www.blazingstargardens.com)



Daughter Isla and Dustin looking at prairie smoke flowers

When I was 10 years old I brought a marigold to the fair for 4-H and the judge asked me what the difference was between an annual and a perennial. I got the question wrong, and I've been trying to make up for it ever since.

I first got into native plants when doing an AmeriCorps program after college called the Minnesota GreenCorps. My service sites were the Cities of Owatonna and Northfield, and my

role was to put in rain gardens and other clean water projects. That's where I first learned how native wetland plants are especially suited for the wet and dry basins of rain gardens and infiltration basins. Then I started learning about the plants that can go on the dry upper slopes of rain gardens—plants like Prairie Smoke, Prairie Phlox, Meadow Blazing Star—and I thought, these are just normal perennial plants, both beautiful and important for pollinators and wildlife too, why aren't we planting them in all of our regular landscaping and garden projects instead of mostly exotic plants?

That question sent me down the road I'm on today. I worked at a conservation district for a year after my AmeriCorps service and launched my business Blazing Star Gardens in 2012 to have a more hands-on role in native landscaping and restoration projects. Since then, I've focused on growing plants for home gardeners and wholesale customers, but the goal has always been the same: help get more native plants back into our environment.

I've always enjoyed the design of gardens—how to go from the image in our heads to an actual garden. When I started designing native gardens, I needed to visualize the plants better, so I started drawing my garden design with mini-illustrations of the plants. Most garden designs use symbols, circles, a legend, or just names of plants to show where plants go, but I like how the miniature botanical illustrations show the shape of the plant, the height, and the color of the blooms. I thought it would be useful for other people too, and I made the illustrations available on the *Design a Native Pollinator Garden* tool on our website, where people can drag and drop the plants onto their own garden design. I enjoy when people share the designs they've made with this online tool,



especially when they print them out and bring them to plant sales!

The *Design a Native Pollinator Garden* tool is part of a greater effort to help educate and help people who are starting their native garden journey. When I started planting with native plants during my AmeriCorps service, I was completely new to these plants, and there wasn't a lot of information geared towards people planting native plants in gardens. There was a lot of trial and error to see what plants worked in different situations. I spent a lot of time going to public gardens—rain gardens, native landscaping, botanical gardens—to see how plants grow together, bloom together, and how they spread. I try to share my experiences through my website by writing descriptions and sharing photos that help people make more informed plant choices. I really like to take pictures of gardens—wide shots that show how the garden looks and how the plants are growing together.

I have two young daughters and it is fun to share native plants with them. Each spring we look for painted lady caterpillars on the pussytoe plants, then in summer we look for monarch caterpillars. My wife and I live with our girls in



Daughter Lena at the Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota gardens that Dustin designed and installed back in 2015

Owatonna where we have planted a big garden in our lot next door. We have a greenhouse and family land near Albert Lea where I grow native plants for retail sales and 2 acres of plants for wholesale seed and root production. We are hoping to purchase land near Northfield to build a greenhouse and move our business.



Daughter Isla watering Parasol Sedge



Daughter Lena looking for painted lady caterpillars in our home garden

## Get to know about the importance of spring woodland wildflowers

By Breanna Wheeler

One of my favorite springtime activities is to go out to the woods and look for the native wildflowers that emerge before the trees leaf out and block sunlight from reaching the forest floor. These special flowers are called spring ephemerals which means they last only a very short time. Some flowers only last one day, so you have to be sure and catch them before they are done! You may need to make several visits

to see all the different flowers that will emerge and bloom between late March and May.

Besides their beauty, spring ephemerals are important because they stabilize the soil and decrease erosion. They are an early food source for pollinators like the rusty patched bumblebee, ants and butterflies, and they are important for biodiversity. When you are in a woods and are noticing a variety of spring ephemerals, that is an indicator of a healthy forest ecosystem.

Here are a few wildflowers that I think are important for any native plant enthusiast to know about. Hopefully you will be inspired to learn more.

Hepatica is usually the first wildflower I notice in the woods. It is also known as liverwort as it has leaves that are the shape and color of the



Sharp Leaf Hepatica

three lobes of the liver. It can be sharp or round lobed with flowers varying in color from white to purple. The leaves are evergreen and do not die back above ground after they bloom, so it is not a true ephemeral.

False rue anemone is another common spring bloomer in our area. It carpets the forest floor in some areas and is designed to survive strong spring winds. They use wind pollination to propagate when there are few insects in spring. The name 'anemone' comes from the Greek word for wind.

The white trout lily forms colonies of which only about 1% of plants will bloom in a given season. They have purple mottling on the leaves, like a trout, and flowers when they happen, will occur on paired leaves. Flowers are about the size of a quarter. Not to be confused with our most famous..

Minnesota dwarf trout lily which was discovered in 1870 by Mary Hedges. It occurs only in Rice, Goodhue and Steele counties in the whole world. It is found in the Cannon and Straight River watersheds. It evolved from the white trout lily after the last ice age. It is a slow reproducer and is state and federally endangered. The flowers on the dwarf trout lily look like a grain of rice before they open up and when they flower are about the size of my pinky fingernail.

Wild blue phlox has five petals and is part of the mustard family. Not to be confused with the invasive Dame's rocket which has four petals and threatens to and does take over



Woodland (Wild) Blue Phlox

habitat for other spring blooming wildflowers.

Other 'starter' wildflowers to learn about include bloodroot, Virginia spring beauty, marsh marigold, wood

violet, Dutchman's breeches, cutleaf toothwort, and wild ginger.



Cutleaf Toothwort. Photo by Paula Corsi



Major threats to spring wildflowers include: Invasive species such as garlic mustard, buckthorn, Siberian squill, Dame's rocket, and earthworms. Other threats include development and climate change. Heavier rains and flash floods cause erosion, destroy habitat and allow for more invasive species to populate.

Things you can do to help are to use boot brush stations at the beginning of trails and model this behavior for others, brush your boots and other gear like backpacks, walking sticks, and bikes before going into natural areas and after you come out. Plant native species, buy from reputable sources (don't dig them up in natural areas) and volunteer with invasive species removals.

Some of my favorite places for viewing spring wildflowers are Nerstrand Big Woods State Park, River Bend Nature Center (Faribault), Kaplan's Woods (Owatonna), Carley State Park, the MN River Valley National Wildlife Refuge west of the Old Cedar Avenue Bridge, and Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden (Minneapolis). I hope you'll enjoy this springtime pastime, share it with others, and do what you can to help these important plants.

If you'd like to learn more, you can view a [April 23, 2025 DNR webinar](#) on spring ephemerals or visit [Minnesota Wildflowers](#) to learn more.

## **American Goldfinches (*Spinus tristis*) have secrets** by Barb Bolan

Why do goldfinches need spiders? How do goldfinches recognize their mates? How do they insulate from the cold? Are goldfinches pollinators? How do they thwart cowbirds?

True finches, in the family Fringillidae, evolved rather recently, only about 10 to 20 million



Male Goldfinch in summer (breeding) plumage.  
Note colorful beak.



Winter plumage, note dark beak

years ago, in Eurasia. Worldwide there are over 50 genera of finches in at least 250 countries.

Most finches are small to medium sized highly vocal birds with males who are well known for their vibrant colors. Their conical beaks are specialized for cracking seeds or nuts. In fact, they are one of the few bird species that actually eat almost exclusively seeds. The adults eat no insects.

Locally, the American Goldfinch is our best known and most common finch. The bright yellow and sharp black coloration of the males is very distinctive. Their specialized feet allow them to clasp onto plants to feed upside down or right-side-up, however they wish.

Goldfinch's beaks are pinkish/orange during breeding season and dark during the winter.

Goldfinches are partial migrants. If they have enough food and can stay warm enough, they may stay around all year, but, if they get hungry



or cold, they will migrate southward in the winter.

It is believed that females select brighter colored males as mates because they appear healthier. In fact, the specific type of carotenoid pigments in some of their seed choices can enhance their colors and help them find a mate. What he eats is very important, to her at least.

When goldfinches pair up, they develop nearly identical flight calls, allowing others to recognize them as a pair. They do not mate for life so apparently this behavior only lasts while paired up.

These beautiful gold and black finches are often seen in flocks, acrobatically flitting from plant to plant or feeder to tree and back. Goldfinch's diet consists almost exclusively of seeds, with a preference for thistles, sunflowers and asters, but they sometimes do feed their young a few insects, both for protein and because the young nestlings' beaks are not yet strong enough to crack seeds. Goldfinch nests are sometimes parasitized by cowbirds, but since the goldfinches mainly feed seeds to their nestlings, most cowbird chicks don't survive. Cowbird chicks need more protein.

In mid-summer, the female, builds a small cup-shaped nest of plant fibers. She dutifully places it in a shrub in an open area, lashes it to branches with spider silk (therefore needs spiders) and lines it with down from thistles or other flowers. Once satisfied with the nest, she lays up to 7 pale bluish-white eggs in it. In about a month the babies will be ready to fledge. Both parents help feed and care for the young. Our goldfinches nest later than most species to ensure that plenty of seeds are ready for the young to eat. Nature provides the thistle down for their nests in mid-summer.

Unlike most finches, Our American Goldfinches complete full molts in both spring and fall. In the fall molt, to help prepare for the winter season, they add a sublayer, of soft feathers for more insulation. The females never sport the vibrant colors of the male, but they do the molts.



Goldfinch nest. Photo by Andrea Bolan

Our goldfinches are both accomplished seed spreaders and pollinators. While digging seed out from composite flowers such as sunflowers, their feet get coated in pollen from nearby young florets, then when it moves to another plant's flower, pollination is completed. Though they are not as efficient as bees, they get the job done.



A Two spotted bumblebee on coneflower - note concentric ring of florets opening

The most common predators of goldfinches are garter snakes, blue jays, hawks, squirrels, weasels, and both domestic and feral cats.

Native plants such as asters, coneflowers and sunflowers left uncut in the fall provide some of the best food for our goldfinches for the winter.

## School Plant a Pocket of Prairie Program

– Organized by Rice Co Soil & Water Conservation Dept, initiated by Richard Huston.

We participated in the "Plant a Pocket of Prairie" event for 3<sup>rd</sup> graders of Rice County. Volunteers read the *Plant a Pocket of Prairie* book, shared a brief video of Monarchs and pollinators, answered questions and gave students and teachers a native.

**Minnesota Natural Lands** – Thank you Gary Bullemer for sharing so many great stories of our natural lands! We hope you enjoy your retirement from our newsletter writing and spend a lot of time out enjoying nature!

Minnesota is a beautiful state filled with so many opportunities to get out and enjoy our natural lands that it can be hard to know where to start an adventure.

From the MN DNR: "*Minnesota's natural areas are designated to preserve native plant communities, rare species, and geologic features. These areas offer a unique experience for those seeking solitude and an uncommon encounter with the natural world. The Minnesota DNR manages these areas to provide both economic and ecological benefits, including habitat conservation, educational opportunities, recreational activities, ecological relationships, and management efforts.*"

Locations, maps, descriptions and more can be found at the MNDNR site: [Destinations | Minnesota DNR](#)

We have 64 state parks, 9 recreational areas and 9 wayside rests that attract over 10 million visitors each year. Additionally, we are blessed with 60 state forests. And there are 25 state trails covering over 1500 miles and 35 state water trails offering over 4500 miles of paddling

action. If that isn't what you are looking for, perhaps the over 3,000 public water access points and hundreds of fishing piers and sites will entice you to explore the state. We even have 5 national parks here that draw another million plus visitors per year, and of course countless city, county or regional parks to enjoy.



Bison herd at Blue Mounds State Park. Photo from Gary Bullemer

Additionally, there are WMAs, AMAs, SNAs. What are these and how do they differ?

**WMAs** – Wildlife Management Areas – provide wildlife habitat plus recreation areas for hunting and trapping as well as nature viewing and hiking. If you go during hunting season, please wear orange, be careful and follow the rules. Access is free.



Mud Creek WMA Ironweed and Monarda in bloom

**AMAs** – Aquatic Management Areas – protect and maintain over 700 miles of critical shoreline. Fishing and nature activities are typically welcomed, but some are easements, not state owned, and require landowner permission. Access is free for state-owned AMAs.



**SNAs – Scientific Natural Areas** - places where native plants and animals can thrive and rare species are protected. SNAs are free and open to explore, as long as the natural conditions of the property are not disturbed. These sites are very valuable for scientific research projects.



Showy Lady Slipper from Sibley State Park. Photo provided by Gary Bullemer

### Native Garden Grants – closed for 2025

Our 2025 Grant program has been closed but we hope to offer it again in 2026, thanks to another highly successful plant sale. The grant offers reimbursement of up to \$300 for the purchase of native plants to be used in the garden. We plan to award up to five grants for gardens on private property and up to five grants for gardens in public spaces. Two participants have successfully completed their 2025 projects and reimbursements are on the way to them. Thank you Jim Sipe for managing this project!

### Spring Ephemeral Tour at Rice Lake Park *led by Breanna Wheeler*

Breanna Wheeler led us on a gorgeous spring ephemeral tour at Rice Lake Park in April where we saw and learned about many of our beautiful spring bloomers and their importance to the eco-system.



Breanna guided us on a tour of spring ephemerals, such as the trout lilies, at Rice Lake State Park



A colony of White Trout Lilies. As Breanna explained, only a few plants flower each year



Virginia Waterleaf flowers

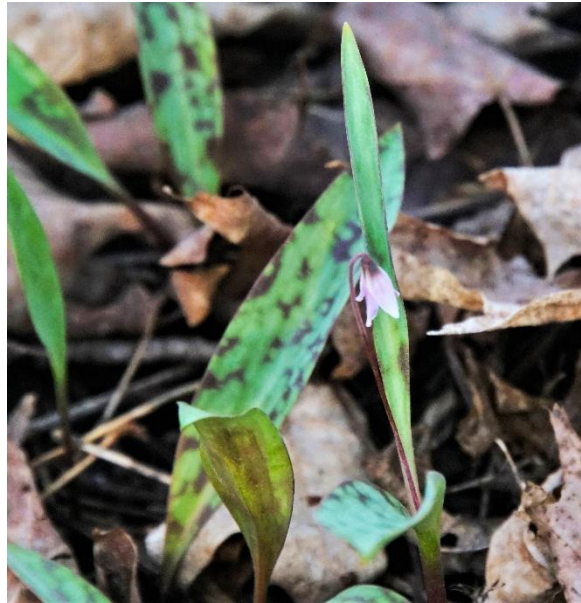


Return Address:  
Barb Bolan  
9700 Baldwin Ave  
Ave Northfield, MN 55057

Address Label



White Trout Lily (not dwarf). A Minnesota spring ephemeral native plant. Photo by Gail Gates



Dwarf Trout Lily, spring ephemeral found exclusively in 3 counties in Minnesota. Note leaves same as larger White Trout Lily but flower is tiny. Photo by Paula Corsi



One of Dustin Demmer's home gardens