

Celebrating Wildflowers

2023

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Celebrating Wildflowers?
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About the Partners

Kelsey Chapter of the Montana Native Plant Society

The mission of the MNPS is to preserve, conserve, and study Montana's native plants and plant communities. The Kelsey Chapter of the MNPS is centered in the Helena area and welcomes members and the public to all activities. The chapter hosts free public programs on native plant topics, sponsors field trips and hikes to identify and study native plants and habitats, offers hands-on identification together a packet of information about landscaping and gardening with Montana native plants in the Helena area and publishes a series of articles on native plants every year in the Independent Record. For information about the Montana Native Plant Society, visit: <https://www.mtnativeplants.org/chapters/kelsey/>.

The Montana Discovery Foundation

MDF offers opportunities for students of all ages to learn about nature, ecosystems, and how to make good decisions within their own communities. MDF helps with on-the-ground stewardship and conservation education in the areas surrounding the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest. Hosting a variety of educational opportunities, MDF increases knowledge and awareness for improving habitat, watershed health, responsible recreation ethics, and other outdoor-related subjects. MDF believes that fun, outdoor activities should be available in all seasons—from International Migratory Bird Day and Celebrating Wildflowers in spring, the Youth Forest Monitoring Program and Master Naturalist in summer, Adopt-a-Species in fall, SnowSchool in winter, and hosted hikes all through the year, MDF will get you out and help you learn about natural resources and outdoor recreation. If you would like more information, please visit www.montanadiscoveryfoundation.org/programs/celebrating-wildflowers/.

Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest

The HLC National Forest, straddling the Continental Divide, includes approximately 2.8 million acres of public National Forest System (NFS) land. The HNF is rich with natural and cultural resources. Its diverse topography and geology provide great scenery and recreational opportunities abound. The Forest's mountain ranges contain a wide array of plant and animal life. Native cutthroat trout and other fish species populate clear mountain lakes and streams and wildlife is found everywhere. The HLCNF is committed to providing quality visitor information, education, and outreach to the community. Forest employees work with a variety of agencies and conservation partners that focus on education efforts to improve habitat, outdoor recreation ethics. As part of these efforts, the HLCNF has been involved with the Celebrating Wildflowers programs for over ten years and appreciates the long-standing partnerships that have kept a great education program strong and teaching Montana kids about native species and habitats. For more information, please visit www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/.

Shooting Stars *Dodecatoon*

A Story from *Flower Stories* by Lenore E. Mulets 1904

Long ago, the little stars up in the sky jogged and jostled each other sadly. “Why do you push and shove?” asked their calm, quiet mother, the moon. “Our big brother, the evening star, will not allow us to shine!” cried the little stars. “We think, O Mother Moon, that there are too many stars in the sky!” “Do stand still,” the evening star exclaimed. “How can I shine steadily with a lot of little stars twinkling about on my toes?”

“Children! Children!” said the Mother Moon, roundly. “Oh,” said one of the little star babies, “I wish we might live down on the earth. There are acres of room down there. How happy we might be on earth!” “We would not need to stand so still down there,” said another star baby, longingly.

“Would it really please you to live on the earth?” asked their father, the Night Wind. Every star baby twinkled and danced and beamed happily out at the Night Wind. “Oh,” cried they, “may we go?” “Fold your pink and white dresses closely about you,” said the Night Wind. “Fasten on your hearts these little shields of gold. I will carry you to the earth.” So there in the middle of the night, after the evening star and the big calm moon were fast asleep, the little stars slipped from the sky. Down and down and down the Night Wind carried the little star babies. With their pink and white dresses folded closely about them they sped on and on.

At length, when each star baby was quite tired out, the Night Wind kissed them and left them to sleep in soft beds of moss by the woodside. Dainty, cool ferns waved over them, and a tiny brook sang them to sleep. “Ah,” said the star babies, when they awoke in the morning, “let us stay always among the grasses and dance and play together. Let us always wear our pink and white dresses folded closely as now. Let us always wear the tiny golden shields on our heart. Let us grow for the earth children. Perhaps some day they will find us and play with us!” Thus it was that the shooting stars first came to earth.

About Celebrating Wildflowers

The Celebrating Wildflowers program was created in 1991 by the USDA Forest Service in response to a public request for information about native plants and their conservation. Other agencies soon joined as botanists, interpreters and the public became enthusiastic about the Celebrating Wildflowers program.

The Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest, in cooperation with the partners of the Montana Discovery Foundation and the Kelsey Chapter of the Montana Native Plant Society, is now in the twenty-second year of Celebrating Wildflowers. The partners, working with area teachers, encourage 4th grade students to read the myths and legends you’ll find on these pages. The students who participate are required to read and research the native plant of interest, then draw a picture to illustrate their selected story.

The winners from this competition are proudly displayed in this publication. Also, participating students hike on Mt. Helena to view first hand the unique and beautiful range of native plant species found virtually in their backyard. Education stations are set up to inform students about pollination and botany.

We hope this publication inspires and encourages everyone to learn more about native plants, their habitat and conservation.

Let's Celebrate Wildflowers

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Blanket Flower

Gaillardia aristata

A Plains Comanche Story

A wonderful Comanche weaver made beautiful robes, mats, and blankets for his people. Everyone in the tribe had something that the weaver had made, and it was among their most prized possessions.

One day the weaver realized that his time on earth was drawing to an end. So, he set out to make one last weaving. It would be his death blanket. The weaver worked for many weeks, gathering the plants to create his dyes, preparing the wool, setting up his loom, and, finally, weaving the blanket. Several months later, the blanket was complete. That night, the weaver died in his sleep.

Out of their great respect and love for the weaver, the tribe wrapped him in the blanket and placed him on the burial platform. When the Great Spirit came to take the weaver to heaven, he was awed by the beautiful blanket. He was also amazed at the love and respect the tribe held for the weaver. So, as a gift to the people of the tribe, the Great Spirit sends the colors of the weaver's last creation to earth every spring in the flowers of the Blanket Flower.

Bitterroot

Lewisia rediviva

A Salish Story

A long time ago, an old woman whose family was starving went down to the river to cry. There was no food so she began singing her death song. The sun heard her and took pity on her and sent a red bird to bring her food and beauty. The red bird said to her, “a new plant will grow from your sorrowful song and your tears which have fallen into the soil. It will have the rose color of my wing feathers and the white of your hair, and it will have leaves close to the ground. Your people will eat the roots of this plant, and they will not starve. Though it will be bitter from your sorrow, it will be good for them.”

When they see these flowers they will say, “here is the silver of our mother’s hair upon the ground, and the rose from the wings of the Spirit Bird. Our mother’s tears of bitterness have given us food.” The bitterroot remains an important cultural symbol and a food and medicine source for Salish and other Indigenous peoples to this day.

Prairie Rose *Rosa arvensis*

Lakota (Sioux) Story

Long, long ago, when the world was young and people had not come out yet, no flowers bloomed on the prairie. Only grasses and dull, greenish gray shrubs grew there. Earth felt very sad because her robe lacked beauty.

“I have many beautiful flowers in my heart,” Earth said to herself. “I wish they were on my robe. Blue flowers like the clear sky in fair weather, white flowers like the snow of winter, brilliant yellow ones like the sun at midday, pink ones like the dawn of a spring day—all these are in my heart. I am sad when I look on my dull robe, all gray and brown.”

A sweet little pink flower heard Earth’s sad talking. “Do not be sad, Mother Earth. I will go upon your robe and beautify it.” So the little pink flower came up from the heart of the Earth Mother to beautify the prairies. But when the Wind Demon saw her, he growled, “I will not have that pretty flower on my playground.”

He rushed at her, shouting and roaring, and blew out her life. But her spirit returned to the heart of Mother Earth. When other flowers gained courage to go forth, one after another, Wind Demon killed them also. And their spirits returned to the heart of Mother Earth. At last Prairie Rose offered to go. “Yes, sweet child,” said Earth Mother, “I will let you go. You are so lovely and your breath so fragrant that surely the Wind Demon will be charmed by you. Surely he will let you stay on the prairie.”

So Prairie Rose made the long journey up through the dark ground and came out on the drab prairie. When Wind Demon saw her, he rushed toward her, shouting: “She is pretty, but I will not allow her on my playground.” So he rushed on, roaring and drawing his breath in strong gusts. As he came closer, he caught the fragrance of Prairie Rose.

“I do not have it in my heart to blow out the life of such a beautiful maiden with so sweet a breath. She must stay here with me. I must make my voice gentle, and sing sweet songs.” the Wind Demon mused. So he changed. He became quiet. He sent gentle breezes over the prairie grasses. He whispered and hummed little songs of gladness. He was no longer a demon.

Other flowers came up from the heart of Earth Mother. They made her robe, the prairie, bright and joyous. Wind came to love the blossoms growing among the grasses of the prairie. And so the robe of Mother Earth became beautiful because of the loveliness, the sweetness, and the courage of the Prairie Rose.

Paintbrush *Castilleja spp.*

Credited from Texas Wildflowers, Stories and Legends by Ruth Isely

Once there was a small boy who worried that he was not big enough to ever become a warrior. Seeing the boy's concern, a Shaman told him not to worry. The Shaman assured the boy that he would walk a different path than that of a warrior and be an important member of the tribe.

When it was time for this boy to become a man, he went on his vision quest. After some time, his vision came. He saw an old grandfather who gave him fine brushes and pots of paints. He saw a young maiden who gave him a white buckskin canvas. The maiden told him he would one day paint a picture on it with colors as pure as the sunset. Retuning to his people, the young man began to paint pictures of the hunts, the dream visions, and the good deeds of his tribe.

But the white buckskin remained empty. He had not found the brilliant colors he had seen during his vision-quest. There he would find what he needed to paint the beautiful colors of the sunset. When he arrived on the hillside, there were already paintbrushes dipped in paint, each with the reds, oranges, pinks, and yellows of the sunset. He quickly painted the scene of the setting sun on his white buckskin. When he went back to his village, he left the paintbrushes on the hillside. The next morning his people saw that the brushes had taken root and multiplied. They covered the land with their beauty. And that is how we came to have Indian Paintbrush to this very day.

Forget-Me-Not

Eritrichium spp.

A German Medieval Story

A knight was picnicking with the woman he loved by the riverside one day. As he gathered a bouquet of flowers for her, the water suddenly rose and began to sweep him away. As the woman reached out to rescue him the current took him away, leaving only the flowers in her hand that he had just picked for her.

He called to her, "forget-me-not!" just before the river pulled him under forever. On the bank of this river now grow thousands of tiny blue flowers to preserve his memory. It is said that the woman's tears watered those flowers for the rest of her life. The Forget-Me-Not flower then spread around the world.

Pasqueflower

Anemone (Pulsatilla) patens

A Lakota Story

This pretty flower used to be white until it helped a young Lakota boy become a man through his vision quest. As night fell, he became chilled so he pulled the robe around him. A voice at his feet said, "Thank you!" Looking down he was surprised to see that a little white flower had spoken. The flower was also cold.

As the days and nights passed, the boy and the flower enjoyed each other's company and watched the brilliant yellow sun rise and set on the purple mountains that surrounded them. The boy took great comfort in the flower's presence. The flower reassured the boy that his vision would come.

Finally, the boy's vision came. He saw that he would become a great medicine man and help his people. In return for the flower quieting the boy's fears, he granted it three wishes.

The pasqueflower wished for a heavy fur robe to keep it warm, the beauty of the purple mountains, and the warm rays of the sun in its heart.

The wishes were granted, and this is how we now see the pasqueflower.

Harebell

Campanula rotundifolia

A Story by Steve Schaller

A long time ago, hares used to be mean to all animals. They would gang up on other animals and hurt them. This went on for many years. Finally all of the other animals grew tired of the constant harassment, and decided to do something about it. They went to the Great Spirit and complained of the hares' behavior.

The Great Spirit was very disappointed to hear how the hares were behaving. To solve the problems, he placed little blue bells around all of the hares' necks as a warning to other animals to run and hide whenever the hares came near.

Indeed, the bells worked so well that, after a time, all of the hares became very lonely because they never got to see any other animals. They become so lonely in fact, that they went to the Great Spirit and asked for forgiveness. They promised to always be friendly to the other animals.

The Great Spirit took pity on them and took off their bells. But as a reminder of the hares' promise, he turned the bells into beautiful blue flowers and placed them where they could always be seen. And so they remain to this very day.

Quaking Aspen *Populus tremuloides*

A Blackfeet Story

Napi, the Great Spirit, came to Earth one day as he often did. He was walking through the mountains and all of the trees bowed down to him as they always did—except for the aspen trees.

On this day, the aspen trees had decided Napi was not that powerful or important. The junipers, ponderosas, cottonwoods, and willows all watched in disbelief at the foolishness of the aspens, knowing Napi's intolerance for disrespect. Napi became so angry at the aspens that he threw lightening bolts at them, nearly frightening all of their leaves off! After that, the aspens grew so afraid of Napi, that to this day, when they hear anyone walking in the woods, they begin to quiver and quake, fearing it may be Napi.

The next time you are nearing an aspen grove you will see how all of the trees tremble at your approach.

Buffaloberry

Shepherdia spp.

A Blackfeet Story

The Great Spirit, Iktomi, came to Earth one day. He looked into a pool of water and saw some bright red berries on the bottom. Being hungry, he dove into the pool, but he could not reach the berries. He came up for air, and dove into the water again and again. The last time as he came up for air, he pulled himself out of the water and lay down beside the pool. Looking up, he saw the berries were actually on a bush hanging over the pool. What he had seen in the water was their reflection.

Iktomi was so angry at the bush for tricking him that he took a stick and hit the bush, causing the berries to fall to the bottom of the pool. He then put a curse on the buffalo berry bush saying "from now on, whenever someone wants your berries, they will have to hit you."

To this day, that is how you must gather buffalo berries.

Mountain Lady Slipper

Cypripedium montannum

Adapted from an Ojibway Story

If you peek inside a mountain lady's slipper, you will often see reddish-purple streaks. These streaks never used to be there until one day a small girl met a rabbit who was crying. He had hurt his feet and wanted to go home. The girl felt sorry for the rabbit and gave him her moccasins.

Being far from home herself, the young girl's feet soon became bruised and cut, and began to bleed. Growing tired as well, she lay down to take a nap. While she slept, a songbird saw her and asked the Great Spirit to take pity on the child.

When she awakened, she saw hanging on two graceful stems a pair of lovely moccasins, just her size. Donning the moccasin flowers, she was able to return home.

Today, you can see where the blood from her feet stained the petals on the inside of the Lady Slipper.

Fireweed *Epilobium angustifolium*

A Blackfeet Story

A young man was being held captive by an enemy tribe. But the woman who loved him knew of his capture and thought of a plan to rescue him. She set fire to one end of the enemies' camp. While the enemy was trying to smother the flames, she ran to the other end of the camp where her lover was tied to a tree.

After she released him, they ran as fast as they could, but the enemy saw them and gave chase. The Great Spirit witnessed this and took pity on the couple. He made flames shoot up from where the woman's moccasins touched the ground and the couple escaped.

After the next rain, wherever there had been fire from her footsteps, the beautiful fire-weed grew. It is, to this day, one of the first plants that comes into an area after a fire.

Douglas Fir *Pseudotsuga nenziesii*

A Story by Steve Schaller

Once there was a big fire in the forest. The big animals, like the deer, moose and rabbits ran away. But the little ones with short legs, like the mouse and chipmunk could not outrun the fast-approaching flames. Grandmother Douglas Fir felt sorry for the little ones. She called to them, "Hurry! Climb to my highest limbs and my bark will keep us safe!"

Once the animals had reached safety, she told them to hide their faces in her cones where they would be protected from the fire. Just as they had tucked their tiny heads and shoulders into the cones, the fire came swiftly through the area. After the glowing embers had cooled, the animals came back down from the tree. They thanked the old Douglas Fir and promised to help spread her seeds about the land. As a reminder of grandmother Douglas Fir kindness, the Great Spirit made the cones look like they had when all of the animals hid from the fire.

Wild Strawberry *Fragaria virginiana*

A Cherokee Story

When the first man was created and a mate given to him, they lived together happily for a time, but then began to quarrel, until at last the woman left her husband and started off toward the Sun. The man was sad and followed alone, but the woman kept on steadily ahead and never looked behind. The Creator took pity on the man and asked him if he was still angry with his wife. He said he was not, and the Creator then asked if he would like to win her back, to which he eagerly answered, "YES."

So Creator caused a patch of the finest huckleberries to spring up along the path in front of the woman, but she passed by without paying any attention to them. Farther on he put a clump of blackberries, but these were also refused. Then some bushes covered with beautiful red service berries were placed beside the path to tempt her, but she went on until she came upon a patch of plump ripe strawberries.

She stooped to gather a few to eat, and as she picked them she chanced to turn her face to the west, and at once the memory of her husband came back to her and she found herself unable to go on. She sat down and the longer she waited the stronger became her desire for her husband. At last she gathered some of the finest berries and turned back along the path to find her husband. He met her kindly and they went home together.