



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection
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SPRING BLOOMS COLOR THE NATURE PRESERVE AT STRATFORD ECOLOGICAL CENTER

March went out like a lamb, and since then there have been plenty of April showers to bring on the flowers. The Nature Preserve at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road is full of Spring Beauties, Cut-leaf Toothwort, the leaves of the Wild Hyacinth, and of course the rampant Ramps. We would make a fortune if we sold these onion plants at today's price of \$20 per pound, however they remain protected in the Preserve.

The May-apples are slowly emerging and spreading their tender umbrella-like leaves, with the "apples" visible between the two stems of older plants. The hillside has yet to become a bank of white trillium, but the stemless red trillium can be seen at the junction of the Creek and Well Loop trails. Violets, Purple Bittercress, Waterleaf, Bloodroot and Dutchman's breeches are evident. Looking up, the Spice Bush, the Red Bud, and the Buckeye leaves are out. There are still many flowers to bloom, and for those with sharp eyes it is like discovering gold without the hard work!

Officially Earth day is Saturday, April 22, but we started planting trees and pulling garlic mustard last Monday. We will continue planting and pulling through Friday, April 21. On Earth day garlic mustard pulling only is planned. However, we hope twenty volunteers arriving at 10 am. or later, are willing to walk out to the cemetery and probe the ground to locate buried head and foot stones. The restoration of the cemetery is ongoing and this is the next stage in the plan.

It seems in the winter, when there are less distractions in the landscape, one notices things on the farm that have gone undetected for months. I have only just registered the tree saplings, surrounded by wire cages, that were planted in the Children's Garden chicken run last fall. There are ten of them, two each of Paw Paw, Smooth Sumac, Mulberry, Sassafras and American Chestnut. Their fruits are edible for anyone or anything. We have always had apple trees in the orchard run, and we were somewhat incredulous that we had not thought to plant saplings here years ago.

Thanks to a rain water activity that the farm and nature guides played with a visiting school group, I noticed how well the large notice boards, located behind the rain garden adjacent to the machine shed, explained the garden's purpose. Delco Water Company, who financed the initial installation, paid for the materials and the Tuesday farmhands built the structure. The boards explain the role of the large cistern connected to the roof of the shed, the reason for the retention and slow leaching of the water through the soil in the garden, and finally shows the clean run-off exiting through a French drain to the woods, and into the stream.

Pumpkin, our Jersey cow, was still nursing her bull calf last year when she ran with the bull and was less likely to conceive. Pumpkin was over four years old when she first gave birth to a bull calf in 2015, but was right on target in 2016. She did in fact stay on target, and scored a hat trick by giving birth to another bull calf on March 23. Pumpkin had been standing outside the barn when labor started, and Farmer Jeff let her find her own way into a heavily straw-strewn pen. During the time taken for one school group to move from her to the pigs and back again, she gave birth to a large, brown healthy calf. She immediately started licking and licking him, and encouraging him to get up, which happened after an hour. He is growing strong alongside the rest of the herd who are enjoying the fresh grass in field 5.

A group of OSU Veterinary students will come out this weekend to trim the goat and sheep hooves, and dock the lamb's tails. They will also check the degree of worm infestation, which causes anemia, by comparing the amount of white under their lower eyelid to a Famacha parasite monitoring scale. The result will help them to decide whether to administer a worm drench, which we do not do on a routine basis.

The sheep will be the stars of the show on Sunday May 7, when we host our first Sheep Shearing Day from 11 am. to 4 pm. There will be shearing demonstrations throughout the day. Visitors can learn how the wool is processed, join in hands-on projects, explore the farm, and enjoy a hayride. The Sock Hop Soda Shop, a fifties-style diner, will serve food and you can listen to the juke box and try hula hooping. The cost is \$5 per family on arrival, or free to "Friends of Stratford."

We invite you to attend other opportunities. On Saturday, April 29 from 10 until noon, naturalist Bob Harter will share a program called Growing Natives. The cost is \$20 per person. The following Saturday May 6, from 10 until noon, he plans to lead a wild flower walk for adults. The cost is \$5 per person. A wood carving class for new or unfinished projects will take place every Wednesday in May from 5:30 to 7:30 pm. A fee for materials and tools will be determined at the first meeting. Please register for the classes. The third annual Photography Contest for Kids aged 6-17 begins on May 1. Details can be found on our web site.

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