



Les Harrison
Ag & Natural Resources Agent
County Extension Director
UF/IFAS Wakulla County Extension

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Spring

Recent cold weather notwithstanding, spring is almost here. The spring equinox is March 20th, and on that date the day and night will be the same length.

Lexicographers, the people who study language, have concluded the term “spring” originated about 2,000 years ago in what-is-now Germany. It loosely translated to the phrase “to jump” or “to run”.

It seems the word’s implication in those simpler times was directed at the flora and fauna. Basically, the plants and animals sprang back to life, either by jumping out of the bud or running.

In 21st century Wakulla County, the month of March finds the plants springing back from winter’s chilly grip, albeit a rather mild one in late 2012 and early 2013. A visit to the forest, field or yards now yields an assortment of Technicolor blooms in progress.

One of the traditional springtime blooming favorites are the dogwoods. This deciduous hardwood is native, but with related species over most of the northern hemisphere.

There are actually two varieties of dogwood native to Wakulla County, the roughleaf and the flowering. Both have large, profuse white blooms and both flower in the spring.

In addition to their striking spring appearance, dogwoods have a long and varied history as a resource utilized by the population. Early settlers used dogwood twigs as toothbrushes by chewing them into coarse bristles.



The strength and dense qualities of the wood made it an excellent choice for material to construct durable tools. Dogwood was the first choice for spindles and spool in textile mills because of its robust qualities.



Wildflowers are making a strong showing in March. The Roundleaf Bluet or Innocence is peering through dead grass and pine needles.

This tiny flower is about the size of a dime and appears in clusters. The only function for this low growing plant seems as a herald of warmer days to come.

Yellow Jessamines are displaying clusters of bright yellow blooms from the top of any plant or structure this vine is able to climb. The blooms soon mature and rain down to the forest floor.

While attractive and showy, the entire plant contains alkaloid toxins. Honeybees seem particularly vulnerable to this lovely, but fatal attraction.

Chickasaw plums are producing copious volumes of delicate white blooms on an otherwise leafless tree. This native understory tree reaches a maximum height of less than ten feet, but its spring blooming capacity far outstrips its stature.



In addition to the showy nature of this tree, it also produces small fruit, some sweet and some bitter. The plums produced are popular with birds and animals, and people lucky enough to have access to the sweet fruit variety.

Its early bloom nature makes it susceptible to late frost and fruit loss. If a late hard freeze occurs, the yellow to red fruit will be lost until the next year.

To learn more about Wakulla County's spring bloom, contact your UF/IFAS Wakulla Extension Office at 850-926-3931 or at <http://wakulla.ifas.ufl.edu/>, and leave your comments and questions about the article.