

# SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Look for it now in southwest Ohio!

Spring 2022



Photos by Dave Woehr: Dutchman's Breeches; Bee Pollinating Dutchman's Breeches; Squirrel Corn.

## Dutchman's Breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*)

By Dave Woehr, Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist

Dutchman's Breeches is a delightful, delicate, ephemeral wildflower found blooming in profusion in the spring woodlands of Ohio. The white flowers are roughly the size of a penny and appear aligned on an arching, several-inch-long stem so that they resemble pantaloons hanging upside down to dry on a clothesline after laundering. Leaves emanate on long petioles from the base of the plant, are compound into three sections, finely divided, fernlike, and bluish green. Rootstocks have small clusters of tuber-like bulblets that are pink, or sometimes white. These bulblets are occasionally a food source for gallinaceous birds such as the Ruffed Grouse, Bobwhite Quail, and Wild Turkey, all of which scratch in the soil to find tasty morsels on their menu.

The Dutchman's Breeches plant is pollinated by bees. The seeds produced by a pollinated flower are a food source much enjoyed by ants, which harvest the seeds, carry them to their nests, and eat the edible parts. The now-dispersed seeds can then germinate in the rich soil of an ant nest. This is a small-scale version of the well-known behavior of squirrels that bury nuts from hardwood trees in the ground inadvertently replanting the forest.

Dutchman's Breeches is somewhat similar in size and color to the related Squirrel Corn (*D. canadensis*), which blooms at the same time but with a heart-shaped flower (see photo above). Another relative is the larger garden flower, Bleeding Heart (*D. spectabilis*), which has heart-shaped pink flowers.

Hisey Park, located outside Waynesville at 5443 Middletown Rd., Corwin, OH 45068, is a wildflower hot spot! To learn more about the spring ephemerals you may see, visit the Ohio Division of Wildlife's [Spring Wildflowers of Ohio Field Guide](#) and check out their [weekly report](#) to see what is currently in bloom.

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