

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Look for it now in southwest Ohio!

Spring 2022



Mayapple colony, flower, and fruit. Photos by Dave Woehr.

Mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*)

By Dave Woehr, Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist

The Mayapple is a large spring ephemeral, possibly making it the easiest wildflower to identify in the spring woodlands of Ohio. Not only is it large, but it colonizes through its vast underground root system allowing it to cover fairly extensive tracts of the forest floor. It pokes through the ground like an unfurling umbrella just as spring begins and then rises more than a foot as its single leaf expands to a one-foot diameter parasol. The leaf is divided in up to nine deeply cut lobes. Fertile plants become branched, and in that forked leaf stem area a single bud develops on a separate short supporting stem. The bud eventually opens into a beautiful white flower the size of a golf ball with up to nine petals surrounding a large ovary and more than a dozen yellow stamens laden with pollen. The bee-pollinated flower produces a fruit (a Mayapple, of course), small and green at first - then yellowing as it grows to about the size of a ping-pong ball. The green fruit is definitely toxic if eaten, and the ripe yellow fruit is not recommended for human consumption even though pioneers made jellies and preserves from it. The "apple" contains several seeds. Box turtles are believed to be the main distributor of Mayapple seeds; a turtle eats the fruit, and the seeds that have passed through its gut are more likely to germinate.

[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.