

Spring Wildflower Trails near Northwest Branch

Think of this as a journey or treasure hunt.

Paint Branch Trail – park on either side of Randolph Rd. at Valley Mill or Pilgrim Hill.

https://www.montgomeryparks.org/uploads/2016/08/Paint-Branch-Trail_a11y.pdf

From Valley Mill (eastside) follow the paved path and turn left to walk towards Fairland Rd. You can find Trillium on the left side of the path on the slope and on the back side of the pond. The pond is to the left and up a few steps to a clearing. This is a great place to see and hear lots of American Toads and turtles. Follow the paved path to Fairland Rd or the natural surface path that follows stream-side – right now more is in bloom along the paved path. Another natural path goes through the woods across Fairland Rd – you will see a small parking area on the other side of Fairland before the traffic light at Tamarack Rd – this is where the trail picks up.

From Pilgrim Hill (westside) follow the paved trail to just beyond the tennis courts – take the natural path into the woods along the stream. The trail will eventually lead back to the paved surface. There are a number of flower treasures along this trail – you will need to look closely; they are not abundant but there is surprising diversity.

Fairland Regional Park – park behind the Ice House on Old Gunpowder Rd.

https://www.montgomeryparks.org/uploads/2016/08/Fairland-RP_a11y.pdf

<http://www.pg parks.com/DocumentCenter/View/2585/Fairland-Regional-Park---Montgomery-County-Map-PDF?bidId=>

A variety of wildflowers here, again not abundant but they are there – think treasure hunt.

From the parking lot follow the paved path (Little Paint Branch Trail) into the woods. Toward the bottom of the hill before you reach Greencastle Rd, turn left onto the natural path marked Viper Trail to Crow's Foot. This trail goes uphill to connect with the paved path, or you can continue through the woods and eventually connect to the Holly trail.

The next 2 are not in our backyard but are worth a trip.

Great Falls – Carderock

<http://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/396583/4071667/1252277440207/greatfallstrailmap.pdf.html>

This area has the best diversity and abundance in the area.

Take the beltway to Great Falls, MD exit Carderock – Clara Barton Parkway. Exit parkway at first exit Carderock and follow signs toward parking areas. Depending on how far you want to walk you can either turn left at T stop sign and park in this lot or turn right and park in the last lot.

First option – the trail is to the left of the parking area into the woods – when the trail splits (before the footbridge) turn right. You will find an abundance of flowers along this trail. If you follow this trail it leads to the one mentioned below.

Second option – to the right of the last parking area follow the trail into the woods – stay to the left toward the river and wander around here – just lovely. Loop back to pass the rock-climbing area and follow the trail that moves through the woods along the Potomac. This trail is the same one mentioned above.

The trail is called Section C of Billy Goat Trail – it is *not* crazy difficult with rock scabbling – the park service designates it as moderate. You can return via C&O Canal path for a loop.

<https://www.nps.gov/choh/planyourvisit/upload/gf-map-page-1.pdf>

Other nice trails to try at Great Falls are the River Trail and the Valley Trail.

Woodend Sanctuary

<https://woodendsanctuary.org/>

The Woodend Sanctuary of the Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS) in Chevy Chase has a native plants garden, the Blair Garden, with spring ephemerals labeled.

Other trails:

Potomac Heritage Trail – River Bend County Park near Great Falls VA

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/riverbend/trails>

Any trail that follows a stream or river is a good place to look.

State Parks – Patapsco (Cascade Falls Trail) & Gunpowder Falls (Lost Pond Trail)

Field Guides

Start with “A Pocket Naturalist Guide Maryland & DC Trees & Wildflowers” – this is a laminated pamphlet – easy to carry.

Lawrence Newcomb’s “Wildflower Guide” – this is an identification book – considered “the bible” to wildflower identification.

The Shop at Woodend (<https://audubon-naturalist-society.square.site/>) has these and many more. ANS also offers short and long courses on Wildflowers. (Look under Nature Classes <https://anshome.org/>).

Frog Calls

<https://dcfrogcalls.webs.com/>