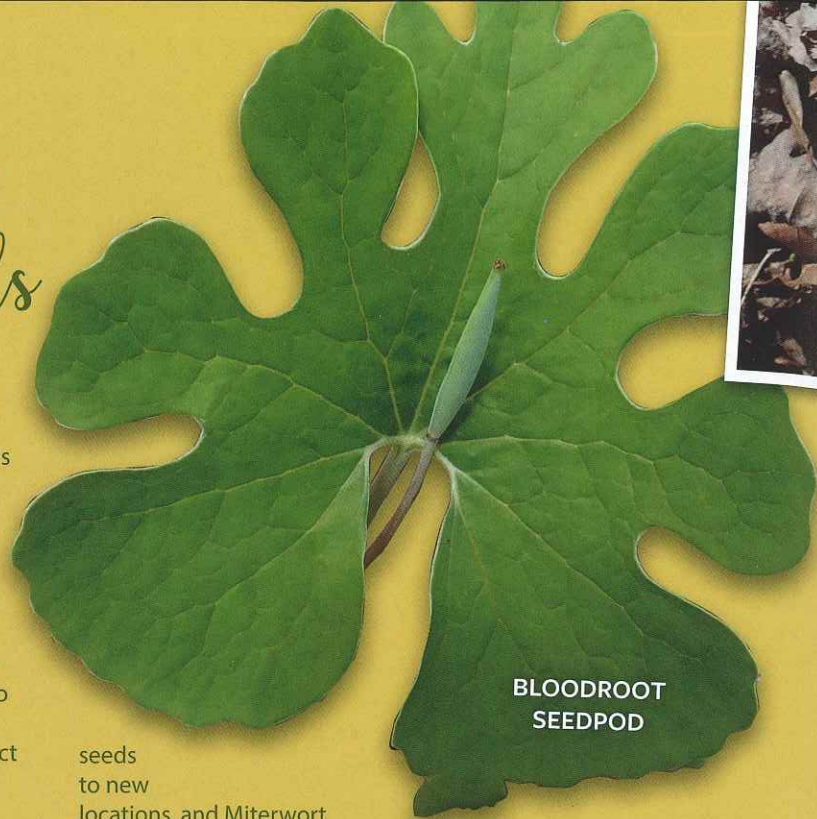


Collecting Native Plant Seeds

Article and Photos by David Mow, Morgan County Soil and Water Conservation District

An easy way to start a lot of native wildflowers is to collect their seed and start them on your own. You will have to decide what you want to collect, because the spring ephemerals will have seeds that mature earlier in the year, than "prairie" type plants that bloom later in the year and therefore, the seeds mature later.

You will also need to know how the plant you want to collect disperses its seeds. If it uses explosive force (ballochory), like Jewelweed, Violets, Geranium's, and Witch-hazel, you may want to use a cloth bag to cover the seed pod to catch the seed when they are thrown from the pod. Some of our spring ephemerals are spread by ants (myrmecochory), you may have to bag these also to keep the ants from getting to them before you. If they spread by wind (anemochory), like a lot of trees, Maples, Ash, and Elms, collect them when they fall, and members of the aster family, Ironweed, Pussytoes, Thistles, or the Milkweed family, you collect when they look fluffy. Another method of dispersal is gravity (barochory). Nut trees, like oaks and hickories and wildflowers such as Firepink and Bundleflower also disperse seeds by barochory. Some plants use water (hydrochory) to spread seeds. Our native Blue Flag Iris, the shrub Bladdernut, and the tree Kentucky Coffee bean float their



BLOODROOT SEEDPOD

seeds to new locations, and Miterwort uses rain drops to splash the seeds out of the seed pods. And finally, the last seed dispersal method zoochory. This is the method of seed dispersal that requires animals or humans to move the seed. This would include things like members of the Bidens genus, such as Bur-Marigold, Nodding

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Bur-Marigold, that look like sunflower seed with barbs, and the Tick-Trefoils, that have triangle shaped seeds that stick to you or animal's fur. You can collect them from your clothes, after you have walked past them in the fall, these are commonly called burs. Other forms of zoochory are animals eating the fruit and depositing the seeds in their waste or birds or other animals collecting and hiding the seeds, like squirrels.

Most people are familiar with garden seeds that are dried to save for next year. The thing is that with some of our native plants the seeds must stay moist to be able to grow. These include things like the shrub Wahoo, the native alternative to Burning Bush, along with the well-known plants like Jack-in-the Pulpit and its lesser-known relative Green Dragon, as well as Solomons Seal and False Solomons Seal. A lot of our native spring ephemerals also need to stay moist, including Bloodroot, Jacob's Ladder, Virginia Bluebells, Wood Poppy, Wild Ginger, Twinleaf, Spring Beauty, and Dutchman's Breeches. Some later blooming woodland species also need to stay moist like Jewelweed and Wood Sorrel.



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