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Spring flowers flourish along the Hockanum River trails

BY BARBARA ARMENTANO ReminderNews

Spring flowers put in an early appearance along the Hockanum River trails in April when temperatures reached summer highs. Walkers enjoyed the early colors of plants and flowers that came up to enjoy the pleasant warmth.



Committee member John Schaffner (left) with Tim Buckley, a friend of Ralph C. Feeney, Jr., prepare a spot for plants in memory of Feeney. Photo by Barbara Armentano.

Glenn Cornish, Hockanum River Linear Park Committee botanist, walked all nine river trails recently and identified all the early wild flowers in bloom. Already flowering were marsh marigolds , with bright yellow flowers visible near running water, and wood anemone , with cup-shaped white flowers seen in shaded locations. Skunk cabbage was noticed in wet areas.

Scattered elsewhere is "Spring Beauty ," a tiny, bright purple flower that is quite rare in the Hockanum River neighborhood, and also bluettes, violets and blood root. Cornish observed wild flowering trees of cherry, crabapples and Bradford pears that seemed to have escaped from previous domestic plantings .

He said American dogwood is just beginning to bloom in a few rare locations on the trails. Red maples were up-andcoming , and unique blooms like catalpa trees with clusters of large white flowers and tulip trees with orange flowers were budding.

Among the shrubs blossoming now are spice bushes, abundant in the woodlands , with tiny yellow flowers like miniature forsythia. Soon, purple loostrife will be very prominent, with

purple flowers in spikes. This is a flower of exquisite beauty but quite invasive, crowding out native species.

The Hockanum Linear Park annual planting program continues to add evergreens to perpetuate a green color to the river environment year-round . There is an abundance of daffodils that were previously planted by committee members. This year, Austrian pine seedlings were a part of the program. The bundle of 25 pine seedlings were planted last week on the Bryan Island hiking trail located behind Kohls. Several committee members added additional plants on Bryan Island in memory of Ralph Feeney, a friend of employees of Empire Industries, who donated a fund in his memory and helped with the plantings.

The committee will be busy sowing sunflower seeds for wildlife habitat and maintaining areas where other wild flowers and plants will be seen throughout the months ahead as the scenery changes all season long. Yellow is a prominent color, showing up in wild mustard, with spikes of yellow flowers. Celandine poppy – not really a poppy – has yellow flowers throughout the year and a somewhat toxic yellow sap. Trout lily is a miniature lily and has speckled leaves like a trout.

Keep a sharp lookout as you walk along the paths, and perhaps you will find a rare plant in bloom. If you do, let the committee know.

The HRLPC is a subcommittee of the Town of Manchester Conservation Commission and has been in existence since 1970, working to clear and maintain trails for hikers along the river in Manchester. The group is dedicated to the scenic beauty, environmental cleanup and general preservation of the natural open space along the river. The public is invited to use the trails and enjoy the outdoor beauty all year long. Before exploring the trails, pick up copies of the nine trail pamphlets and maps at the Customer Service and Information Center office at the Manchester Town Hall, 41 Center St. Look for roadside “Hockanum River Hiking Trail” green and white sign at all trail entrances , and follow the orange blazes on the trees along the trails.

No motorized vehicles or bicycles are allowed on any of the trails.