

Critter Corner

Keuka Lake Forest Wildflower FAQs

The understory in the forests surrounding Keuka Lake should be carpeted with a variety of wildflowers in spring. They come in a variety of shapes and colors but share many traits:

- They need shade from overstory trees to survive: they get fried in openings
- They are important food sources for wildlife – their fruits are a ready source of energy and their roots, or tubers, store carbohydrates and proteins that are dug up and eaten by squirrels, turkeys, deer, and other critters (and at one time native Americans)
- When deer are overabundant, they eat the plants which never grow out of their reach; decades of overbrowsing by overabundant deer herds can eliminate these plants
- They colonize slowly: ants spread their seeds short distances (a process called myrmecochory) because they are attracted to a fleshy appendage on the seeds called an elaiosome—seeds are taken to the ant colony, the elaiosome is used for food and the seeds are tossed aside and germinate
- Decades of hillside agriculture (growing grapes and other crops) deforested the hills above Keuka Lake, wiping out trees and wildflowers and the current re-establishment of the forests by trees since 1900 has yet to be matched by re-establishment of most of the wildflowers

A sampling of wildflowers

					
Cucumberroot the roots or tubers taste like cucumber and are good wildlife food. Red flower.	Trout lily (leaves are vermiculated like brook trout) or dog tooth lily (root like canine tooth). Yellow flower	Trailing arbutus. On state rare plant list. Pink/white flower.	Trillium. At one time forest floor carpeted with this white/red flower. Favorite deer food.	Leeks or wild onion. Indicator of rich soil. Good eating, white flower.	Root/tubers typical of the plants. Store carbohydrates and proteins, important wildlife food. These are from Indian cucumberroot

Saving/regenerating these important wildflowers is difficult when the forest surrounding Keuka Lake is cut down to provide large viewsites for homesites, especially mid-slopes which are unstable in rains.