

Wildflower Meditations

From the Open Files of:	Northwest Synod of Wisconsin Resource Center
Contributed by:	Rev. Dr. Loretta Kuse & Dr. Hildegard Kuse
This file is available in:	

**Rev. Dr. Loretta Kuse
Dr. Hildegard Kuse**

Kuse Family Museum and Nature Preserve Medford, Wisconsin 54451

Introduction

You are invited to join in exploring the awesome beauty and astounding growth of some early spring wildflowers. At the same time we hope you will enjoy reflecting on the many different ways these plants can remind us of God's goodness and love and of specific ways we can become better stewards of God's creation.

Wildflowers

- Wildflowers are those native and introduced species that grow naturally in woods, fields, and gardens.
- For the months of April and May some species are spring ephemerals that bloom very briefly before the trees leaf out to shade them. They then disappear for the year. Others are plants we may recognize as common weeds that have a more extended season. These may be ordinary, but can be viewed in extraordinary ways.
- The plants described are commonly found in the upper Midwest.

Many of us pay lip service to caring for and protecting the environment God has given us, but how can we appreciate, cherish, or preserve the things we do not recognize or that we even know exist? With more urbanization and loss of habitat, introduction of invasive species, more time with television, and increasing emphasis on manicured and weed-free landscaping, the opportunity to see and appreciate what once existed in our natural environment is disappearing. This is particularly true of native vegetation including wildflowers. Some of these plants are becoming less common or even threatened.

Some people think they can easily attract bird and butterflies by planting a bed of bright non-native flowers. They forget that the birds need a source of food, water, and shelter, that plants need appropriate habitats, and that the butterflies spend the major part of their lifetime as caterpillars with each species needing very specific native host food plants. They overlook the importance of the interdependence of all parts of the environment and of discovering the relationship among the many components.

We don't have freedom until we know the choices. We can't ask for a particular flavor of ice cream unless we know it exists, and in the same way we cannot protect or cherish plants we cannot identify.

This set of wildflower meditations is NOT designed to turn the users into botanists, but it does use enough background terminology to enable the viewers to search in references and on the Internet for themselves. Entry words for search engines are helpful tools. Scientific names for plants are included because in many instances they provide the only assurance that people from different regions are really talking about the same plant. That is especially important when discussing medicinal or food uses of a plant.

The Church and Land Stewardship

Web searches can also include sources that inform us about ways the church is attempting to support good stewardship of God's creation

Several national church bodies have issued documents addressing what their memberships should be doing in terms of care and appreciation of creation. In 1993 the ELCA issued a social statement, CARING FOR CREATION – VISION, HOPE AND JUSTICE at a church wide assembly. In 2003 a conference was held to again look at the statement to see how the church body has acted and what its future mission should be. The statement addresses many major environmental issues and urges members to keep the document current instead of on the shelf and act on its contents. A group called LENS (Lutheran Earthkeeping Network of the Synods)

<http://www.webofcreation.org/LENS/index.html> was formed as an informal network of persons and church groups dedicated to the task of earthkeeping. Going to their website or checking out a source called Web of Creation (www.webofcreation.org) will provide the reader with current ideas and actions on the larger issues.

How do the meditations and information about native plants relate to those larger environmental statements? Learning more about wildflowers may at first seem not to address very large or worldwide concerns such as global warming or high levels of fossil fuel consumption. However, it does call attention to the importance of maintaining biodiversity, and the interdependence, relationships, and connectedness of our humanity to the rest of God's creation. It can develop an awareness of what actually exists in the natural world. In Genesis 2:19-20 we note that God invited Adam to name the living things that had been created. Without information about specific components in our environment, we cannot know what we are preserving or losing. People who have an appreciation of the beauty of their world are more likely to want to cherish it.

Possible Uses

- Daily personal and family meditations
- Devotions for small group meetings
- Meditations or nature study at church camps
- A "different" springtime Bible study or program for women, men, or youth groups
- Spring flower walks taken by people of any age
- A resource to take along to "the cottage", on a summer vacation, or into the backyard
- Tourism - Use as a guidebook during a drive in the country, or a visit to a nature preserve or wildflower nursery business
- Memory walks via computer or through the use of printouts for the homebound or those in care facilities

- Intergenerational sharing
- Environmental awareness
- Identification and learning helps for youth leaders
- Background information for teachers who wish to reinforce the major science concepts they are considering in their regular classrooms (diversity, continuity, interdependence, relationships, etc.) See such sources as the National Science Education Standards or the Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Environmental Education
- Information for home schoolers or individual students
- Inspiration to study ordinary plants in extraordinary ways or in greater depth
- Incentives to relate plant study to art appreciation, photography, sketching or painting, or creative writing.

Plants Included

The spring plants included are: Hepatica, Dutchman's Breeches, Bloodroot, Trout Lily, Wild Geranium, Marsh Marigold, Wood Anemone, Common Buttercup, Spring Beauty, Wild Phlox, Common and Nodding Trilliums, Jack-in-the Pulpit, Wild Ginger, Wild Oats, German Violets, Downy Yellow and Woolly Blue Violets, Bishop's Cap, Blue Cohosh, Canada Mayflower, Cut-leaved Toothwort, Clintonia, Yellow Rocket, Shepherd's Purse, Common Dandelion, Virginia Waterleaf, Wild Sarsaparilla, False Solomon's Seal, Starflower, and Yellow Wood Sorrel.

Links to Plant Files

Each plant has links to two files. One contains the meditation, a Bible passage, a brief introduction and a hands-on list of things to do with each plant. The second file has more detailed background and reference information about the wildflower, additional photographs to illustrate the information, and ideas for furthering environmental awareness. The meditation themes and scriptural references for each plant are listed separately in another file.

Selected Bibliography

A selected bibliography of some of the materials cited or suggested for further reading is included. Note that a few are quite old and probably out of print, but finding these or similar ones at used book sales or in personal libraries can provide entertaining and instructive ways of seeing how people studied nature, the language they used, and the ways their feelings about the environment have changed over the years.

Prayer

Loving Creator God:

You surround us with natural beauty. Help us receive your gifts with thankfulness. Keep us mindful of our role in creation - to serve and keep your garden and to learn about and care for what you have given us. In Jesus' name, Amen