

Our Blog

U.S. Botanic Garden's Understory: Photographs of Jackie Bailey Labovitz

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The U.S. Botanic Garden's Conservation & Sustainability Horticulturist, Ray Mims, takes a look at the importance of spring ephemerals, which are featured in the Garden's current exhibit, Understory, on display now through October 14, 2013.

Spring ephemerals of the forest understory are among the most amazing of our native plants. During a brief window of opportunity, these fleeting botanical gems arise from the ground after it thaws and bloom, taking advantage of the sunlight beaming through the leafless trees. As soon as the trees leaf out, the above-ground parts of the ephemerals begin to wither, and by summer, most have vanished. They make up an important facet our forests' understory that only few see and appreciate.

Two well-known favorites photographed in the [U.S. Botanic Garden's \(USBG\) Understory exhibit](#) are the bloodroot and trout lily. Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*, pictured right) is a fragile pure white flower that develops quickly and soon disappears. The bloom opens with the warmth of the sun's rays and closes at night. The red juice from the roots was used as dye and war paint by Native Americans and the botanical name comes from the Latin for bleeding. Trout lily (*Erythronium americanum*, pictured above) can be found in large groves, and as these tiny plants grow, they cluster and form mats under soil that prevent erosion. Despite this large underground system, only a few flowers of trout lilies appear each spring.

Many spring ephemerals are found in eastern deciduous forests and the Mid-Atlantic region. Despite their large natural range, many are threatened on a state level due to increased foraging by swelling deer populations, logging, development, agriculture and the unsustainable collection of plants from the wild. When purchased from reputable nurseries, many are beautiful additions to home gardens.



Bloodroot, *Sanguinaria Canadensis*

Ms. Labovitz's photography, on display through October 14, 2013, in the East Gallery of the USBG, celebrates these short-lived flowers in stunningly beautiful, larger than life images printed on canvas. Come visit the U.S. Botanic Garden to see this exhibit and take time to enjoy our beautiful urban oasis. The U.S. Botanic Garden is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily.

Learn more about the U.S. Botanic Garden at www.usbg.gov.