

“Bloodroot” by Sally Cureton

One of the first flowers to herald spring in the Rockingham Springs Arboretum is **Bloodroot** (*Sanguinaria Canadensis*). A member of the poppy family, its showy, white flower appears early and very briefly in March and April. Each blossom, wrapped in a single leaf, is large - 1 ½ to 2 inches and lasts only a day or two. Bloodroot produces large amounts of pollen and is usually self-pollinating, a process called *autogamy*. With few insect pollinators around in early spring, this process helps to guarantee its continuation from year to year.

The name arises from the orange-red juice of the stem and rhizome. American Indians used this juice as a dye for baskets and clothing, as well as an insect repellent and facial paint when mixed with animal fat. It is toxic if ingested, but has many medicinal properties. It has been used to treat ringworm and skin cancer. Early pioneer families put drops of it on lumps of sugar for coughs and sore throats. In addition, a tea made from the root was a common rheumatism treatment among tribal nations of the Mississippi region. Some people find that it causes a skin irritation similar to poison ivy. Bloodroot grows in nearly every county in Virginia, frequently in colonies on steep slopes.