

Colts Foot and Other Spring Blooms

by Jill McNealy

One of the earliest plants to bloom in your springtime garden, certainly the first to stay blooming for the longest time, is the colts foot. It is happiest in moist soil and will bloom for several weeks. It is very cheery and those who find it growing have often confused it with the dandelion, which is no relative at all. A good way to tell the difference is to look at the end of the petals - colts foot is blunt not rounded like the dandelion. It is a rather short plant, keeping close to the ground until its seed head matures and produces the best designed seeds for creating the next generation. The stalk shoots up for about five inches or so and then flattens out so that the seeds will fall, at the next breeze, far from the parent plant. The blooming season is from March until May so that in its life span it must be prepared to live in different climates and must be able to cope with many, many younger siblings. The leaves themselves are late to arrive and it is rare to see them at the same time as the flowers. It is very common in the village along the roadsides as well as in our arboretum.

Another bright yellow plant is the Marsh Marigold or Cowslip. It is often eaten as a spring vegetable. But I would not recommend that anyone try eating any plant in our arboretum. The Marsh Marigold has from five to nine round petals. It grows from Newfoundland to South Carolina and west to Saskatchewan and Nebraska. Near any small stream bed you may see this harbinger of spring. The leaves are very shiny and I can hardly wait each spring when their time from blooming arrives.

The next flower is also quite short but is not yellow. These are called Bluets or Quaker Ladies, and their pale blue color is charming and refreshing. These fragile looking flowers have a yellow center. They are members of the Madder family whose Latin name is *Houstonia carerulea*. The petals are at right angles to each other, and the plants always grow in clumps from a rosette of leaves. Bluets are found from Nova Scotia in the north to Georgia to Arkansas in the south in open grassy places to wet rocks. This charming clump of tiny blue blossoms are a welcome addition to springtime at our arboretum.

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