

Winding Trails: by Al Hobart

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4 Flowers

Primrose is one of the most pleasant-sounding words in our long list of flower names, and suggests neatness and daintiness as well as a comparison with one of our most beloved and beautiful blossoms, the rose. Actually, however, the name is simply a variation or alteration of Primula, which is the type genus of the primrose family, Primulaceae, and derives from a Latin word meaning first, in allusion to title plant's early blooming habits. Like our highly-bred garden roses, which at one time were typically red, the domestic primroses now come in a large variety of color combinations. The rose part of the name of course refers to the color red, which usually exists to some extent in even the yellow primroses.

Flowers of the wild members of the primrose family, although not

so large and gaudy as their cultivated cousins, are nevertheless always showy and beautiful, and far more rugged than their civilized relatives. Some of the shooting-stars (Dodecatheon), prefer swampy meadows at high altitudes, others flourish at lower levels in sterile soil that can hardly support a healthy blade of grass. The dainty, lovely little star-flowers (Trientalis) brighten the shady forest understorey as well as sunny waysides in the valley and hills; the storied scarlet pimpernel (Anagallis) adds its gay color to damp places beside country roads and the shady, damp edges of meadows; the rare – in our area – moneywort, or creeping loosestrife (Lysimachia), which has the habit and general form of pimpernel, loves the damp shade in the open pondside woods.

These four – shooting-star, star-flower, pimpernel and moneywort – are the only members of the primrose family found growing wild in our area. We have three species of shooting-stars, the alpine, tall moun-

tain, and broadleaf respectively. The first two are found mostly at higher altitudes and grow in wet swampy places; the broadleaf, or Henderson's, shooting-star is the one found commonly about the Valley. It has broad roundish leaves, whereas the leaves of the other two species are long and narrow. The leaves are always basal, and the flowers grow in a several-flowered cluster, or scape.

Flowers of the shooting-stars are strikingly different in form from those of other primroses and are very attractive. The five purple, narrow petals are sharply reflexed and have black and yellow bands at base. The conspicuous beak-like projection at the flower's center is composed of the pistil tightly surrounded and encased by the five long-anthered stamens. This peculiar structure accounts for the flowers sometimes being called birdbills.

Star-flowers have regular open half-inch flowers with five white or pinkish petals. These are borne singly on small slender stems

that rise above the whorl of five or six leaves topping the main plant stem. The elliptic leaves are two or three in. long, pointed at both ends. The plant is four to eight in. high. It is one of our daintiest and prettiest wild-flowers.

The flowers of scarlet pimpernel, although small (1/2 in. broad or less), are extremely beautiful. The petals are not separate but form broad lobes on the corolla tube, which is a more reddish or violet hue at base. The plant is mostly a creeper with several erect stems several inches high bearing short broad leaves in opposite pairs, with the short flower stems stringing from their axils. At night and on dark days when stormy weather is imminent the flowers of pimpernel remain tightly closed. The plant is often called poor-man's-weatherglass.

Moneywort is also a creeper with almost exactly the same habit of pimpernel. It owes its common name to the fact that its broad, opposite leaves are nearly round, with

a fanciful resemblance to coins. The blossoms of moneywort are large and showy, 3/4 in. across, and a conspicuous bright yellow. The only place I know of this attractive plant growing wild is in the damp shade beside a pond at old Waldo.

Of all the wildplant families represented in our area none can produce a lovelier foursome than our little group of wild primroses.



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