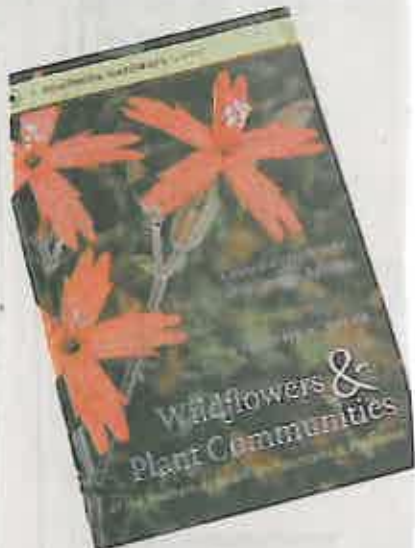


New book is just in time for wildflower walks

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These days, seems nothing happens unless it's on my calendar, no matter how enjoyable it might be. That's why I'm saving dates now for spring wildflower hikes at some of the best viewing sites in the Upstate, including Station Cove Falls, Devils Fork State Park Chestnut Ridge Heritage Preserve, and the Nine Times Preserve.

I'm especially eager to get going this year, since I've been boning up on my wildflower identification with a highly touted new book, "Wildflowers & Plant Communities of the Southern Appalachian Mountains & Piedmont" (The University of North Carolina Press, 2011). This exceptional overview of regional natural history was written and photographed by Timothy P. Spira, an outdoors enthusiast and professor of botany at Clemson University.

Though I have several other guides to help me identify native flora, Spira's book offers an original and insightful perspective. Rather than arranging plants by flower color or family characteristics as others do, his work uses a holistic method that organizes trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants by natural communities.

It doesn't take long to realize what good sense this exacting approach makes, as grouping plants by their habitat mimics how we experience them in nature. Plus, identification becomes easier once you learn which species are associated with particular environments.

In his book, Spira examines 21 major plant communities, describing their distinctive features, vegetation, seasonal aspects and dynamics, as well as offering a list of characteristic species. A photo key of 760 plants, arranged by community type, provides a rapid overview of species that might be encountered in each habitat.

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WALKS

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Detailed descriptions of plants provide extensive information on 340 species, including 65 trees, 75 shrubs and woody vines and 200 herbaceous plants. Also included are a glossary of botanical terms, a section of line drawings of basic plant structures, and a list of selected natural areas to be visited, which make the book even more useful to a novice.

I hope to learn even more from Spira on Feb. 21, when he will speak at the regular meeting of the Upstate Native Plant Society, at 7 p.m. in Multipurpose Room 2 at Greenville Tech in McAlister Square. Until then, I'll continue to set my route to stalk the early wildflowers.

Between now and late March, a number of early bloomers should make their appearance, including blood root (*Sanguinaria canadensis*), dimpled trout lily (*Erythronium*



View Oconee bells, the Upstate's most celebrated wildflower, around the third week of March at Devils Fork State Park.

MARIAN ST. CLAIR/CONTRIBUTOR

umbilicatum), dwarf iris (*I. verna*), little sweet Betsy trillium (*T. cuneatum*), liverwort (*Hapat-ica*), spring beauty (*Claytonia virginica*), wood anemone (*Anemone quinquefolia*) and Oconee bells (*Shortia galacifolia*).

If you want to do the same, investigate any of the above-named trail sites on the Web. For example, South Carolina Heritage Preserves can be

found on the website of the Department of Natural Resources at www.dnr.sc.gov/mlands/heritage, while state parks can be found at www.southcarolinaparks.com.

When you're ready to head out on a hike, be sure to dress properly, which means layers of clothing to add or remove as weather dictates, and sturdy boots. I also find a small backpack of water and snacks and a walking stick to be indispensable. Rather than carry a field guide, I prefer to take photographs and then identify plants later.