By Kylee Baumle

Spring fever is hitting hard. The sun is shining more days than not, and even though we still have some snow now and then, the temperatures seem to be inching ever upward, even if it's slower than I'd like. To make things worse, I look through the photos I've taken in previous years and I see that in less than a month, we'll have quite a few flowers in bloom. But I want it NOW.

All things in good time. While I long for warm spring days, and even summer heat, I also enjoy the early walks in nearby woods, where I can watch the floor come to life, one wildflower at a time. In my mind's eye, I can see it as time-lapse photography. First comes the skunk cabbage, we'll end with the fire pinks, and by then it's summer.

About that skunk cabbage. It's one of the first to appear and is very common in our part of Ohio, but to my knowledge, in all my forays into the woods, I've never seen it. I would imagine it's because I don't go out looking for it early enough. It generally appears in late February, sometimes poking up through the snow, and because of its ability to generate heat, it can melt the snow around it.

Temperatures inside its tightly wrapped foliage and flower buds can reach 70 degrees! This only serves to intensify the skunky smell it gives off, but that smell also serves a purpose. Its odor attracts pollinators, such as flies and bees. No doubt the people at the Black Swamp Nature Center know where I might be able to see some skunk cabbage for myself; maybe there's even some there.

Next to appear will likely be Spring Beauty, which is extremely plentiful, and not just in the woods. I've seen its little lavender-striped white flowers dotting yards, too. You have to get down at ground level to see the striations, otherwise they appear to be just white, or even pale pink.

There will be hepaticas, commonly called liverwort, because its foliage has three lobes like the

human liver and also because in the past it has been used to treat liver disorders. Hepatica is one of my very favorite wildflowers and though it's native to Ohio, it's not one of the most commonly seen here.

I'll never forget the first time I saw hepaticas growing in the wild in a woods on the eastern side of Paulding County. I nearly hyperventilated. They have delicate blooms resembling small anemones, coming in varying shades of pale pink, lavender, and white.

If I tell you what else is coming to a woods near you, I'll make you more impatient for spring, too. Just know that it won't be long before the show begins. We're fortunate to live in a location where we can watch such beauty take weeks to unfold, necessitating several walks in the woods to catch it all.

Remember though, that it's unlawful to remove native wildflowers without a landowner's permission and not permitted at all from state and national parks or public gardens, no matter how tempting it might be. They'll be there year after year for generations to enjoy and there's nowhere they look better than in their native environment anyway.

Read more at Kylee's blog, Our Little Acre, at www.ourlittleacre.com and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/OurLittleAcre. Contact her at PauldingProgressGardener@gmail.com.