

# Wildflowers true spring harbingers

Igor Stravinsky, when he composed "The Rites of Spring," said that winter was a long, weary eternity and spring was an hour of violent explosion. Unfortunately, Michigan winters are much like Russian winters, and our spring — when it comes — is just as brief, but oh, so beautiful.

It is in the naturalized spring garden that one is most touched by the sight of the first blooms of the new year. Each day in April one spots different varieties of the true harbingers of spring — the early bulbs and wildflowers.

To have the pleasure of an early spring naturalized garden one need not own several acres of woods or even an extensive collection of difficult-to-acquire and difficult-to-grow wildflowers. A small shady area under a large tree or under several large shrubs, or even a problem shady area on the north side of the house, can be developed with the right materials to create a woody feeling.

A thick ground cover, a few ferns and some early small bulbs are the basic beginnings for this low maintenance garden.

The familiar ground covers, such as Baltic ivy, pachysandra or myrtle, practically take care of themselves and are just as decorative as that status-symbol lawn you have to slave over. Use only one kind, however, do not mix them.

A few well placed ferns in any setting will help establish a natural landscape. They also are one of the best "weed suppressor," although they can be highly aggressive and take over in any position when they like the location.

They can scramble out of their allotted area in a manner that demands fast action. As a general warning therefore, be a little cautious about where you place ferns. There are a few members of the family that are somewhat less invasive. These include the various osmunda ferns, such as the cinnamon, interrupted and the superb royal fern. My favorite is the low growing non-invasive Christmas fern. And it is absolutely evergreen — just as the ads say.

The early "small" bulbs are beautiful and unusual, and are ideal for the lazy or busy gardener. They are remarkably hardy, undemanding, and multiply at a rate that makes the original effort well worthwhile. One can create drifts of color by not mixing too many varieties and instead planting one kind in clumps.

Since you must allow the foliage of bulbs to die back after the blossom dies, the unsightly leaves can be easily tucked in among the

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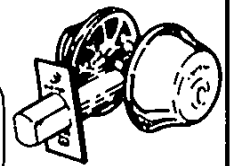
Minimum maintenance is one of the chief attractions of a "naturalized" garden. Wildflowers are almost self-supporting. (Photo by Eric Owen).

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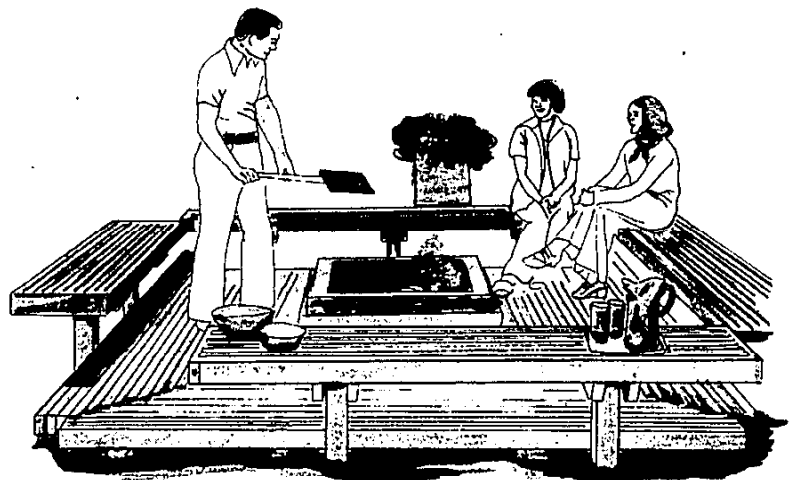
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