

Trees produce flowers

SPRING'S profusion of forest-floor wildflowers often distracts our attention from the flowers of the trees overhead.

Wildflowers bloom early in spring because sunshine can still penetrate to the forest floor. Sunshine is used by the plants to produce flowers, which eventually produce seeds.

We sometimes forget that the winged maple seed we see came from pollinated flowers of a maple tree, or the cottony fluffs floating through the air came from pollinated flowers of the cottonwood tree.

BUT NOW THAT our attention is not directed to the forest floor, we can take note of some very conspicuous tree flowers.

Horsechestnuts — with their large, white, clustered, upright spiked flowers — can be seen blooming now.

Black locust trees have large,



nature
Timothy Nowicki

drooping clusters of white flowers that can be seen blooming now, too. Their leaves, which have several small leaflets along a central shaft, are visible but not full size.

Their flowers are fragrant and are pollinated by insects. When a flower is pollinated, it will develop into a pea pod-like seed pod.

They will grow to be about five inches long with four-eight seeds inside. Honeylocust trees produce a similar seed pod that is much larger and may be a foot long.

SEEDS KNOWN to be 88 years old have survived in the soil without decaying.

Black locust trees grow fast and can grow from the roots of existing trees. Dense thickets of trees may be derived from one or two original plants. Growing quickly and in dense thickets makes them useful for erosion control.

Champion black locust trees may grow to be five feet in diameter, but most trees are only 18-20 inches in diameter. They produce a very strong durable wood which was used for fence posts at one time.

Though the trunk may be straight, the bark has a twisted appearance, and the branches have a very zigzag appearance.

Locust trees and garden peas are members of a group of plants called legumes.

All legumes have bacteria associated with their roots which can take nitrogen from the air and make it useable by plants. They are very helpful in enriching the soil.

Setting sun to be watched

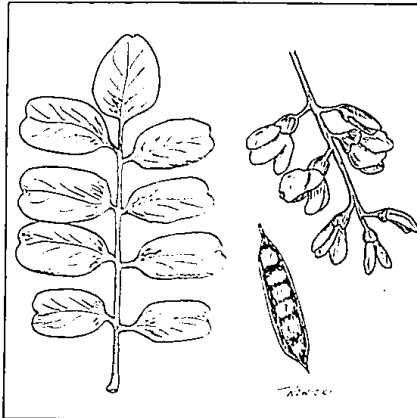
Summer solstice, the time when the sun is farthest from the Earth's equator, will be celebrated in a reflective tour through the University of Michigan-Dearborn Environmental Study Area Monday, June 20, at 8:30 p.m.

Participants will walk down the "Path of the Setting Sun," the area's largest meadow.

Mike Hayes, supervisor of the Environmental Study Area, will lead the tour to the lake and back, investigating animals that come out at night.

The tour is free. Dress for the weather. The terrace of the Henry Ford Estate will be the starting point.

UM-D is on Evergreen Road, across from the Fairlane Town Center.



Black locust trees produce drooping clusters of white flowers and 5-inch seed pods.

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