



## “Look closely, look often” for emerging beauties

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Podcast and web video at [arboretum.unl.edu](http://arboretum.unl.edu)

After a long, gray winter, there’s nothing more welcome than the first spring blossoms. Once that first tight bud opens, a whole range of slow, subtle transformations will occur. Even a daily walk-through isn’t frequent enough to catch all the drama going on in the garden.

Prairie ecologist J. E. Weaver’s “look closely, look often,” is sage advice. Emerging, awakening, unfurling, flowering, fruiting—plants reward anyone who takes the time to pay attention. Everyone has their own favorites, but here’s a list of beauties just starting to make their appearance now, and with much more to offer as the growing season progresses.

### Early-flowering Perennials

Celandine poppy, *Stylophorum diphyllum*. Woodland perennial with bright, oak-like leaves and yellow flowers from spring to early summer. Prefers shade and rich, moist soil; may die back in dry weather but will self-sow.

Variiegated Solomon’s seal, *Polygonatum multiflorum* ‘Variegatum’. Emerging leaves are striped ivory-white along arching stems. Delicate, vase-shaped white flowers hang from stems in May. In fall blue-black fruits hang from the stems and leaves turn a nice yellow. Prefers shade and rich, organic soils. Once established, tolerates dry shade and form full patches with stems all arranged in the same direction. Combines well with spring bulbs or groundcovers.

Sulfur epimedium, *Epimedium x versicolor* ‘Sulphureum’. A low-growing groundcover that can tolerate the shade under trees. Stems are wiry, so the foliage moves readily in the wind. Delicate flowers in April and colorful, varied fall foliage. Needs organic matter, but drought-tolerant once established (\*warning: may be difficult to find).

Virginia bluebells, *Mertensia virginica*. Wonderful woodland flower with beautiful blue blossoms in April and May. May take awhile to establish but will colonize and spread readily once established. Tends to go dormant in summer months.

Creeping Jacob’s ladder or Greek valerian, *Polemonium caeruleum*. A Missouri wildflower with bell-shaped light blue flowers in late spring (name refers to the way leaves are arranged like rungs of a ladder).

Columbine, *Aquilegia canadense*. Red and yellow bell-shaped flowers are held high above the foliage in spring. Prefers fertile, well-drained soil and some shade. May rebloom if cut back after first bloom.

Fremont’s clematis, *Clematis fremontii*. A Plains clematis that grows like a herbaceous perennial. It has a non-vining habit, 20" x 12" with stems emerging in clusters. Thick, leathery leaves emerge in early spring and attractive 1" urn-shaped flowers with thick blue to purple petals in May. Like most clematis species, it can take several years to grow into maturity.

Prairie smoke, *Geum triflorum*. Reddish pink, nodding flowers are blooming right now, but the silvery pink seedheads that really draw our attention, and that gave this plant its common name.

Pasque flower, *Pulsatilla*. Drought-tolerant prairie native with delicate lavender, cup-shaped flowers in early spring followed by silky seedheads.

Turkish creeping veronica, *Veronica liwanensis*. A wonderful, fast-growing groundcover that can take very tough conditions. Glossy evergreen leaves create a nice carpet. Beautiful sky blue flowers may rebloom later in the season.

Shell-leaf penstemon, *Penstemon grandiflora*. Waxy foliage is gray and glossy. Flowers are wonderful shades of lavender and pink, blooming in late May and June. Prefers well-drained soil, full sun and light, sandy soil.