

SPRING



On the same rocky ridgetops and ravines that challenged pioneer settlers to scratch out a meager subsistence, a colorful tapestry emerges each spring with a burst of native wildflowers framed by flowering dogwood and redbud trees.

There's no better place to observe the annual woodland transformation than at Charles C. Deam Wilderness Area, mere minutes from downtown Bloomington.

Designated by Congress in 1982, the 13,000-acre site is the northern reach of the Hoosier National Forest that stretches in piecemeal fashion across nine counties from here to the Ohio River.

The centerpiece of the 200,000-acre federal forest, Deam Wilderness is named for Indiana's first state forester, a self-taught botanist who stoked his curiosity by visiting every township in the state during the early 1900s. His collection of more than 78,000 plants is housed at the Indiana University Herbarium.

The aptly named Deam Wilderness has 37 miles of trails that put hikers in the right spot to see an array of spring wildflowers. Bloodroot, buttercup, dogtooth violet, dutchman's breeches, hepatica, Jack-in-the-Pulpit, Jacob's ladder, spring beauty, trout lily, and various trillium are common.

An especially vibrant show of wild hyacinth, twinleaf, and other wildflowers grace a remote slope on the southern edge of the wilderness. Get there via Hunter Creek Road to a parking area at Mitchell Cemetery, but get there quick because the late-April display doesn't last long.

Looking for wildflowers is not the area's only springtime allure, and Deam Wilderness is by no means the only place to find them if wildflowers are your interest.

Low Gap, Scout Ridge, and Sweedy Hollow nature preserves within Morgan-Monroe State Forest are wildflower havens off-limits to timber management that occurs elsewhere in the 25,000-acre state forest.

Did you know Indiana has more native wild orchids than Hawaii? And it's not even close at 42 to 3. One you should look for at Morgan-Monroe's Sweedy Hollow is the whorled Pogonia, but don't expect to see them in great number since it's on the federal list of threatened species.

Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve is another place to see rare orchids. The 800-acre preserve west of Bloomington is owned and managed by the local Sycamore Land Trust. Although much smaller at 23 acres, The Nature Conservancy's Cedar Bluffs Nature Preserve features steep limestone bluffs that welcome colorful spring guests like nodding onion and hoary puccoon.

Picking wildflowers is a definite no-no, but there's another springtime arrival that you can collect in certain locations – morel mushrooms. The sponge-like fungus is a prized item for the dinner table. There's even a national day (May 17) set aside for mushroom hunting.

Although it's illegal to take anything from a state-dedicated nature preserve, morels are fair game in the rest of Morgan-Monroe State Forest. Recent rule changes by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources also allow foragers to leave designated trails in state forests in their pursuit of edible mushrooms, nuts, and berries.

But don't expect morel hunters to share their favorite locations anymore than anglers will tell you where they like to fish. It's all hush-hush.

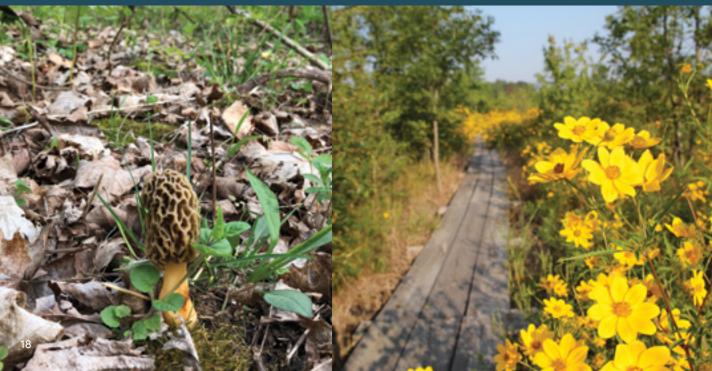
Three reservoir lakes provide ample opportunity to cast a line for a variety of fish species.

Griffy Lake and Lake Lemon, both north of Bloomington, were developed decades ago to provide a steady water supply to Bloomington. They've both transformed into outdoor destinations, with fishing near the top of the recreational list for both. Griffy is experiencing a resurgence after undergoing a couple of restocking efforts in recent years. Lemon is known for quality largemouth bass, even though bluegill are the most dominant species found.

Monroe Lake south of Bloomington is Indiana's largest lake at nearly 11,000 acres.

MOREL MUSHROOM

BEANBLOSSOM BOTTOMS



It's most often thought of for largemouth bass, but it's also a quality lake for catfish, crappie, hybrid striped bass (wipers), and walleye. Two private marinas and nine public access boat ramps make it easy to get on the water. Fourwinds Lakeside Inn and Marina is in Fairfax State Recreation Area on the west side of the lake, and Lake Monroe Marina is in Paynetown State Recreation Area on the north side. Both rent dock space and a variety of watercraft.

Paynetown also is the hub of DNR outdoor programming. The activity center schedules year-round events that include campfire cooking and nature photography workshops, pioneer cemetery tours, bird and bug programs, astronomy, and guided hikes of all types.

If camping is your thing, Paynetown has more than 300 sites and nearby Hardin Ridge Recreation Area has 200 more. Hardin Ridge is a 1,200-acre complex managed by the Hoosier National Forest.

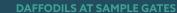
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

of Bloomington Through The Seasons

Phil Bloom is a lifelong Indiana resident and freelance journalist specializing in outdoor recreation and travel. He also was a newspaper reporter/editor for 33 years and communications director for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources for 10 years. He is a two-time president of the Outdoor Writers Association and the Hoosier Outdoor Writers, and the author of Hiking Indiana, a guide to the state's best hiking trails.



HOOSIER NATIONAL FOREST







SUMMER



Fish on!

Expect to say that a lot when testing your angling skills on Monroe Lake, the largest lake in Indiana at 10,750 surface acres.

Built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the 1960s, the flood-control reservoir sprawls across parts of three counties as it collects and stores water from Salt Creek.

The main basin of the lake is within namesake Monroe County, but protected bays and coves reach deep into forested surroundings to create ample room for high-powered bass and ski boats as well as smaller jonboats and fishing kayaks.

Monroe Lake has eight state recreation areas managed by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and another one that the U.S. Forest Service oversees. There are nine public access ramps, two private marinas, and a whole lot of fish waiting to be caught.

Monroe's fishing reputation was built on largemouth bass that attract a steady schedule of organized fishing tournaments as well as the everyday angler.

But anyone targeting just one fish species at Monroe is, well, missing the boat.

Bluegill, catfish, and crappie are equally abundant, and hybrid striped bass (aka "wipers") are another popular target for some anglers. Wipers are an artificial cross of striped bass and white bass.

But a real under-the-radar game fish roaming Monroe's depths are walleye.

Indiana DNR has been stocking walleye in Monroe for decades. Millions of inch-long walleye fingerlings are released annually in hopes enough will survive and eventually grow to meet the 14-inch minimum size required for anglers to keep. But fingerlings are an easy snack for predator fish, so the results of the mass stockings have been somewhat marginal.





LAKE LEMON

CHARLES C. DEAM WILDERNESS

So, DNR tweaked its approach by supplementing the annual fingerling stockings with fewer but larger walleye – 6 to 8 inches long. The switch has given a jump-start to the program. The bigger fingerlings are avoiding predation and growing fast enough to reach legal size in about two years. DNR research surveys are collecting 10-year-old walleye that are 24 inches long.

What's puzzling is an indifferent angler attitude toward Monroe's walleye. In DNR surveys, anglers consistently rank walleye as the most-preferred stocked fish species, but walleye tumble to sixth place when anglers are asked what they fish for at Monroe.

The good news? Walleye are an untapped resource just waiting to be caught.

And don't overlook Monroe's tailwaters.

Monroe Lake's wide-open waters accommodate other water sports, including swimming and boating.

Public beaches are found at Fairfax SRA, Paynetown SRA, and Hardin Ridge, and boats of all sizes - personal watercraft to 35-passenger party boats - can be rented at the two marinas, which offer a full menu of services to boaters.

If you're looking for something a little quieter, the Lake Monroe Sailing Association can put wind in your sails. A member-run group, LMSA operates a marina at Moores Creek State Recreation Area.

In association with the Bloomington Parks & Recreation Department, LMSA offers sailing instructions through the summer. There are beginner classes on weekends for adults and five-day camps for youth age 9 and older. Or you can let an experienced skipper take you on one of LMSA's Family Sails aboard a 24-foot keelboat.

The idle zone associated with sailors using Moores Creek SRA is a benefit to canoers and kayakers, who can find similar quiet water areas at Monroe's Pine Grove and Crooked Creek SRAs.

Two other fishing spots to check out are Lake Lemon and Griffy Lake, both north of Bloomington. Like Monroe, they are reservoirs built to supply water to the community, with recreation a bonus.





BEACH AT PAYNETOWN SRA

MONROE LAKE

Lemon is the larger of the two at 1,650 acres and is managed by a conservancy district that oversees lake access at Riddle Point Park. Boat rentals are not offered and there's a fee to use the park's boat ramp. Goodsized largemouth bass are a prime target, and the lake also contains bluegill, catfish, and crappie.

At just over 100 acres, Griffy limits boats to electric trolling motors only. A boat launch fee is charged. A city-managed boathouse rents canoes, kayaks, and rowboats. Griffy was drained in 2012 to repair the dam and spillway, but the lake has since been restocked with bass and other species.

Landlubbers aren't left out of summer fun. Trails for hiking, biking, or jogging can be found at city and county parks. Trails and campsites at Monroe Lake and Morgan-Monroe State Forest, and a solid roster of nature preserves (Beanblossom Bottoms, Amy Weingartner Branigin Peninsula, and Cedar Bluffs) will help you get in touch with your wild side.

SWIMMING BEACHES

FAIRFAX BEACH

Home to an expansive beach and secured swimming area, Fairfax Beach is a perfect place for a day in the sun. 9801 S. Fairfax Rd.; 812-837-9546; in.gov/dnr

HARDIN RIDGE RECREATION AREA

Visitors will find a 300-foot swimming beach for playing and sunbathing as well as a shady grass-covered hillside above. 6464 Hardin Ridge Rd.; 812-837-9453; fs.usda.gov

PAYNETOWN BEACH

The beach has plenty of space for playing or relaxing with a great view of the lake. Adjacent to the beach is the Paynetown SRA Activity Center. 4850 State Rd. 446; 812-837-9490 or 812-837-9546; in.gov/dnr

RIDDLE POINT PARK

In addition to a swimming beach visitors will find a boat launch ramp, picnic area, and lots of shoreline for fishing. 7599 N. Tunnel Rd.; 812-334-0233; lakelemon.org

An entrance fee is needed to access all swimming beach areas.







"I am struck by the simplicity of light in the atmosphere in the autumn, as if the earth absorbed none, and out of this profusion of dazzling light came the autumnal tints."

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Leaves.

Orange. Red. Yellow. Colorful, brilliant leaves paint autumn's fall portrait in the rolling hills that surround Bloomington.

Drive any road, stand at any vista overlooking the landscape, and nature's kaleidoscope is magnificent.

The best vantage point from which to view the show is atop the Hickory Ridge Fire Tower in the Charles C. Deam Wilderness Area.

Hickory Ridge was built in 1936 by the Civilian Conservation Corps and is the only remaining tower of eight the CCC built in the Hoosier National Forest to help spot fires. It served that purpose for more than 40 years and has remained open to the public since the 1970s, earning a spot on the National Historic Lookout Register in 1990.

There are 133 steps from ground level to the 7-square-foot cab atop the 110-foot-high tower.

It's a cardio workout, but the panoramic view is the unparalleled payoff.

Mason Ridge Fire Tower in Morgan-Monroe State Forest north of Bloomington is a similar treetop viewpoint for leaf peepers, but access is limited to weekday business hours at the forest office.

Another sign of autumn is the crunch of leaves underfoot on the scenic trails in Bloomington and around the county.

The B-Line Trail is the centerpiece of Bloomington's urban trail system. Built on a former railroad corridor, it stretches 3.1 miles through downtown and links to the 2-mile Bloomington Rail Trail that in turn links to the 2.4-mile Clear Creek Trail. The combined 7.5 miles are popular with walkers, bikers, joggers, and skaters. A noteworthy feature of the Clear Creek Trail is a 150-foot-long wrought-iron bridge. Built in 1887 to span Big Pine Creek in Warren County, it was renovated and moved here in 2003.

Bloomington Parks & Recreation Department also has several natural surface trails of less than a mile at Lower Cascades Park, Latimer Woods, RCA Community Park, and Winslow Woods, plus a 1.1-miler at Leonard Springs Nature Park and a new 2.7-mile trail in Cascades Park, the oldest park in the city system.

Griffy Lake Nature Preserve features a network of hiking-only trails that vary in length from 0.4 miles to 3.7 miles.

Arguably one of the prettiest settings is an area tucked into the southwest corner of Indiana University's campus known as the Old Crescent. Paved paths crisscross a tree-shrouded courtyard surrounded by the oldest buildings on campus, including three built in the 1800s that helped land the site on the National Register of Historic Places.

If you're up for some truly serious hiking, an overnight backpacking trip to the Charles C. Deam Wilderness Area is in order. Hikers and horseback riders share most of the 37 miles of trails in the federal wilderness area, but the Sycamore Loop is for hikers only. The 6.3-mile trail begins near the Hickory Ridge Fire Tower and skirts the Sycamore Branch of Salt Creek and meanders through the forest to Terril Cemetery, the final resting place of several pioneer families from the late 1800s.

Other popular trails in the Deam Wilderness are Grubb Ridge and Cope Hollow, both loop trails, and the linear Peninsula Trail that provides access to designated campsites on the shores of Monroe Lake.

Pate Hollow Trail is another one for hikers only. It's in the Hoosier National Forest but outside of Deam Wilderness near Paynetown State Recreation Area managed by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

MONROE LAKE AT FAIRFAX SRA

LOWER CASCADES PARK



Morgan-Monroe State Forest also offers some lengthy long-distance hikes and is the northern trailhead of the Tecumseh Trail. A 42-mile through-hike trail, Tecumseh starts near the state forest office.

If you want to test your stamina, the Tecumseh challenges runners each October with the Tecumseh Marathon series with races ranging in length from 6.8 miles to a full marathon (26.2 miles).

Bloomington also is a bicycling town. Indiana University students race each spring in the annual Little 500, which inspired the 1979 award-winning movie *Breaking Away*.

But if you don't want to enroll in college, there's the annual Hilly Hundred. What started in 1968 with 54 riders has grown to attract about 5,000 touring cyclists from 40 states and a few foreign countries for the two-day event in October. The non-competitive ride takes cyclists through the scenic hills of Monroe County and neighboring counties – about 50 miles one day followed by a different 50-mile route the second day.

MORE FALL DESTINATIONS

FOWLER PUMPKIN PATCH

Family-friendly and oh so fun. Pick your favorite pumpkin, go on a hayride, explore the corn maze, and say hello to the goats and donkeys in the petting zoo.

4932 Ň. Greene County Line Rd.; 812-327-4895

MUSGRAVE ORCHARD

The perfect place to pick up hand pressed apple cider and homemade caramel apples. 8820 N. Old State Rd 37; 812-339-5006

OLIVER WINERY

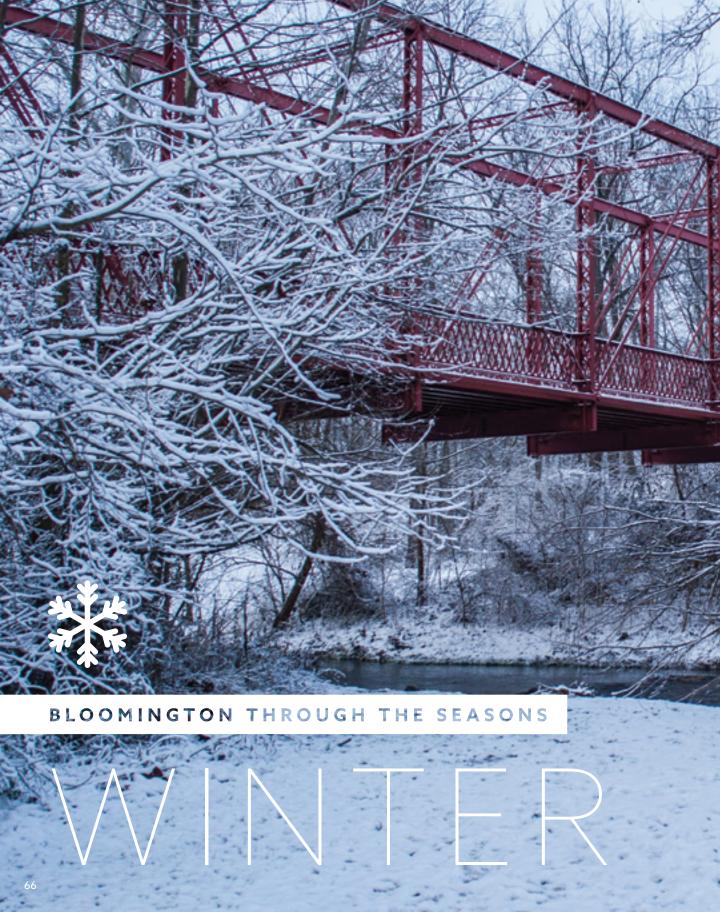
Stop in for a taste of their famous Apple Pie Wine, and stay to pick out your favorite pumpkin. Choose from gourds of all shapes, sizes, and colors, all of which are beautifully displayed around the timber-frame tasting room. 200 E. Winery Rd.; 812-876-5800; oliverwinery.com

LEAF PEEPING

Enjoy an afternoon drive along Maple Grove Road, on the National Register of Historic Places as Indiana's first Rural Historic District. You'll be sure to catch stunning displays of fall's finest colors.









Winter is no time to quit going outdoors, especially around Bloomington and Monroe County.

Sure, sure, it's tempting to curl up by the fireplace with a good book and a mug of hot chocolate, but you'd miss the outdoor delights that make winter an invigorating time of year.

Besides, winter days in Bloomington can be downright balmy...or bitterly cold.

January is historically the coldest month of the year. The average low temperature is 29 degrees, but the all-time record was a bone-chilling minus-21 on January 21, 1985.

But relax, the highest temperature recorded in January was 78 on Jan. 25, 1950.

Freeze or thaw, snow or not, it's a wonderful time to be outdoors.

The best chance for snow is January with a monthly average of 7 inches, almost double the December average.

And when it does snow, cross-country skiers and sledders swoop in to enjoy it while it lasts.

Hills near Tri-North Middle School and at the Indiana University Sailing Club on Lake Lemon are generally acknowledged as the most popular snow-sledding destinations, but you've got to bring your own sled.

Karst Farm Park, Cascades Golf Course, and the Indiana University Golf Course have the sort of rolling terrain coveted by cross-country skiers and snowshoers.

The Bloomington Rail Trail and Clear Creek Trail in Bloomington offer a combined 4.4 miles of cross-country skiing possibilities, but for real adventure strap on your skis and hit the trails at Charles C. Deam Wilderness Area or Morgan-Monroe State Forest.





BLOOMINGTON RAIL TRAIL

Your chances of seeing wildlife increase significantly in winter since trees have shed their leaves and opened sightlines even in the densest forest. Add the thinnest layer of snow and deer, wild turkeys, rabbits, squirrels, and other woodland wildlife stand out against the white backdrop.

Don't forget to look up. Perhaps you'll see owls, hawks, or even a bald eagle roosting on a tree limb.

When it comes to bald eagles, there's no better place than Monroe Lake south of Bloomington, where the majestic birds have staked out a winter home. The Indiana Department of Natural Resources launched its bald eagle restoration efforts at Monroe in 1985 and the species has become the poster child of the DNR's Nongame & Endangered Wildlife Program.

Seventy-three eaglets were released at Monroe over a five-year period in the late 1980s with a goal of 50 nesting pairs. That threshold was crossed in 2008, prompting the removal of bald eagles from the state's endangered species list. Today, more than 300 nesting sites are scattered across

GRIFFY LAKE

Indiana, with Monroe as their main hub. Golden eagles, rare in Indiana, are occasional visitors.

The bald eagle restoration program's success is celebrated annually in late January at Fourwinds Lakeside Inn and Marina in the Fairfax State Recreation Area. Experts lead a variety of raptor-focused education programs for children and adults and guide visitors on tours of the lake in search of bald eagles.

Private birding trips can be arranged through IndiGo Birding Nature Trips, including owl prowl night hikes to places like Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve.

Improve your chances of seeing bald eagles by heading to some of the more remote areas around Monroe Lake. The Peninsula Trail in the Deam Wilderness Area extends into the lake and is accessed from the Grubb Ridge Trail. Another option is the Amy Weingartner Branigin Peninsula Preserve, a relatively new property owned by the Sycamore Land Trust, a local conservation group. It's located near the Paynetown State Recreation Area, which has a year-round



HIKING AT PAYNETOWN SRA

CLEAR CREEK

activity center that offers guided hikes, stargazing, and other nature-oriented programming.

Monroe Lake is the site of two unique events designed to usher in the New Year on January 1. One is the annual Polar Day Plunge at Paynetown SRA that benefits the Bloomington Boys & Girls Club, and the other is the First Day Trail Run and Walk on the other side of the lake at Fairfax State Recreation Area.

DNR State Parks across Indiana have had First Day hikes for several years – rain, shine, cold, or warm. The one at Fairfax has the added twist of running or walking a 3.7- or 1.3-mile trail. The untimed, non-competitive events include a post-race appetizer buffet and prize drawings at Fourwinds Lakeside Inn and Marina.

But if you simply can't stand cold weather, there are a few indoor options to consider. The Frank Southern Ice Arena has public skating hours daily through the end of February, and Kirkwood Observatory is a window to the stars on Wednesday nights.

INDOOR RECREATION

These entertaining indoor activities won't let cold weather dampen anyone's spirits. Here's what to do on a cold day in Bloomington.

CLASSIC LANES BOWLING CENTER

Thirty-two lanes, plus billiards, arcade games, concessions, and lounge. 1421 N. Willis Dr.; 812-332-6689: classiclanesin.com

FRANK SOUTHERN ICE ARENA

Open October to March with public skating daily. Admission charged. 2100 S. Henderson St.; 812-349-3741; bloomington.in.gov/parks

GLOW GOLF

Miniature golf course that glows in the dark, plus a laser maze. *Inside College Mall*, 2806 E. 3rd St.; 812-323-3400; opryglowgolf.com

HOOSIER HEIGHTS

Indoor climbing facility with rental gear, instruction, and challenges for all skill levels. 1008 S. Rogers St.; 812-824-6414; hoosierheightsbloomington.com

URBAN AIR TRAMPOLINE PARK

Indoor trampoline park with open jump, Warrior course, slam dunk ball, and more. 3603 W. State Rd. 46; 812-727-8309; urbanairbloomington.com

WESTERN SKATELAND

Classic roller skating rink, with skate rental available. 930 W. 17th St.; 812-332-7288; westernskateland.ws







