

St. Francois State Park (Swimming Deer Trail)

July 20, 2026

	BOTANICAL NAME (with genus pronunciation)	FAMILY [CC] = Coefficient of Conservatism	COMMON NAME ☼ = Flowering / 🍇 = Fruiting / 🌿 = Fern
☐	<i>Actaea racemosa</i> (ak-TEE-uh)	Ranunculaceae [CC7]	Black Cohosh ☼
☐	<i>Agrimonia pubescens</i> (ag-grim-MO-nee-uh)	Rosaceae [CC4]	Downy Agrimony ☼
☐	<i>Andersonglossum virginianum</i> (an-dr-sun-GLOSS-um)	Boraginaceae (Boraginales) [CC6]	Wild Comfrey 🍇
☐	<i>Aristolochia serpentaria</i> (uh-RISS-toe-LO-kee-uh)	Aristolochiaceae [CC6]	Virginia Snakeroot
☐	<i>Asimina triloba</i> (uh-SIM-in-uh)	Annonaceae [CC5]	Pawpaw 🍇
☐	<i>Asplenium ruta-muraria</i> (uh-SPLEE-nee-um)	Aspleniaceae [CC10]	Wall-Rue Fern 🌿
☐	<i>Aureolaria flava</i> (awr-ee-o-LAYR-ee-uh)	Orobanchaceae (Lamiales) [CC8]	Smooth Yellow False Foxglove ☼
☐	<i>Brachelytrum erectum</i> (brack-ee-ell-LY-trum)	Poaceae [CC5]	Long-Awned Woodgrass 🍇
☐	<i>Carex eburnea</i> (CARE-x)	Cyperaceae [CC7]	Bristleleaf Sedge / Cedar Sedge
☐	<i>Carex jamesii</i> (CARE-x)	Cyperaceae [CC4]	James' Sedge / Grass Sedge
☐	<i>Coleataenia anceps</i> (ko-leh-TEE-nee-uh)	Poaceae (Panicoideae subfamily) [CC3]	Beaked Panicgrass 🍇
☐	<i>Cryptotaenia canadensis</i> (kripp-toe-TEE-nee-uh)	Apiaceae [CC2]	Honewort 🍇
☐	<i>Daucus carota</i> (DOW-kuss)	Apiaceae [introduced]	Wild Carrot / Queen Anne's Lace ☼
☐	<i>Diarrhena obovata</i> (dy-er-EE-nuh)	Poaceae [CC6]	Beak Grass 🍇
☐	<i>Elephantopus carolinianus</i> (el-eh-fan-TOE-pus)	Asteraceae (Vernonieae tribe) [CC3]	Elephant's Foot
☐	<i>Galium concinnum</i> (GAY-lee-um)	Rubiaceae [CC4]	Shining Bedstraw
☐	<i>Geum canadense</i> (JEE-um)	Rosaceae [CC2]	White Avens ☼ & 🍇
☐	<i>Geum virginianum</i> (JEE-um)	Rosaceae [CC9]	Cream Avens ☼ & 🍇
☐	<i>Hydrastis canadensis</i> (hy-DRASS-tiss)	Ranunculaceae [CC6]	Goldenseal
☐	<i>Hydrophyllum appendiculatum</i> (hy-dro-FILL-um)	Boraginaceae (Boraginales) [CC6]	Great Waterleaf / Woolen Breeches
☐	<i>Iris domestica</i> (EYE-riss)	Iridaceae [introduced]	Blackberry Lily
☐	<i>Laportea canadensis</i> (luh-POR-tee-uh)	Urticaceae [CC4]	Wood Nettle
☐	<i>Leersia virginica</i> (LEER-see-uh)	Poaceae [CC4]	Whitegrass
☐	<i>Liatris aspera</i> (ly-AY-triss)	Asteraceae (Eupatorieae tribe) [CC6]	Rough Blazing Star ☼
☐	<i>Lobelia spicata</i> (lo-BEE-lee-uh)	Campanulaceae [CC5]	Pale-Spike Lobelia ☼
☐	<i>Melanthium woodii</i> [was <i>Veratrum</i>] (mel-ANN-thee-um)	Melanthiaceae [CC8]	Wood's Bunchflower ☼
☐	<i>Pedicularis canadensis</i> (peddick-yoo-LAYR-iss)	Orobanchaceae (Lamiales) [CC5]	Wood Betony / Lousewort
☐	<i>Persicaria virginiana</i> (pr-seh-KAYR-ee-uh)	Polygonaceae [CC1]	Jumpseed / Virginia Knotweed ☼
☐	<i>Phryma leptostachya</i> (FRY-muh)	Phrymaceae [CC2]	Lopseed ☼ & 🍇

☐	<i>Prunella vulgaris</i> (pru-NELL-uh)	Lamiaceae (Nepetoideae subfamily) [CC1]	Self-Heal ☼
☐	<i>Rudbeckia triloba</i> (rood-BECK-ee-uh)	Asteraceae (Heliantheae tribe) [CC3]	Brown-Eyed Susan ☼
☐	<i>Sanicula canadensis</i> (suh-NICK-yoo-luh)	Apiaceae [CC3]	Black Snakeroot 🍄
☐	<i>Scirpus pendulus</i> (SKR-pus)	Cyperaceae [CC5]	Nodding Bulrush 🍄
☐	<i>Scutellaria incana</i> (skoo-teh-LAYR-ee-uh)	Lamiaceae (Scutellarioideae subfam.) [CC5]	Downy Skullcap ☼
☐	<i>Silene stellata</i> (sy-LEE-nee)	Caryophyllaceae [CC5]	Starry Champion ☼
☐	<i>Silphium terebinthinaceum</i> (SILL-fee-um)	Asteraceae (Heliantheae tribe) [CC5]	Prairie Dock
☐	<i>Stenaria nigricans</i> (sten-AYR-ee-uh)	Rubiaceae [CC5]	Diamondflowers ☼
☐	<i>Symphoricarpos orbiculatus</i> (SIMM-for-ee-KARR-pos)	Caprifoliaceae [CC1]	Coralberry
☐	<i>Symphyotrichum urophyllum</i> (SIMM-fee-o-TRY-kum)	Asteraceae (Astereae tribe) [CC4]	Arrowleaf Aster ☼
☐	<i>Tradescantia subaspera</i> (trad-eh-SKANT-ee-uh)	Commelinaceae [CC8]	ZigZag Spiderwort ☼
☐	<i>Viola striata</i> (vy-O-luh)	Violaceae [CC3]	Striped Creamy Violet 🍄

BUNCHFLOWERS:

Two trails from the same park. It's surprising how different they can be from each other! Earlier in the year we botanized along the Mooner's Trail where we always look for the lavender-colored *Hepatica* buttercup (whose leaves look like they've melted together). Today on the Swimming Deer Trail we had the Bunchflower (*Melanthium woodii*) on our radar. And we found lots of them – “Bunches of Bunchflowers” as somebody joked.

Bunchflower's old name was “*Veratrum*” (a “truly” easy-to-remember name). But its new name *Melanthium* (dark + flower) is even better. It belongs in the same “Blissful Etymology Club” as *Helianthus* (sun + flower) and *Leucanthemum* (white + flower). If only all botanical names were so simple and descriptive!

Actually, what we mostly found today were bunches of leaves, not bunches of flowers. We only found a few plants that displayed the tall flowering stalk with its panicle of dark maroon flowers. The large leaves form a rosette, like Comfrey and American Columbo – but look frazzled and stressed-out with their conspicuous parallel veins – like the neck of a weightlifter struggling during a lift. Well, we'll soon learn that they have a lot of guilt to be stressed-out about.

When we were all gathered together in an area full of Bunchflower plants, John unexpectedly started talking about mammal embryology. He told us that “cyclopia” (being a cyclops with one big functional eye in the middle of your face) is a real thing. In fact as embryos we all start out that way – with one “eye center”. But during development there's a process in which our “eye center” gets divided right down the middle. This division is accomplished, believe it or not, by a protein called “Sonic Hedgehog”.

As we stood there in the field of Bunchflower plants scratching our heads, John tied it all together. Thanks to the sacrifice of countless cycloptic sheep and goats that were born in the last century, it was deduced that various *Veratrum* / *Melanthium* plants were the cause of these severe birth defects. These plants produce an alkaloid called “cyclopamine” (another candidate for the “Blissful Etymology Club”). Cyclopamine blocks the Sonic Hedgehog from completing its task of dividing the “eye center”.

But none of us started kicking and uprooting the evil Bunchflower plants around us. Why? First of all, they're C8 plants. There's a law against hurting a C8 plant (not really, but there should be). Secondly, the Sonic Hedgehog protein is also found in the production of human cancers. If cyclopamine can block the hedgehog when it's dividing our eye-center, maybe it can also block it when it's producing cancer. And it can! So bring out the Miracle-Gro! Our beguiling Bunchflowers aren't the villains that the sheep industry makes them out to be. They're actually... OUR HEROES!

GRASSES and SEDGES:

We usually overlook – conveniently overlook – the grasses and sedges. But you'll notice that several are listed in our species list today. That's because Alan Brant was with us. He can see things that most of us graminophobes can't. So thank you, Alan, for helping us open our eyes to the real world.

A SURPRISE GEUM:

Normally we only see 2 Geums in the St. Louis area: *Geum vernum* (Spring Avens) and *Geum Canadense* (White Avens). We often just walk past these common plants without even acknowledging their existence – much as we do with the poor *Sanicula* plants and worst of all the shamefully ignored Virginia Creeper. But today as the rest of us walked past yet another *Geum* without even blinking, Alan stopped, pointed to it, and exclaimed: “*Geum virginianum!*” In Missouri, Cream Avens is a rare C9 plant. It's more common in states east of us. Most of us have probably never even seen one. It looks a lot like our White Avens, but in addition to the slight color difference of its flower, it has sepals longer than the petals, a lower stem that is much hairier, and larger stipules. I'm not sure that the lesson stuck, because on our way back we all walked right past it without even blinking.

FREE PHOTOS: Once again Kathy Bildner has shared some photos with us – including several of the famous Bunchflower! You can find them on our Google Drive [HERE](#).

PARTICIPANTS:

There were 9 of us botanists who braved the heat today. We are, in alphabetical order:
Kathy Bildner, Alan Brant, Jerry Castillon, Wayne Clark, Michael Laschober, John Oliver, David Steinmeyer, George Van Brunt, and Laura Yates.