

# Native Plants

*This photo is of the Minsi Lake dry bed.  
The lake is currently having the dam rebuilt.  
Estimated to reopen November 2019.*



**Spirit Rutzler**

This column is exclusive to the *Blue Valley Times*

Spring is on its way. The air is warming and many of the plants are beginning to awaken from their winter slumber. Already you can visit Minsi Lake County Park and see several of the willow species beginning to “plume out.” This is especially true for the pussy willow that sends out little buds of fuzz along their slender reddish branches. But there is another plant that is coming into bloom right now this is frequently overlooked if not avoided completely.

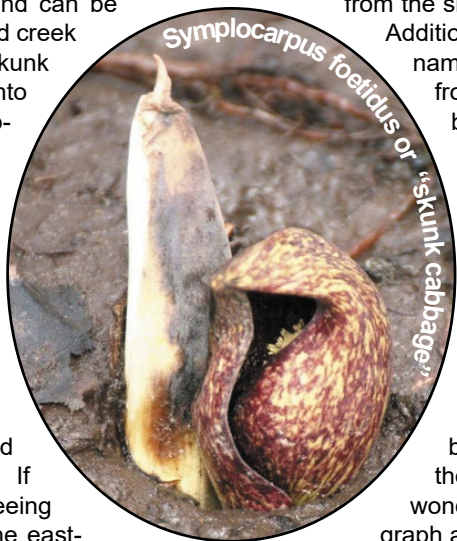
*Symplocarpus foetidus* or “skunk cabbage” is common to shaded wetlands here in north-eastern Pennsylvania and can be found along the trails and creek banks at Minsi Lake. Skunk cabbage can come into bloom as early as February to as late as May and does so well before the large green leaves appear. The flowers of skunk cabbage do not resemble typical flowers. They are composed of a spathe and spadix – or rather a hood that covers a central rod that is composed of clusters of flowers. If you are interested in seeing one up close, park at the eastern parking lot and hike back to the first bridge. Look for maroon mottled spathes on the right hand side of the bridge on the bank of the creek. There is a small colony there that is reaching mature bloom.

While this plant is not attractive to gardeners, it plays an important part in our ecosystem. Since it blooms much earlier than other wildflowers, it is known as an “ephemeral” plant. All ephemerals provide an important source of food

for pollinators that are coming out of hibernation in the beginning of spring. Without these early plants like skunk cabbage, many of the insects we rely on to pollinate our crops would starve. The skunk cabbage is unique from most other ephemerals in that it exhibits thermogenesis – it can chemically create its own heat! It is due to this process that skunk cabbage will come to bloom through snow, well before its ephemeral counterparts. But not all is sweet and warm with this hardy plant.

Skunk cabbage gets its well-deserved name from the smell of its leaves when crushed.

Additionally, if the “skunk” part of its name isn’t enough to scare you off from eating this cabbage, then be warned. This plant contains calcium oxalate crystals, which cause burning and swelling of the mouth, tongue, and esophagus as well as other harmful effects. While you may be able to find some articles that say skunk cabbage was used as a home remedy, it is better to steer a wide path around it, as reactions to the plant can be severe. All of these quirks though make the skunk cabbage a wonderful and unique plant to photograph and admire in our wetlands.



*Spirit Rutzler is a resident of the Slate Belt. She is employed by the Wildlands Conservancy as a naturalist and the Bike and Boat Coordinator. She graduated Summa Cum Laude from East Stroudsburg University with a B.S. in English and Secondary Education. She is currently completing her M.S. in Conservation Biology from Green Mountain College.*

Spirit Rutzler is a committee member of Friends of Minsi Lake.

**Friends of Minsi Lake Mission Statement:** To support Minsi Lake and improve the area’s conservation value, encourage economic development and enhance recreational opportunities for everyone who lives, works and/or plays in Northampton County.

## Friends of Minsi Lake

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## Opening day at Dinky's

By Jill Matthews  
BANGOR - Our first customers of the season at Dinky's Ice Cream Parlor in Bangor were Lydia six and Natalie two years old who enjoyed their ice cream treats on a sunny afternoon on Saturday.

# Spring Is Here

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## Stste Rep. Emrick Recieves the Hometown Hero Award

By Michael Ortoski

Johnsonville - State Representative Joe Emrick visited Pack 14 of Johnsonville last Thursday night and was awarded the Hometown Hero award by the Webelos Scouts.

The Scouts got a chane to ask Emrick many questions about his job, how the government works and questions about Minsi Lake dam reconstruction.

Emrick is a committee member of 'Friends of Minsi Lake' who are the new caretakers of the lake. Their mission is to support Minsi Lake and improve the area's con-servation value, encourage economic development and enhance recreational opportunities for everyone who lives, works and/or plays in Northampton County.

FOML Purpose Statement: To chart the course and provide resources needed to enhance the natural and recreational assets throughout the Minsi Lake area.

Scout leaders thanked Emrick for his support of the Scouting. "It is great to see a State Representative so involved with the local youth" said troop leader 'Vinny'.

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