

# THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH NEWSLETTER

Spring 1994

## What To Look For . . . Weeds

*Imports... spring blooming flowers that came to North America from abroad... sometimes called aliens, sometimes called Eurasian weeds. Along the most traveled parts of the PATH are these tough, persistent, aggressive plants, producing lots of seed, greening over rough places, moving into any available open space, adapting to many conditions of shade, sunlight, and water.*

Everyone knows the dandelion except a visitor from India who said, looking at our lawn one spring, "Americans must love yellow flowers. You plant so many of them." The name comes from the French "tooth of the lion" which describes the sharply cut leaves. There are many uses of dandelions, from salads to wine.

Winter cress, a bright yellow; dames rocket, a purple pink; and wild garlic, with white flowers are all members of the mustard family, having four-petaled flowers and seed pods with many seeds. Winter cress blooms early, and often turns old fields yellow in the spring. Dames rocket is often grown in old fashioned gardens and is planted along the PATH by birds. Wild garlic adapts easily to shade and grows in profusion along the PATH. It has strong-smelling leaves.

Wild parsnip is a relative of the carrot and grows along the PATH with its cousin, the Queen Anne's lace. Wild parsnip has golden flowers and heavy seeds and a strong ribbed stem.

The modern, cultivated plant has been developed from this sturdy weed.

Our most abundant plant is creeping charlie, an aggressive member of the mint family, which invades every available open spot along the PATH and in my garden. But in the spring this lowly plant has beautiful, pale blue blossoms and gives off a lovely mint scent when crushed by fingers or foot.

Fragrance and flowers enhance our spring walks on the Prairie Path.

