

# Spanning the Gap

## (Spring) Flowering Trees and Shrubs



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We so look forward to the warmth and life of spring that the sight of the first spring flower can be cause for celebration. While looking for these lovely promises of warmer months, you may also notice the flowering trees and shrubs.

To list all the flowering trees of the area would mean to list all tree species because all trees have flowers. Some tree flowers are large and attractive while most are small and easily overlooked. Let's look at some "conspicuous bloomers."



Pink azalea (Pinxter flower).  
(NPS photo by Maria Berde)

### **Shadbush** (*Amelanchier arborea*)

This small tree of the roadside and woods blooms with clusters of white, long-petal flowers in April and May before or as its leaves unfold. Its blooming reminds us that the shad are now ascending the Delaware River to spawn. Its edible berries mature in early June, and can make good preserves for people to eat, but you would have to get there first to harvest them before the birds and wildlife eat them. Other names for the plant are **Serviceberry**, **Sarvis**, **Shadblow**, and **Juneberry**.



Shadbush.

### **Catalpa**

(*Catalpa speciosa* or Catawba tree, and *Catalpa bignonioides* or Common Catalpa)

A native of Mississippi, the catalpa will be found in the park in places where it has been planted for its showy appeal. Even when not in flower, both northern and southern can be identified by its very large, heart-shaped leaves. Two places to find this



tree are both along the Appalachian Trail: at Lake Lenape PA, or at a former homesite on the AT in New Jersey, just south of Blue Mountain Lakes Road.

A catalpa in bloom near Blue Mt. Lakes Road.

**Dogwood** (*Cornus florida*)

The flowering dogwood is another tree loved for its showy spring flowers and planted as an ornamental. It is at home, though, throughout the southeast and blooms in the understory of hardwood forests along the length of the Appalachian Trail except north of Massachusetts. Its four large white "petals" are not petals at all but enlarged bracts which surround a cluster of small greenish-white flowers. Any of the spur trails from Old Mine Road to the Appalachian Trail will provide a view of the flowering dogwood in flower from March through June.



Flowering white dogwood.

**Pink Azalea** (*Rhododendron periclymenoides*)

Take a moment in your spring wildflower searches to look up from the forest floor to these flowers in the mid and upper levels. This small twiggy shrub blooms in spring before its leaves appear. Its colorful blooms appear at the ends of the branches as clusters of tubular flowers with a slight fragrance. Also called **Pinxter Flower**, it can be seen along the borders of swamps and bogs, as well as dry sites in woods and thickets.



Pink azalea (Pinxter flower).  
(NPS photo by Don F. Mitchinson)

**Mountain Laurel** (*Kalmia latifolia*)

This evergreen shrub blooms in the recreation area in the latter part of June, making it the last flowering shrub of spring. White or pinkish star-like flowers occur in compact clusters with a resemblance to large popcorn balls. Large thickets of mountain laurel in bloom, with fluffy white flowers contrasted against its dark green foliage are the inspiration of countless "Mountain Laurel Festivals" all along the Appalachian chain.



Mountain laurel.

## **Rhododendron** (*Rhododendron maximum*)

The native rhododendron of this area, called great or Rosebay rhododendron, are not "spring flowers" at all, for they bloom in July, but they are included here because of their popularity, and to give an opportunity to distinguish them from the earlier-blooming mountain laurel. They are similar to mountain laurel in that they are evergreen shrubs that grow in thickets; they differ from the mountain laurel in that the leaves are larger, and individual flowers that form the cluster are shaped differently. Instead of being pinkish and star-shaped, the rhododendron's flowers are cup-shaped and white with green spots on the upper lobe. Most of the ravines in the recreation area host spectacular rhododendron thickets; they are easily seen along the boardwalk trail at Dingmans Falls PA. In New Jersey, an especially profuse area is along the Appalachian Trail as it borders Sunfish Pond.

***Please remember that all wildflowers within Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area are protected by federal law and may not be picked or dug up for transplanting.***



Rhododendron in Dingmans Ravine.