



Photo Credit: Antweb.org

Natural Connections

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Seeds with eliasomes

If you are enjoying the beautiful woodland flowers of spring, you might want to thank an ant!

Many ephemeral spring wildflowers have an unlikely partner in spreading their seeds. Ants. Although many different species of ants that help to spread seed, ants of the *Aphaenogaster* family are the most abundant and successful at this work. These are not the species of ants that find their way into our home but live within our woodlands where early spring flowers bloom before the forest floor becomes shaded from the trees. Violets, dutchman breeches, bloodroots are just a few of the early spring flowers that create seeds with a fatty, lipid appendage called an eliasomes. To ants, the eliasome mimics the smell of dead insects, which is a favorite food to these woodland ants. The ants carry the seeds back to their colonial home where they eat the eliasome off the seed, discard the seed into a waste pile called a midden. The middens are warm and nutrient rich giving the seeds a better chance to grow. This process is called myrmecochory. Myrmecochory is often referred to as a good example of natural mutualism where both species (plant and ant) benefit from this relationship.



Bloodroot



Wild Violet



Dutchman's Breeches