

Heavenly Flowers: Star and Angel Wings

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As a young girl, hiking the woodlands of Maine and New Hampshire, I learned about starflowers and angel wings while on family adventures. Once home from the woods, I spent many hours creating fanciful stories about these heavenly-named flowers and combined their stories with the peoples of folktales that



I read at the time. Look for starflower and angel wings on your next hike. I hope you will find them inspiring as well.

Starflowers (*Trientalis borealis*) have been blooming in Maine's woodlands for several weeks now and will continue through mid to late June if the weather remains cool and moist. They grow in both in hardwood (deciduous) and softwood (coniferous) forests but prefer moist woods with dappled sunlight.

Look for masses of this flower, standing about 4-inches tall, with their snowy-white flowers and whorl of leaves. By mid-summer starflowers go dormant, leaving only the stem with tiny seed capsules at the tip. Starflowers spread by rhizomes and seed distribution.

Interesting Facts

- *Trientalis*, the genus name, is from the Latin meaning "one third foot" and is descriptive of the average height of this plant.
- *borealis*, the species name, means "northern."
- Pollinated by native bees.
- Seeds require the cold of winter to become viable. They do not germinate until their second fall season.
- Seeds are dispersed by insects.

Angel wings is the common name I learned as a child for what is also known as gaywings, and fringed polygala (*Polygala paucifolia*). This beautiful flower, of magenta and pink, resembles a tiny flying bird or angel. It can be found in woodlands, mid-May through early June, close to the forest floor. Look for it along trail edges where it takes advantage of a bit more sunlight.



Interesting Facts

- *Poly*, the genus name, is from the Latin meaning "much" or "many".
- *gala* is from the Latin for "milk".
- Plants in the genus *Polygala* produce compounds known to increase milk production in nursing mammals.
- Produces showy above-ground flowers that are pollinated by insects, and tiny underground flowers which self-fertilize without opening.

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- [Jocelyn Hubbell](#) Interpretive Specialist, Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands.