

Trail Descriptions:

Robin's Trail

This 1.5-mile trail parallels New Hope Creek and runs between the two parking areas. As it winds through the floodplain forest the path offers vistas of the creek and its stone-covered streambed and takes hikers through a mixed hardwood forest with beech, hickory, tulip poplar and sweetgum. This trail is named in memory of Robin Pascal by the PascalStrom family.

Beech Loop Trail:

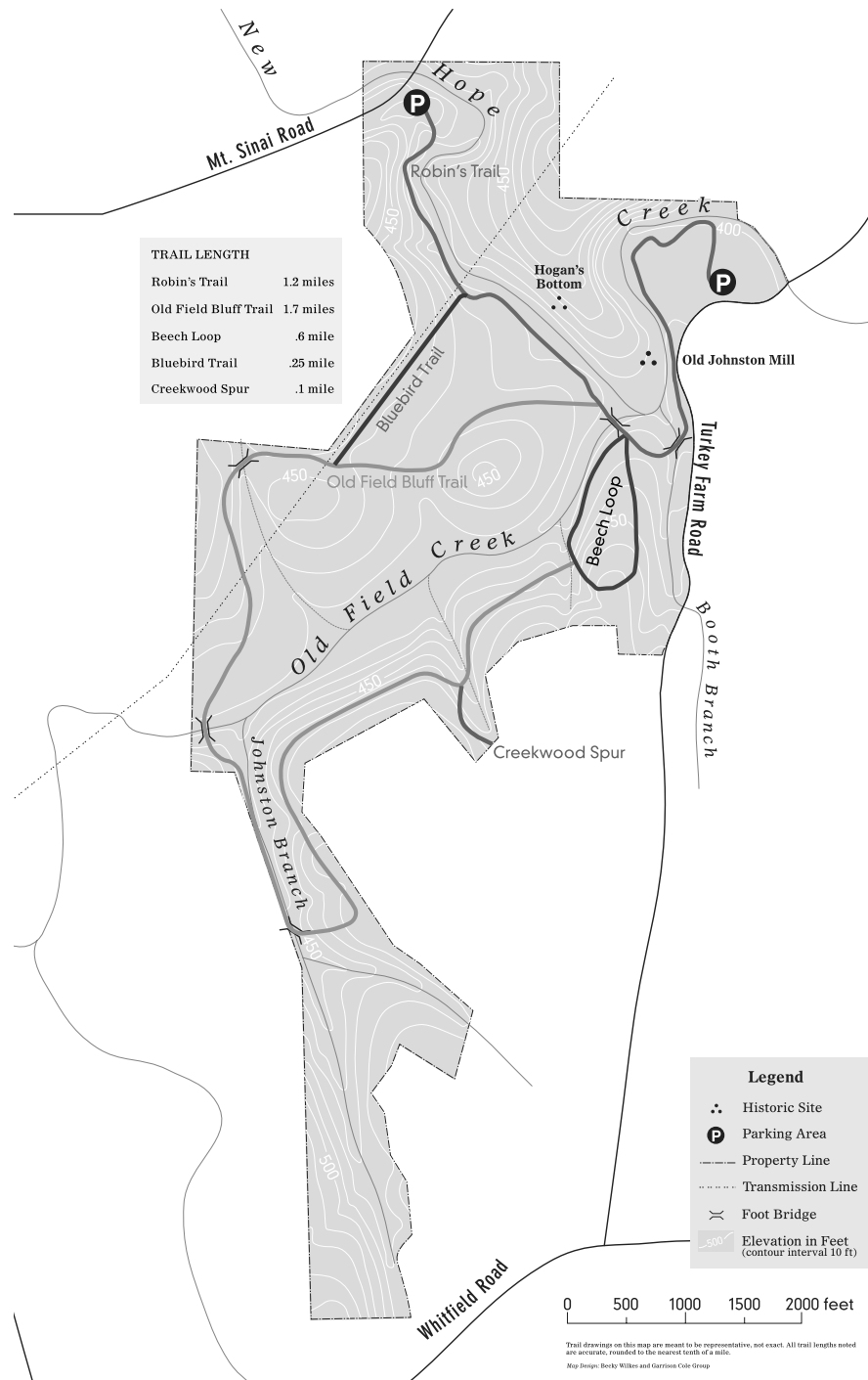
This 0.6 mile loop traverses a beech forest and links the Robin's Trail to the Old Field Bluff Trail

Old Field Bluff Trail: This 1.7 mile loop traverses a variety of habitats and crosses several of Johnston Mill's Creeks.

Bluebird Trail: This 0.3 mile loop links the Robin's Trail to the Old Field Trail via the power line. The open area attracts a variety of bird species. Volunteers have installed bluebird boxes along the trail.

For more information on TLC and to find out how you can become a member visit
<http://www.triangleland.org>

Your contributions make trails like these possible.



**JOHNSTON MILL
NATURE PRESERVE**

Preserve Guide

Welcome to Johnston Mill Nature Preserve, a 296-acre natural area owned and managed by Triangle Land Conservancy.

This forested tract on the outskirts of Chapel Hill is a green oasis in the midst of a suburban area facing rapid growth and change. A walk in these woods transports visitors to an earlier time when water-powered gristmills dotted New Hope Creek and the pace of life was just a little slower. We hope you spend an hour or an afternoon in this preserve and get acquainted with one of the most significant and scenic natural areas in Orange County.



Johnston Mill Nature Preserve in Spring: Wildflowers Abound!

Johnston Mill, like many places in the NC Piedmont, is a wonderful place to visit in the spring. The best area in Johnston Mill Nature Preserve to see wildflowers is in the floodplain along Robin's Trail. Other places along Johnston Branch in the southwest corner of the property, along the Old Field Bluff Trail and then continuing along the south side of Old Field Creek, also have wildflowers, though not as abundant.

Tips for spotting wildflowers: Wait to take your hike until late morning to early afternoon, if possible. Many spring ephemerals remain closed in the morning and open when they get some sun. Most spring wildflowers are small—walk slowly and look carefully along Robin's Trail. Don't forget to look up for flowers on our trees, too!

You may hear people refer to spring wildflowers as spring ephemerals. This group of plants shares a common strategy for survival in the deep summer shade of deciduous forests. The plants emerge in very early spring or even late winter, photosynthesizing in the direct sunlight that

is available before the trees leaf out. By late spring, these species have completed their reproductive cycles, having grown, flowered, and set seed. Some have leaves which persist through summer, others disappear until re-emerging in late fall or early winter. Strictly speaking, not all spring-flowering species are considered spring ephemerals—only the ones that complete their life cycles over a 6-8 week period in early spring.

What you'll see depends on when you go. Here are some wildflowers to look for along the easily-accessed Robin's Trail:

FEBRUARY/ MARCH

Trout lily (*Erythronium umbellatum*): Look for the two long, mottled leaves (thought to look like the mottling on a trout), short stems, and nodding flower heads with yellow petals of this showy native as early as mid-February.

Spring beauty (*Claytonia virginica*): These tiny white, pale pink, or candy-striped flowers have 5 petals that open when warmed by the sun, so you may miss them on a cool, early morning hike, but they grow in carpets along the floodplain of the creek.

Liverleaf, hepatica (*Anemone americana*): The doctrine of signatures is an ancient belief that plants contain cues to help healers understand how to use them to treat illness. The rounded, three-lobed leaves, shaped like a human liver, were used by Native Americans and folk healers to help cure liver diseases. Besides the leaves, which emerge after the flowers have gone and persist all summer, look for clumps of six-sepaled flowers on densely hairy stems, ranging from white to pink to deep lavender.

Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*): This shrub grows densely along parts of the floodplain and normally has waxy, blue-green leaves. Before the leaves emerge in early spring, however, these trees are covered with tiny, greenish-yellow flowers. Scratch the bark on one of the small twigs and sniff for a spicy, citrusy scent, often compared rather unfortunately with Lemon Pledge.

Windflower (*Anemonella thalictroides*): So-called because the delicate stems shiver easily in the slightest breeze, windflowers light up shady areas with five-to-ten-petaled white flowers and rounded but irregular leaves.

Giant chickweed (*Stellaria pubera*): Look hard for these "giants" growing close to the ground—the flowers are less than half an inch across. It may look as though these small starry flowers have 10 petals, but look closely and you'll see there are really five petals which are deeply divided into two parts.

Dwarf crested iris (*Iris cristata*): Large numbers of these are found along the first part of Robin's Trail from the Mt. Sinai Rd. parking lot—walk the spur trail to the left toward the bench overlooking the creek. They have flattened leaves like the cultivated bearded iris but they are only about 3-4 inches tall. The deep blue to purple flowers have fuzzy fringed white crests on the insides of the three outermost sepals, giving them their name.

Jack-in-the-pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*): Look for these trifoliate leaves along New Hope Creek. Flowers are usually green, sometimes brown or maroon and are borne on solitary stalks, with the spathe (the pulpit) as a long tube with a pointed hood enclosing the upright spadix (the jack) with tiny male and female flowers. Single-leaved, smaller plants, called "jacks," will mostly have male flowers, while more robust plants with two or more leaves will have mostly female flowers, called "jills."

Painted buckeye (*Aesculus sylvatica*): The large flowering stalks of this lovely native shrub or small tree are pale yellow that can have a hint of pink. Also note the emerging lime-green, compound leaves, which have spreading leaflets radiating from a center stalk. Buckeye leaves and seeds are highly toxic, and the seeds were once used to stun fish by crushing them and throwing them into streams.

Little brown jugs (*Hexastylis arifolia*): You might notice the triangular, glossy green leaves of in winter as they are one of the few common evergreen herbaceous plants. Crush a small piece of leaf and smell the spicy scent—the roots of this plant were used as a spice. Peer under the leaves to see the unusual flowers, which give little brown jugs their common name!

Green and gold (*Chrysogonum virginianum*): Look for these cheery yellow flowers close to the ground, nestled among clumps of scallop-edged green leaves. They are in the Aster family, so the five or more "petals" are really sterile flowers, with the tiny fertile flowers in the centers. These bloom sporadically into early summer, so continue to look for their golden blossoms into June.

Tuliptree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*): Instead of looking up at these tall, straight trees, cast your eyes on the ground and look for the green, yellow, and orange-splashed cupped flowers with many stamens. Pick one up and examine the cone-like center which has the ovules—later in the fall, you'll see that these have developed into cone-shaped fruits made up of many winged seeds called samaras, which blow apart in winter winds and send seeds helicoptering down to the forest floor.

MARCH/APRIL

APRIL / MAY