**Pasque Flower** (*Pulsatilla vulgaris*) is a fuzzy little perennial that works well in shady areas beneath deciduous trees. Before the leaves emerge on many trees, the pasque flower produces purple, maroon, or white flowers atop finely dissected foliage. The flower buds and fruit heads (appearing later in spring and summer) are covered with long grayish white hairs, giving the plant a fuzzy appearance. The seed heads can reach 10 to 12 inches, while the flowers and foliage often remain much lower. This plant would easily get lost in the summer garden if it were not for the interesting seed heads. Pasque flower prefers full sun to part shade with fertile, well-drained soil.

**Bloodroot** (*Sanguinaria canadensis*), a member of the poppy family, is found in moist woodlands throughout the state. Plants bloom over a 2 to 4 week period in late March and April. However, individual flowers often last only 1 or 2 days. The single white flower contains 8 to 16 petals. As the plant emerges in spring, the leaf is tightly curled around the flower stalk. The multi-lobed leaf begins to unfurl during bloom, eventually attaining a width of 8 to 10 inches. Leaves persist until late summer. Below ground, bloodroot produces thick, tuber-like roots. The common name, bloodroot, refers to the bright red juice which oozes from the root when cut or broken. Bloodroot performs best in shady woodland and garden settings.

A few other early spring bloomers include: **snowdrop anemone** (*Anemone sylvestris*), **basket-of-gold** (*Aurinia saxatilis*), **Dutchman’s breeches** (*Dicentra cucullaria*), **creeping phlox** (*Phlox stolonifera*), **trilliums** (*Trillium spp.*), and **violets** (*Viola spp.*). Try some of these perennials in your garden and watch them herald the coming of spring.

**For More Information**
Horticultural information on selection, planting, cultural practices, and environmental quality is available from your local Iowa State University Extension office and from these Web sites.

- ISU Extension Distribution Center—www.extension.iastate.edu/store
- ISU Horticulture—www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu
- Reiman Gardens—www.reimangardens.iastate.edu

If you want to learn more about horticulture through training and volunteer work, ask your ISU Extension office for information about the ISU Extension Master Gardener program.

Prepared by Cindy Haynes, extension horticulturist; and Diane Nelson, extension communication specialist. Illustrations by Jane Lenahan, extension graphic designer.
One of the first signs of spring is the emergence of crocuses, daffodils, and other spring-flowering bulbs. Several other perennials also bloom in early spring and complement the familiar bulbs. Wake up your perennial borders with any of the following as a prelude to peonies, bearded irises, and other later spring bloomers.

**Pig Squeak (Bergenia cordifolia)** has large, shiny, semi-evergreen leaves. The green leaves often turn red or maroon in winter. Several new cultivars produce purple foliage. The pink and white flowers are secondary to the ornamental foliage and are produced in clusters on 12 to 18 inch tall scapes or stalks in early spring. This plant performs well in full sun to part shade and is adaptable to a wide variety of soils. A planting site that shelters the plants from strong winds will prevent tattering and browning of the foliage during the winter.

**Heartleaf Brunnera (Brunnera macrophylla)** is a low growing, mounding perennial (12 to 18 inches tall) with tiny, brilliant blue flowers that appear in early spring and continue for a month or more. The masses of true blue flowers are reminiscent of forget-me-not, hence another common name—perennial forget-me-not. The heart-shaped leaves remain clean and dark green throughout the summer and into fall. Several new cultivars have mottled silver or white foliage. Brunnera prefers part shade to shade with moist, well-drained soil. However, it will perform well in full sun if enough moisture is provided. Heartleaf brunnera works well in combination with hostas and lungworts.

**Lenten Rose** *(Helleborus orientalis)* is a semi-evergreen to evergreen perennial that usually starts blooming in late March. The nodding, bell-like flowers vary in color from creamy white, pale green, and lavender to burgundy. Plants grow 15 to 18 inches tall. This perennial is a bit more temperamental than many other perennials and requires fertile, moist, well-drained soil in part shade. An early bloomer with leathery evergreen foliage, the Lenten rose performs best in a protected site away from strong winter winds. This perennial is marginally cold hardy. A planting site near the house will provide a little extra warmth and also will give you a close-up view of its lovely flowers.

**Candytuft** *(Iberis sempervirens)* is another perennial with semi-evergreen to evergreen foliage. The flowers are pure white and can blanket the foliage for several weeks in spring. Candytuft has a low growing, mounding habit reaching 6 to 12 inches tall. This plant works well in the front of the border or cascading slightly over a small wall. Plant it in full sun to part shade with some protection from winter winds.

**Crested Iris** *(Iris cristata)* is one of the few irises that bloom in shade. It is smaller than bearded iris, reaching only 6 inches in height, and has fewer insect and disease problems. Flowers are smaller and without beards but very effective in the woodland garden. Flower colors are somewhat limited—mainly blue, purple, and white. The crested iris prefers full sun to part shade with well-drained soil; it also works well in the rock garden.

**Virginia Bluebells** *(Mertensia virginica)* is a native woodland wildflower. Flowers are borne in nodding clusters. Pink buds open into trumpet-shaped, light blue flowers. The plants, approximately 1 to 2 feet tall, die back to the ground by early summer. Because of their ephemeral nature, Virginia bluebells are often planted between slower growing perennials. Plants prefer moist sites in partial shade.

**Moss Phlox** *(Phlox subulata)* is noted for its bright carpets of color for several weeks in spring. Flower colors include white, pink, lavender, and bi-colors. The foliage is dark green, needle-like, and evergreen. Plant height is 3 to 6 inches tall, making it a wonderful edging or rock garden plant. The plant prefers full sun and insists on well-drained soil.

**Lungwort or Bethlehem Sage** *(Pulmonaria saccharata)* is a mounding perennial 10 to 18 inches tall noted for its attractive foliage. The dark green leaves are often speckled with silvery white spots. The foliage of some cultivars has more silver than green. Although the foliage is the main ornamental feature, the flowers are lovely as well, and can be white, pink, or blue—some even change from pink to blue. Lungwort performs best in part shade with fertile, moist, well-drained soil.