

Jack-in-the-pulpit

Jack-in-the-pulpits are common woodland wildflowers that can be found blooming from early May into summer. These unique looking flowers hold many secrets including “Jack” who hides under a hood. “Jack” is really the spadix of the plant. A spadix is a fleshy protrusion that holds a collection of small flowers and is often protected by a spathe, or modified leaf or scale. The hood works like an umbrella keeping the rain from entering the spathe and washing the pollen away from the flowers inside.



Another secret hiding in the Jack-in-the-pulpit is how pollination occurs. Many flowers use sweet smells, bright colors or ultraviolet coloration to attract insects for a sip of nectar. While the insect searches for nectar they accidentally brush up against the anthers collecting the pollen which is then spread to the next flower. Jack-in-the-pulpits, however, attract fungus gnats with a slight fungal smell. The gnats enter the spathe thinking they can lay their eggs on a fungus but soon realize that they are trapped. Trying to climb back up the spathe is too slippery and they fall back down to the bottom of the flower. The hood and the spadix prevent the gnats from simply flying back out. However, if the Jack-in-the-pulpit has male flowers the gnats, who have by now been covered in pollen, can find a small opening at the base of the spathe to escape by. After pollination occurs red berries can be found on stalks on the forest floor.



Lady’s Slippers

Yellow Lady’s slippers are another type of spring wildflower that uses trickery or forced pollination. The bright yellow of the flower, and the maroon “V” pointing down into the petal pouch, suggests to bees that they will find nectar upon entering the orchid. Hairs force the bee to move passed the stigma (female part) then the anthers (male part) to the exit hole at the back. If an insect visits more than one lady’s slipper pollination occurs.



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