The Kaul Wildflower Garden is an everchanging monument to the fundamental beauty abounding in Nature. As one strolls along wooded paths through drifts of ferns and nodding cumbines, it’s hard to believe that this wondrous place was once an overgrown quarry.

In 1966, Bobbe Kaul looked at the quarry’s eroding banks, with its tangles of privet and honeysuckle, and envisioned a place where many of Alabama’s most treasured native plants could be displayed in a naturalistic setting. With the endorsement of the Birmingham Botanical Society, she invited Swiss Landscape Architect Zenon Schreiber to design the garden. Mr. Schreiber developed planting beds and pathways that ingeniously harmonized with the original contours of the site. Native plants, many of which were rescued from the path of the bulldozer’s blade, were then planted and allowed to form natural colonies.

Springtime, especially from mid-March through April, is the garden’s showiest period. With the first hint of warmer weather, the pure white, daisy-like blossoms of bloodroot (Sanguinaria canadensis) begin dotting the forest floor. Next come the lavendar-blue blossoms of blue phlox and the appleblossom pinks of wild geranium (Geranium maculatum) and foam flower (Tiarella Cordifolia). Eared coreopsis (Coreopsis auriculata) adds its cheery yellow, while fire pink (Silene virginica) blazes bright red.

Although sweeps of wildflowers are visible from a distance, only by viewing individual plants close-up can one appreciate the elegant design embodied in each wildflower. Kneel down on a path beside a mayapple (Podophyllum peltatum) just as it begins to emerge from the soil—doesn’t it look like a small, green bullet? Or inspect a great white trillium (Trillium grandiflorum)—see how its parts come in groups of three? Then go find a shooting star (Dodecatheon meadia)—doesn’t its blossom resemble a flaming meteor descending from the heavens?

Herbaceous plants star in this garden, but that doesn’t mean that native, woody plants are overlooked. Just witness the glorious spring blooms of native azaleas (Rhododendron sp.), mountain laurel (Kalmia latifolia), oakleaf hydrangea (Hydrangea arborescens) and wild sweet crabapple (Malus angustifolia).

Summer and fall are quieter times in the garden, but there is still plenty to see. The brilliant scarlet blooms of cardinal flower (Lobelia cardinalis) are eye-catching in July and August. Mid-summer also sees the giant wands of tiny, white flowers borne by cohosh bugbane (Cimicifuga racemosa), as well as the intermittent, pink blooms of fringed bleeding heart (Dicentra eximia). August and September while the glossy, evergreen leaves of galax (Galax urceolata) and partridgeberry (Mitchella repens) are handsome in all seasons.

The Kaul Wildflower Garden is a triumph not only of design, but of the human spirit that moves us to preserve the natural order. Thanks to the efforts of Zenon Schreiber, and dedicated volunteers—especially Bobbe Kaul—it’s a dream come true for Birmingham.
This southern, native woodland was created for the enjoyment, education and inspiration of all who walk here. Given by Barbara Orr and Hugh Kaul, it was begun in 1966 and dedicated in 1986.

The Kaul Wildflower Garden

Designed by W. Fancher Lane
Written by Stephen Bender

The Birmingham Botanical Garden
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Birmingham, Alabama