

# *around the year*

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE SEASONS AND / THE CHRISTIAN YEAR



## APRIL

by John Burroughs

AN EXCERPT FROM *BIRDS AND POETS* (1877)

If we represent the winter of our northern climate by a rugged snow-clad mountain, and summer by a broad fertile plain, then the intermediate belt, the hilly and breezy uplands, will stand for spring, with March reaching well up into the region of the snows, and April lapping well down upon the greening fields and unloosened currents, not beyond the limits of winter's sallying storms, but well within the vernal zone,—within the reach of the warm breath and subtle, quickening influences of the plain below. At its best, April is the tenderest of tender salads made crisp by ice or snow water. Its type is the first spear of grass. The senses—sight, hearing, smell—are as hungry for its delicate and almost spiritual tokens as the cattle are for the first bite of its fields. How it touches one and makes him both glad and sad! The voices of the arriving birds, the migrating fowls, the clouds of pigeons sweeping across

# From the Editor's Desk

April 1, 2016

Dear Readers:

April is my favorite month of the year, and with good reason. No matter what kind of weather March has doled out, we can be fairly certain that we will have spring by the end of April. It might be a rainy, muddy spring, but it will still be spring! April also brings my birthday on the 28th, a special day that I share with the **Feast of St. Gianna Beretta Molla**—my favorite saint and the patroness of mothers, physicians, and unborn babies. You can learn more about her in this newsletter (see page 7) and at **SaintGianna.org**.

Other saints whose feast days are celebrated in April include: **St. Anselm**, **Mark the Evangelist**, and **St. Catherine of Siena**. If you're an Anglophile like me, you'll enjoy celebrating **St. George's Day** on April 23rd—be sure to check **AroundTheYear.org** later in the month for ideas to celebrate this patron saint of England!



I also share my birth month with American naturalist **John Burroughs**, who penned a beautiful **ode to April** that I just had to share with all of you (starting on the first page of this newsletter); the entirety of his book *Birds and Poets* (1877) can be read at [www.Gutenberg.org/ebooks/5177](http://www.Gutenberg.org/ebooks/5177).

I think Mr. Burroughs would agree that now is the time to get outdoors! A walk in the woods in April provides opportunities to witness new life at almost every turn in the path—keep your eyes open for **wake-robin**s, a rare but lovely woodland treasure (see page 3).

Be sure to check out my recommendations for April books for children, including the wordless magic of Gerda Muller's **Spring** (see page 8). For adults I recommend Sigrid Undset's **biography of St. Catherine of Siena**. Happy reading, and happy spring!

*Kelli Ann Wilson, Editor*  
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*Coming to around the year in May:  
Celebrating May Day, Whitsunday, & more!*

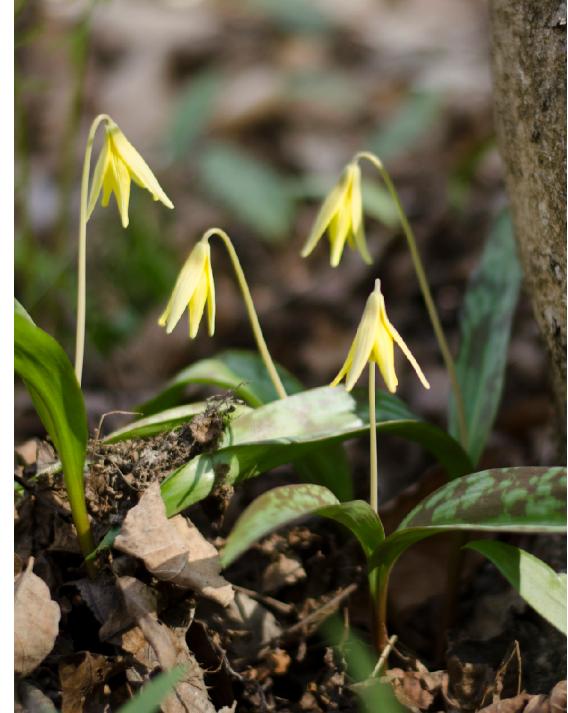
the sky or filling the woods, the elfin horn of the first honey-bee venturing abroad in the middle of the day, the clear piping of the little frogs in the marshes at sundown, the campfire in the sugar-bush, the smoke seen afar rising over the trees, the tinge of green that comes so suddenly on the sunny knolls and slopes, the full translucent streams, the waxing and warming sun,—how these things and others like them are noted by the eager eye and ear! April is my natal month, and I am born again into new delight



TROUT LILIES AND WILD OATS  
APPEAR IN THE WOODS.

and new surprises at each return of it. Its name has an indescribable charm to me. Its two syllables are like the calls of the first birds,—like that of the phoebe-bird, or of the meadowlark. Its very snows are fertilizing, and are called the poor man's manure.

Then its odors! I am thrilled by its fresh and indescribable odors,—the perfume of the bursting sod, of the quickened roots and rootlets, of the mould under the leaves, of the fresh furrows. No other month has odors like it. The west wind the other day came fraught with a perfume that was to the sense of smell what a wild and delicate strain of music is to the ear. It was almost transcendental. I walked across the hill with my nose in the air taking it in. It lasted for two days. I imagined it came from the willows of a distant swamp, whose catkins were affording the bees their first pollen: or did it come from much farther,—from beyond the horizon, the accumulated breath of innumerable farms and budding forests? The main characteristic of

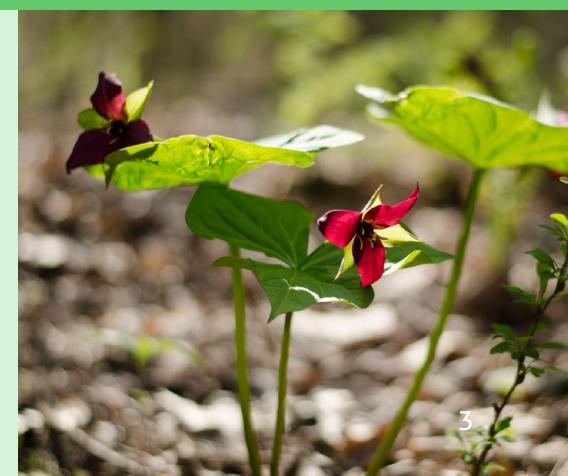


these April odors is their uncloying freshness. They are not sweet, they are oftener bitter, they are penetrating and lyrical. I know well the odors of May and June, of the world of meadows and orchards bursting into bloom, but they are not so ineffable and immaterial and so stimulating to the sense as the incense of April. The season of which I speak does not correspond with the April of the almanac in all sections of our vast geography. It answers to March in Virginia and Maryland, while in parts of New York and New England it laps well over into May. It begins when the partridge

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## WAKE-ROBINS (TRILLIUM ERECTUM)

If you happen to be in the woods at just the right moment in spring, you might be lucky enough to come across the lovely *Trillium erectum*, or wake-robin flower. Native to the shady places of North America, wake-robin can be identified by their large, three-petaled bloom of white or deep red. While beautiful to behold, one should refrain from picking them as the whole plant can die if the flower is taken; in some places it is actually illegal to disturb them! You'll often find wake-robin blooming alongside bellwort (*Uvularia grandiflora*) and wild oats (*Uvularia sessilifolia*).





### In April by James Hearst

This I saw on an April day:  
Warm rain spilt from a sun-lined cloud,  
A sky-flung wave of gold at evening,  
And a cock pheasant treading a dusty path  
Shy and proud.

And this I found in an April field:  
A new white calf in the sun at noon,  
A flash of blue in a cool moss bank,  
And tips of tulips promising flowers  
To a blue-winged loon.

And this I tried to understand  
As I scrubbed the rust from my brightening plow:  
The movement of seed in furrowed earth,  
And a blackbird whistling sweet and clear  
From a green-sprayed bough.

### From "April Rain Song" by Langston Hughes

Let the rain kiss you.  
Let the rain beat upon your head with silver liquid drops.  
Let the rain sing you a lullaby.  
The rain makes still pools on the sidewalk.  
The rain makes running pools in the gutter.  
The rain plays a little sellp-song on our roof at night—  
And I love the rain.

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### Some Quotes about April

"When the April wind wakes the call for the soil, I hold the plough as my only hold upon the earth, and, as I follow through the fresh and fragrant furrow, I am planted with every foot-step, growing, budding, blooming into a spirit of spring." —Dallas Lore Sharp

"No Winter lasts forever, no Spring skips its turn. April is a promise that May is bound to keep, and we know it."

—Hal Borland

"The sun was warm but the wind was chill. You know how it is with an April day."

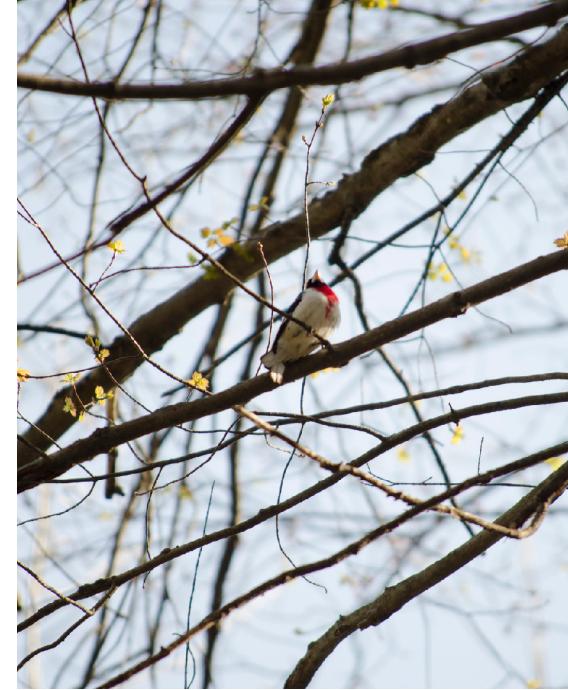
—Robert Frost

drums, when the hyla pipes, when the shad start up the rivers, when the grass greens in the spring runs, and it ends when the leaves are unfolding and the last snowflake dissolves in midair. It may be the first of May before the first swallow appears, before the whip-poor-will is heard, before the wood thrush sings; but it is April as long as there is snow upon the mountains, no matter what the almanac may say. Our April is, in fact, a kind of Alpine summer, full of such contrasts and touches of wild, delicate beauty as no other season affords. The deluded citizen fancies there is nothing enjoyable in the country till June, and so misses the freshest, tenderest part. It is as if one should miss strawberries and begin his fruit-eating with melons and peaches. These last are good,—supremely so, they are melting and luscious,—but nothing so thrills and penetrates the taste, and wakes up and teases the papillae of the tongue, as the uncloying strawberry. What midsummer sweetness half so distracting as its brisk sub-acid flavor, and what splendor of

full-leaved June can stir the blood like the best of leafless April?

One characteristic April feature, and one that delights me very much, is the perfect emerald of the spring runs while the fields are yet brown and sere,—strips and patches of the most vivid velvet green on the slopes and in the valleys. How the eye grazes there, and is filled and refreshed! I had forgotten what a marked feature this was until I recently rode in an open wagon for three days through a mountainous, pastoral country, remarkable for its fine springs. Those delicious green patches are yet in my eye. The fountains flowed with May. Where no springs occurred, there were hints and suggestions of springs about the fields and by the roadside in the freshened grass,—sometimes overflowing a space in the form of an actual fountain. The water did not quite get to the surface in such places, but sent its influence.

The fields of wheat and rye, too, how they stand out of the April landscape,—great green squares on a field of brown or gray!



A ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK WELCOMES SPRING.

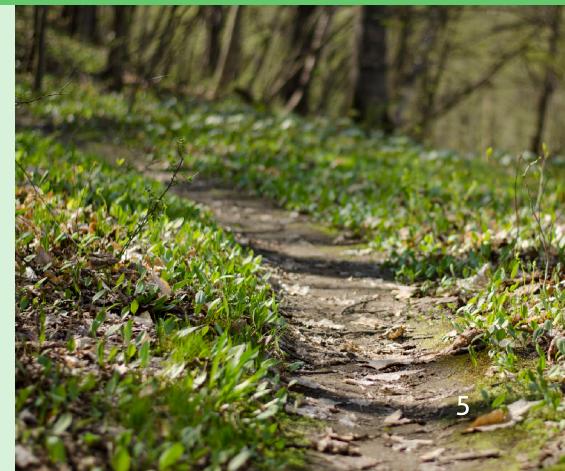
Then is there anything like a perfect April morning? One hardly knows what the sentiment of it is, but it is something very delicious. It is youth and hope. It is a new earth and a new sky. How the air transmits sounds, and what an awakening, prophetic character all sounds have! The distant barking of a dog, or the lowing of a cow, or the crowing of a cock, seems from out the heart of Nature, and to be a call to come forth. The great sun appears to have been reburnished, and there is something in his first glance

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## WALK IN THE WOODS

“Any patch of sunlight in a wood will show you something about the sun which you could never get from reading books on astronomy. These pure and spontaneous pleasures are ‘patches of Godlight’ in the woods of our experience.”

— C.S. Lewis





above the eastern hills, and the way his eye-beams dart right and left and smite the rugged mountains into gold, that quickens the pulse and inspires the heart.

Our April, at its best, is a bright, laughing face under a hood of snow, like the English March, but presenting sharper contrasts, a greater mixture of smiles and tears and icy looks than are known to our ancestral climate. Indeed, Winter sometimes retraces his steps in this month, and unburdens himself of the snows that the previous cold has kept back; but we are always sure of a number of radiant, equable days,—days that go before the bud, when the sun embraces the earth with fervor and determination. How his beams pour into the woods till the mould under the leaves is warm and emits an odor! The waters glint and sparkle, the birds gather in groups, and even those unused to singing find a voice. On the streets of the cities, what a flutter, what bright looks and gay colors! I recall one preëminent day of this kind last April. I made a note of it in my note-book. The earth seemed suddenly to emerge from

a wilderness of clouds and chilliness into one of these blue sunlit spaces. How the voyagers rejoiced! Invalids came forth, old men sauntered down the street, stocks went up, and the political outlook brightened.

Such days bring out the last of the hibernating animals. The woodchuck unrolls and creeps out of his den to see if his clover has started yet. The torpidity leaves the snakes and the turtles, and they come forth and bask in the sun. There is nothing so small, nothing so great, that it does not respond to these celestial spring days, and give the pendulum of life a fresh start.

April is also the month of the new furrow. As soon as the frost is gone and the ground settled, the plow is started upon the hill, and at each bout I see its brightened mould-board flash in the sun. Where the last remnants of the snowdrift lingered yesterday the plow breaks the sod to-day. Where the drift was deepest the grass is pressed flat, and there is a deposit of sand and earth blown from the fields to windward. Line upon line the turf is reversed, until there stands out of the neutral landscape a ruddy square

visible for miles, or until the breasts of the broad hills glow like the breasts of the robins.

Then who would not have a garden in April? to rake together the rubbish and burn it up, to turn over the renewed soil, to scatter the rich compost, to plant the first seed, or bury the first tuber! It is not the seed that is planted, any more than it is I that is planted; it is not the dry stalks and weeds that are burned up, any more than it is my gloom and regrets that are consumed. An April smoke makes a clean harvest.

I think April is the best month to be born in. One is just in time, so to speak, to catch the first train, which is made up in this month. My April chickens always turn out best. They get an early start; they have rugged constitutions. Late chickens cannot stand the heavy dews, or withstand the predaceous hawks. In April all nature starts with you. You have not come out of your hibernaculum too early or too late; the time is ripe, and, if you do not keep pace with the rest, why, the fault is not in the season.

—J.B.



## WHATEVER GOD WANTS: CELEBRATING SAINT GIANNA

April 28th is the Feast of Gianna Beretta Molla, an Italian wife, mother, doctor, and twenty-first century saint. Her path to sainthood began when she discovered in the second month of her fourth pregnancy that she had a uterine fibroma but refused any surgical interventions that would result in the loss of her unborn child. She successfully delivered her full-term baby daughter, Gianna Emanuela, but died seven days later on April 28, 1962 due to complications from a c-section.

St. Gianna is a saint of the modern era; a model of modern womanhood and all that comes with that designation. She balanced beautifully her career as a doctor and her role as a mother and wife. A glance at her writings reveals her to be the embodiment of love and devotion, both to her family and to her patients.

She has been deemed the "pro-life" saint because, when given the choice to treat her fibroma (which would have ended her pregnancy) she chose to save the life of her unborn child

instead. But, there is much to love about St. Gianna no matter where one finds oneself on the socio-political spectrum. From the Society of St. Gianna Beretta Molla:

Gianna Beretta Molla was a simple, but more than ever, significant messenger of divine love. In a letter to her future husband a few days before their marriage, she wrote: *Love is the most beautiful sentiment the Lord has put into the soul of men and women.*

Following the example of Christ, who "having loved his own... loved them to the end" (Jn 13: 1), this holy mother of a family remained heroically faithful to the commitment she made on the day of her marriage. The extreme sacrifice she sealed with her life testifies that only those who have the courage to give of themselves totally to God and to others are able to fulfill themselves.

St. Gianna was beatified by Pope John Paul II on Mother's Day in 1994, and she was canonized by him on May 16, 2004.

Learn more at [SaintGianna.org](http://SaintGianna.org)

### Quotes from Saint Gianna

- What is a vocation? It is a gift from God and therefore comes from God. If then it is a gift from God, it is up to us to do all in our power to know God's will. We must go along that way, if God wills it, not forcing the door; when God wills it, how God wills it.

- As to the past let us entrust it to God's mercy, the future to divine providence. Our task is to live holy in the present moment.

- We must be living witnesses of the beauty and grandeur of Christianity.

- One earns paradise with one's daily tasks.

- One cannot love without suffering or suffer without loving.

- Look at the mothers who truly love their children: how many sacrifices they make for them. They are ready for everything, even to give their own blood so that their babies grow up good, healthy, and strong.

# APRIL 2016

**April 1st: Friday in Easter Week**

**April 3rd: Second Sunday of Easter**

**April 4th: THE ANNUNCIATION** (transferred)

**April 10th: Third Sunday of Easter**

**April 17th: Fourth Sunday of Easter**

**April 21st:** Feast of St. Anselm, patron of nurses.

**April 23rd:** Feast of St. George, patron of England.

**April 24th: Fifth Sunday of Easter**

**April 25th:** Feast of St. Mark, Evangelist, patron of barristers.

**April 28th:** Feast of St. Gianna Beretta Molla, patroness of mothers, physicians, and unborn children.

**April 29th:** Feast of St. Catherine of Siena, patroness of the sick, the tempted, and those ridiculed for their piety.

## Stay in touch!

Visit [AroundTheYear.org](http://AroundTheYear.org) for more photos, crafts, recipes, and ideas for celebrating the natural seasons and the Christian year.

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I'm currently looking for individuals who might be interested in contributing to *around the year* (both the website and the newsletters). If you enjoy what I've created and would like to become involved, please contact me! [kelli@aroundtheyear.org](mailto:kelli@aroundtheyear.org)

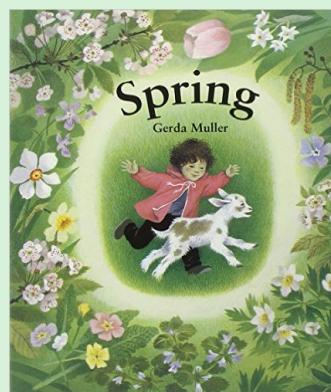


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## Recommended Reading

CHILDREN'S BOOKS FOR THE MONTH OF APRIL



***Spring*** illustrated by Gerda Muller

*From the publisher:*

One of a series of four books without text, which lead the young child through the seasons of the year.

Full of fun, active illustrations, this chunky board book shows the joys of playing with lambs, sowing seeds, painting Easter eggs and watching baby birds.

***And Then It's Spring***, written by Julie Fogliano, and illustrated by Erin E. Stead

*From the publisher:*

Following a snow-filled winter, a young boy and his dog decide that they've had enough of all that brown and resolve to plant a garden. They dig, they plant, they play, they wait... and wait... until at last, the brown becomes a more hopeful shade of green, a sign that spring may finally be on its way.

