

## GOLDEN PEA; PRAIRIE BEAN

*Thermopsis rhombifolia* (Nutt.) Richards

PEA FAMILY

The early flowers are especially welcome and are eagerly looked for. It is an event of the year to find the first anemone, the well-known "crocus" of the prairie. Following this pioneer come the sweet coltsfoot, a dwarf buttercup, a tiny, leafy-stemmed violet, and, showiest of all, this splendid Golden Pea. It perfumes and brightens many a hillside and bit of prairie, always showing a preference for sandy soil.

When the stalk emerges from the ground it wears a gray coat of silky hairs. Its tip is bent over and sheltered by large stipules (those leaf-like appendages at the base of each leaf-stalk), as if the plant hid its face between huge ear tabs from the sudden exposure to wind and sunshine. As the stem grows, the three-parted leaves push out from this protection, but for a time the leaflets remain folded along their mid-ribs, only gradually opening out and assuming the horizontal position. The flower buds are soon revealed, and rapidly develop into large, bright yellow, pea-shaped blossoms, followed a few weeks later by sickle-shaped pods.

It is interesting to observe the various and ingenious devices used by plants to ensure the safety of the tender young shoots and leaves during the great change from the snug cradle of the bud to the full exposure of maturity. The transition is usually made without injury. Many people believe that while man-made gardens are often caught by late frosts and storms, the wild plants have a sure instinct that leads them to defer growth until the weather is safe. But this is not wholly correct, "for only those who have studied nature but very little will maintain that she never errs."\* The Golden Peas growing on a sunny slope near the house of the writer have been badly frozen three years out of six, while those near by, but on the north side of a coppice, have escaped all injury. These are no wiser than their brothers on the hillside, but the brush held the snow and frost and so delayed their start.

\*Maeterlinck.