



# WILD NEWS

## Prince William Wildflower Society

A Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

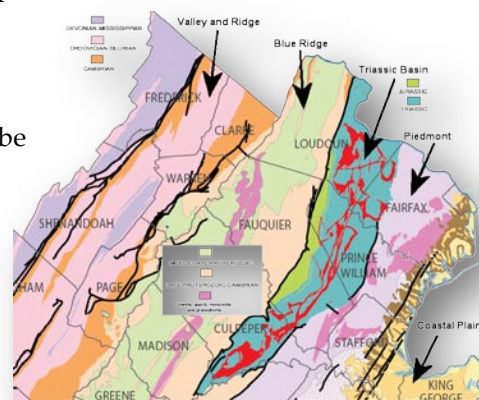
[www.pwws.vnps.org](http://www.pwws.vnps.org)

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**Monday, July 15, 2013, 7:30 p.m., Bethel Lutheran Church, Manassas, Va.**  
Join Prince William Wildflower Society members for a presentation on the  
“**Geology and Natural History of Prince William County,**” by **Charlie Grymes**,  
Adjunct faculty, Department of Geography and  
GeoInformation Science, George Mason  
University, and Chair, Prince William  
Conservation Alliance. Everyone is welcome; the  
meeting is free and open to all. Refreshments will be  
served and doorprizes awarded.



### From ~the ~President

As I write this late on Independence Day, the last booms of fireworks still can be heard in my neighborhood. Americans celebrate the anniversary of the founding of our nation with parades, picnics, concerts, and fireworks. I like to celebrate our beautiful LAND—the grasses, flowers, and trees of our valleys, shores, hills, and mountains.

Harry and I were the recipients of a gracious invitation of VNPS and PWWs legend Nicky Staunton to visit with her on July 4. As many of our longtime members know, Nicky used to live in the City of Manassas then moved out to the country about seven years ago. She lives amidst her beloved trees and enjoys a small meadow she created. Today her woods were alive with the songs of indigo buntings, ovenbirds, scarlet tanagers, and wrens. Butterflies visited the fragrant common milkweed by her front porch and the wild bergamot in her meadow. The sounds of the city were left behind and a refreshing breeze made for a very pleasant summer day.



We walked the perimeter of her property and beyond and enjoyed the elegant flowers of the butterfly pea (*Clitoria mariana*) on the rock outcrop and many other small blooms that Nicky joyfully pointed out to us. Mosses formed soft green carpets and assorted mushrooms were abundant after a month of heavy rainfall. Nicky said that she chose the land because of the club mosses that cover much of her forest. Rather than simply garden with native plants, she wanted to move TO the native plants. She is the rightfully proud steward of her enchanting ten-acre property, and we were delighted that she shared it with us on the 4th of July. [Photo of *Clitoria mariana* courtesy of Nancy Vehrs]

On a sad note, the PWWs community mourns the loss of charter member Frances Louer in June. She and her husband Phil created an amazing azalea garden on their property at the base of Bull Run Mountain in the Haymarket area. Called Phran's Azalea Trails, this garden, with its numerous native companion plants, was featured on our annual spring tour three times. They were legends in the Azalea Society. The Louers also hosted an annual meeting or two for us as well. If you have a jack-in-the-pulpit or spice bush from our plant sale, it probably came from Frances. We extend our sympathy to Phil and the rest of her family. ~Nancy Vehrs

## Manassas Park Elementary School Workday

On Saturday, June 1, several PWWS members worked with students of the Manassas Park Elementary School's "Go Green" club in the school's courtyard gardens. Members who weeded and mulched and supervised the students were Bobbi Frye, Deanna High, Carol Thompson, Karen Waltman, and Nancy Arrington. We plan to continue our efforts to spruce up the courtyard beds, which are planted with native ferns, perennials, shrubs, and trees. If you'd like to be added to the list of helpers, please let Nancy Arrington know, [narrington1@verizon.net](mailto:narrington1@verizon.net) or (703) 408-7446.

~NancyArrington

## ~Prince William Wildflower Society Membership Meeting Minutes~

**Monday, May 20, 2013, 7:30 p.m., Bethel Lutheran Church, Manassas**

President Nancy Vehrs opened the meeting at 7:35 p.m. She welcomed the guest speaker, Judith Dreyer, and others present.

**Announcements:** PWWS polo or denim shirts can be ordered, and Nancy V. passed around a catalog. Plant Sale: Nancy V. recognized Plant Sale Chair Nancy Arrington for the record-breaking \$4,654 made at the May 11 plant sale. Nancy A. thanked those who helped pot and deliver over 1,300 plants, and she also thanked those who worked the morning of the sale.

Nancy A. announced that our service project of weeding Manassas Park Elementary School's native flower garden is scheduled for the rain date of June 1. Volunteers are needed. Nancy A. also reported that PWWS brochures about gardening to attract butterflies and gardening with woodland native wildflowers will soon be available.

Those who opened their gardens for the April 28 **Garden Tour** and the hostesses who greeted visitors were all thanked. It was a rainy day and attendance was down a little, but about 90 people attended.

Bird walks are conducted at Merrimac Farm by Harry Glasgow and Nancy V. on the last Sundays at 8 a.m. Free. Call Harry or Nancy at (703) 368-2898.

The speaker at the July 15 PWWS meeting will be Charlie Grymes, who will talk on the Geology of Manassas.

Marion Lobstein, PWWS Botany Chair, reported that 3,500 copies of the *Flora of Virginia* were printed, and after some minor changes, mostly in spacing, there will be a second printing. Check out "Botanizing with Marion" at [pwws.vnps.org](http://pwws.vnps.org), and look for classes she will present in the fall on how to use the *Flora*.

**Program:** Judith Dreyer was introduced, and Judith thanked Carol Thompson for inviting her to speak. Judith talked about how to turn a lawn into a meadow, and showed pictures of the diversity of plants and wildlife found in a meadow she designed and maintained. Judith is knowledgeable about edible and medicinal plants, and she provided views of some of these useful plants, many found in meadows. Please see her web site at [judithdreyer.com](http://judithdreyer.com) for more information. Judith also recommended the book *Bringing Nature Home* by Doug Tallamy and web sites on wild food cooking.

**Doorprizes:** *Finding Wildflowers*, signed by Marion Lobstein and Cris Fleming was won by Mary Sherman; *Wildflowers, a Golden Guide*, went to Janet Wheatcraft; and *Country Flowers* by Lee Bailey was won by Rose Breece.

**Present:** Rose Breece, Nancy Vehrs, Veronica Tangiri, Marion Lobstein, Helen Rawls, Carol Thompson, Janet Wheatcraft, Ellen Long, Joyce Andrew, Mary Sherman, Dee Brown, Glen Macdonald, Gordon Olson, Julia Sarr, Tamie Boone, Harry Glasgow, Jeanne Fowler, Bill Hendrickson, Nancy Arrington, Robert Segal, Jeanne Endrikat, Charles Smith, Mike and Joyce Wenger, Rima Vesilind, Karen Waltman.

~Respectively submitted, Karen Waltman, PWWS Secretary

## E~V~E~N~T~S

### ~JULY~

**Monday, July 15, Prince William Wildflower Society Membership Meeting 7:30 p.m., Bethel Lutheran Church, Manassas.** Program will feature Prince William conservation Alliance Chair Charlie Grymes, who will talk to us about local geography. Contact PWWS program chair Helen Walter at [helenwalt43@verizon.net](mailto:helenwalt43@verizon.net) or (703) 330-9614 for more information.

**Saturday, July 20, Virginia Cooperative Extension Prince William Master Gardener Volunteers, Teaching Garden at**

St. Benedict Monastery, 9535 Linton Hall Road, Bristow, Va. 20136. All programs are free and run from 9:00am to Noon. Registration is requested. Please call (703) 792-7747 or email [master\\_gardener@pwccgov.org](mailto:master_gardener@pwccgov.org).

--**Managing problems in Your Landscape** Join Master Gardener Volunteers at the Teaching Garden as they teach "lessons learned" in a few of our 25 garden beds.

--**Turf Alternatives**, Want less grass to mow? The class will include a discussion of groundcovers, clover, moss, ornamental grasses, and other plants as an alternative to planting and maintaining a lawn.

## Weekends in July at Prince William Forest Park

**Sunday, July 14 & 21 and Saturday, July 20. Farms to Forest Nature Hike**, 9:00 to 10:00 a.m. Meet at Oak Ridge Campground to join Ranger Mary for a 1-hour hike through the forest. Explore the history of the landscape which was once farmland and the wonderful features of this diverse natural ecosystem. Please wear closed-toe shoes and bring water.

**Saturday, July 27, Basic Orienteering**, 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. Meet at the Turkey Run Education Center (TREC). Learn to find your way with only a map and compass! Join Ranger Cecilia for this one hour basic instructional course in orienteering and land navigation. Learn the basic features of a map and compass and then test your skills on the park's vast orienteering courses.

**Sunday, July 28, Laurel Loop Trail Nature Hike**, 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. Meet at the Visitor Center. Join Ranger Stephanie for this all ages, all access hike on the 1.3 mile Laurel Loop Trail. Located just next to the visitor center and of moderate difficulty, the Laurel Loop Trail is the perfect hike for beginner and expert nature lovers! Wear closed toe shoes and bring water and weather appropriate clothing.

## ~August~

**Tuesday, August 20, 9:00 a.m., "Botanize with Marion" at Deep Cut, Bull Run National Battlefield, Manassas.** Marion Lobstein, Prince William Wildflower Society's botany chair will lead a walk at Deep Cut to see late-summer blooming native flowers and grasses. (A plant inventory from past years' walks is available on the PWWS web site under "Botanizing with Marion." The walk is free and open to all.

## ~September~

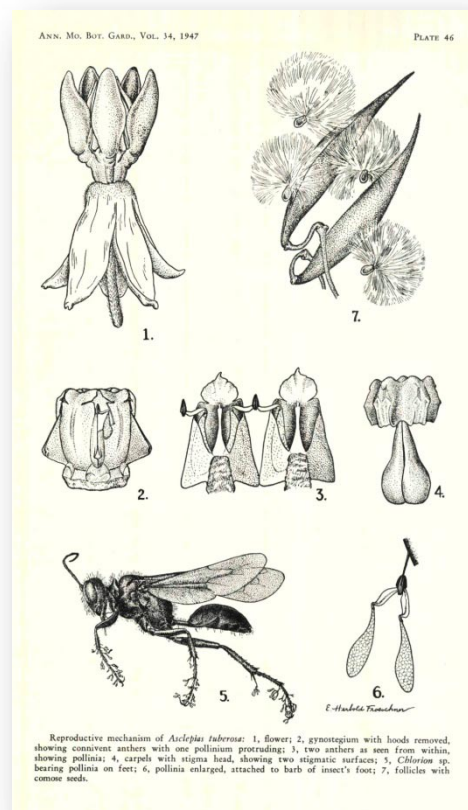
**Friday, September 13 to Sunday, September 15, Virginia Native Plant Society 2013 Annual Meeting**, "How Habitats Change: From Unraveling Past Land Use to Establishing New Spaces for Natives to Thrive." Sponsored by the

Jefferson Chapter of VNPS, the meeting will be held at the Best Western Plus Charlottesville Airport Inn and Suites, Ruckersville, Va. To register or if you need more information, see [vnps.org](http://vnps.org), the latest issue of the VNPS Bulletin, or call Karen York, VNPS Office Manager at (540) 837-1600; email [vnpsoc@shentel.net](mailto:vnpsoc@shentel.net).

**Monday, September 16, 7:30 p.m., Bethel Lutheran Church, Manassas, "Celebrating the Natural Communities of Virginia: Plants and Their Neighbors—A Community Context,"** with Charles Smith, PWWS Education and Conservation Chair. Native plants are best understood and enjoyed in the context of the plants and the environment they have evolved with. Join us as Charles shares patterns we can use to identify and appreciate the various natural communities of Virginia. The program is free and open to all.

## The Dog Banes of Summer? Butterfly-weed and other Milkweeds By Marion Blois Lobstein

Botany Chair, Prince William Wildflower Society (Article adapted from articles published in PWWS's *Wild News*); Professor Emeritus, Northern Virginia Community College



Milkweeds in the genus *Asclepias* are one of the joys of summer. One of the most beautiful and easily recognizable species is the orange milkweed or butterfly-weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*). There are 10 other species of milkweed in our area through the northern Blue Ridge Mountains (summarized in the chart, below, with the taxonomic changes in milkweeds.) All of

the milkweeds are native, summer-blooming perennials that have wide ranges of distributions in the eastern U.S. Butterfly-weed is found in dry, sunny fields, along road sides, and at edges of woods from Eastern Canada and Maine to Florida and west to



Ontario through most of the southwestern states (even California and North Dakota.) According to the Digital Atlas of Virginia Flora, it is found in all counties of Virginia.

All milkweed species were formerly placed in the Asclepidaceae (milkweed family) but now this family is included in the Apocynaceae (dogbane family). The genus name *Asclepias* is derived from the name of the Greek god Asclepius, the god of medicine and healing referring to the medicinal properties of various species of milkweeds. The species epitaph (name) *tuberosa* refers to the tuberous roots of these plants. (The derivation of species epitaphs of other species in our area are summarized in the chart of listing these species. None of the scientific names of the milkweeds in our area have been changed in the *Flora of Virginia*.) The common name butterfly-weed refers to the fact it often attracts butterflies [as well as bees and other insects] as pollinators and is the host plant for the larvae of monarch and queen butterflies. Other common names for *A. tuberosa* are orange for the color, pleurisy root for its medicinal use, and chigger-flower referring to chiggers often found near the plants, although there is no proof that one will contract chiggers from being on the plants. Common names of the other species of milkweed are included in the chart summarizing the ones in our area.

Butterfly-weed is the only species of milkweeds in our area that does not exude a milky sap when damaged. The plant stands up to three feet tall with alternate oblong leaves that are 3-4 inches long. All other milkweeds in our area have opposite leaves. The taproot of butterfly-weed can be up to 20 feet long with many tuberous projections.

Milkweeds have a very unusual flower structure: A calyx of 5 reflexed sepals fused at bases, a corolla of 5 reflexed petals fused at bases, 5 stamens that are attached at the base of the corolla. The filaments of the stamens are petal-like and form a corona or crown made up of 5 scoop-like hoods, each with a horn-like structure inside. The corona encloses the stigma or

upper parts of the compound pistil formed by two carpels (female parts of flower). The anthers of the stamens stick to the stigmas of the pistils forming a gynostegium. The pollen grains in the anthers adhere together to form a mass or bag-like structure known as pollinia. Each anther has two parts that each produces a pollinium and the pair of pollinia is attached to each other by appendages or translator arms that have a sticky pad or corpusculum at the top, collectively

forming a pollinarium. There are two carpels that form a compound pistil. The ovary of each carpel is separate each with a short neck or style with the two stigmas fuse to form a stigmatic disk. The stigmatic head is five-angled with glands that adhere to the corpusculum. There are stigmatic slits in the gynostegium that lead to the pollinaria. The pollinator such as a butterfly or bee must slip a leg through one of these slits and snag a pollinarium that adheres to the insect's leg as it pulls out its leg. The pollinator must then visit another flower of the same species and repeat the process to stuff the pollinarium into its gynostegium slit. Each pollinium has many pollen

grains so if fertilization of an ovary occurs many seeds (up to 200) are produced that are enclosed in the fruit or follicle or pod. Pollination rates are not high as one might expect. Each flattened seed has a silky appendage or coma that assist in dispersing the seeds when the follicle or pod splits open and the seeds float in the wind. During WWII, American school children collected over 5 tons of milkweed seeds with comas that were used to stuff lifejackets when kapok was not available. These comas are still used to stuff hypoallergenic pillows.

The medicinal and edible uses of butterfly-weed and other milkweeds are many. Historical medicinal uses of butterfly-weed included treating lung inflammation of pleurisy and asthma, swelling from rheumatism, and eliminating intestinal worms. It has been used as a diuretic and laxative as well as serving as a principle ingredient in Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound used to treat "female problems" of menstrual cramps and menopause. The early shoots and flower buds of this and other species are edible but require preparation with several changes of water.



This summer enjoy the beauty of butterfly-weed and other milkweed species as well as the variety of pollinators that visit these interesting plants. This fall observe the interesting pods of milkweeds and watch the wind disperse their seeds.

Websites great for milkweed flower structure:

[http://www.backyardnature.net/fl\\_milkw.htm](http://www.backyardnature.net/fl_milkw.htm)

[http://ntsavanna.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/07/images\\_milkwd8.gif](http://ntsavanna.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/07/images_milkwd8.gif).

## There and Back Again: A Short Taxonomic History of Milkweed

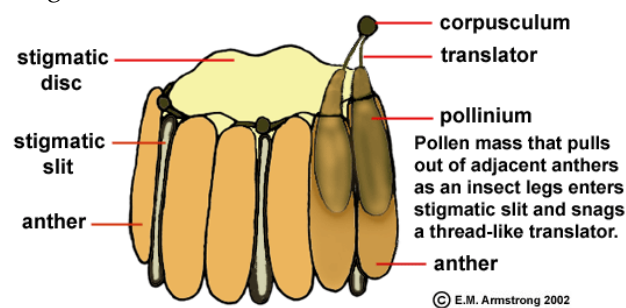
By Marion Blois Lobstein

Most of the 200 species of *Asclepias* are native to the New World. The history of taxonomy or scientific names and classification of this interesting group of plants is complicated and convoluted. Dioscorides, the Greek physician who wrote his *Materia Medica* in the first century A.D., first used *Asclepias*, but he was describing a plant other than milkweed, which does not grow in Europe. Possibly he was describing European dogbane (*Vincetoxicum hirundinariae*) which is an Apocynum species. True milkweed or *Asclepias* species were first collected and sent to Europe by French and English explorers in the 1500s and 1600s. In 1585, John White, the English artist who was part of the ill-fated Roanoke Lost Colony, illustrated *Asclepias syriaca*. The herbalist Gerarde included a description and illustration of Indian swallowwort that may have been a dogbane, but by the 1633 the illustration was that of *Asclepias syriaca* that was also call *Apocynum syriacum*. Around 1620, Louis Hebert, a French colonist and pharmacist in New France (Eastern Canada) sent seeds of *Asclepias syriacum* to Paris to investigate its medicinal properties. By 1635, Philip Cornut, a doctor and botanist in New France, described both *Asclepias syriaca* and *Asclepias incarnada* in *Canadensium plantarum historia*. He used the genus *Apocynum* for both species, but was confused about the identification *Asclepias syriaca*, and used the name syriacum referring to a dogbane for the Mid-East. Linnaeus in 1753 used the genus *Asclepias* and still used the species epithet *syriaca*. Linnaeus is thought to have used a specimen of this species collected by John Clayton and sent to Gronovius, who shared the specimen with Linnaeus. In the *Flora Virginica*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. of 1762, the

use of both *Asclepias* and *Apocynum* is present. Of the eleven species of *Asclepias* found in our area, Linnaeus assigned all but three of the species epithaphs.

Michel Adanson in 1763 proposed “Apocyna” as a family that included Apocynum and Asclepias. The accepted family name of Apocynaceae was based on A.L. de Jussieu’s “Apocineae” in 1789. In 1810, however, Robert Brown split Apocynaceae into two families, Asclepiadaceae and Apocynaceae, based on whether or not the pollen is packaged in pollina (only in Asclepiadaceae). During the 1800s, there were various treatments of these two families. In the 1990s and 2000s, the molecular investigation of the DNA of species in these two families has led to combining the two families once again into the Apocynaceae. Members of the former Asclepiadaceae are now in the subfamily Asclepiadoideae. It seems molecular data has brought us full circle in re-

combining these two families into Apocynaceae.



Milkweed Flower (stigmatic column)

[References: “The history and use of milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca* L.),” by Erika E. Gaertner, in *Economic Botany* 33, no. 2 (April/June 1979), 119-123; “Nomenclature and Iconography of Common Milkweed,” by Jules Janick and Winthrop B. Phippen, in

*Chronica Horticulturae*, 53, no. 2 (2013).]

## Selected glossary of botanical terms

[Source: Alan S. Weakley, J. Christopher Ludwig, and John F. Townsend. Bland Crowder, ed. *Flora of Virginia*. (Fort Worth: BRIT Press, 2012)]

**Androecium** Collectively, the stamens of a flower.

**Anther** The expanded, apical, pollen-bearing portion of the stamen, comprising one or, usually, two pollen sacs and a connecting layer.

**Calyx** (plural **calyxes**) The outer whorl of the perianth; collectively, all the sepals of a flower.

**Carpel** A unit of the gynoecium with a simple pistil formed from one modified leaf, or that part of a compound pistil formed from one modified leaf; megasporophyll.

**Corolla** Collectively, all the petals of a flower, whether distinct or connate; the inner whorl of a perianth.

**Corona** A set of petal-like or crown-like structures between the corolla and the androecium in some flowers, derived by modification of the corolla or androecium.

**Gynostemium** A compound structure resulting from the union of stamens and pistil.

**Perianth** Collectively, the calyx and corolla of a flower, especially when they are similar in appearance.

**Pollinium** (plural **pollinia**) In many Orchidaceae and Asclepiadaceae, a coherent cluster of many waxy pollen grains, transported as a unit during pollination.

**Sepal** A segment of a calyx.

**Stigma** The part of a pistil adapted for the reception of pollen.

[Images: Milkweed flower structure accessed at "A NeoTropical Savanna," by Mary Farmer, <http://ntsavanna.com/the-tropical-milkweed/>; *Asclepias tuberosa* (Butterfly weed), Jacob Bigelow, 1787-1879, artist, *American Medical Botany*, NYPL Digital Library, Digital ID#1107185]

## Chart of milkweed species in our area

Species found in area	Common name	Authority for species epitaph	Meaning of species epitaph	Flower color
<i>Asclepias amplexicaulis</i>	Clasping milkweed	J.E. Smith	Clasping [leaves] to stem	Variable
<i>Asclepias exaltata</i>	Tall/poke milkweed	Linnaeus	Very tall	White
<i>Asclepias incarnata</i>	Swamp milkweed	Linnaeus	Flesh-colored	Pink
<i>Asclepias purpurascens</i>	Purple milkweed	Linnaeus	Purplish	Purple
<i>Asclepias quadifolia</i>	Four-leaved milkweed	Jaquin	Four-leaved	Pink-greenish
<i>Asclepias rubra</i>	Red milkweed	Linnaeus	Red	Red
<i>Asclepias syriaca</i>	Common milkweed	Linnaeus	Syrian (Linnaeus thought came from Syria)	Rose-greenish purple
<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	Butterfly-weed	Linnaeus	Tuberous	Orange
<i>Asclepias variegata</i>	White milkweed	Linnaeus	Variegated	White-purplish
<i>Asclepias verticillata</i>	Whorled milkweed	Linnaeus	whorled	White-greenish white
<i>Asclepias viridiflora</i>	Green milkweed	Rafinesque	Green flowered	Green

[Editor's note: Please see "Botanizing with Marion" at [pwvs.vmps.org](http://pwvs.vmps.org) for an enhanced version of this chart.]

## Propagation of Butterfly-Weed: An Easy One

(by Jackie Ralya, reprinted from *Wild News*, June 1982, edited by Deanna High)

Along with being one of my favorite wildflowers, Butterfly-weed is one of the easiest to grow from seeds. The seed pod is similar to other members of the Milkweed Family, with the seed attached to the familiar downy parachutes. Seed can be harvested in late summer when the pods turn brown and begin to split.

Collected pods can be dried indoors until seed can be shaken out. Dry seeds should be stored in an airtight container and refrigerated until sown.

Seed sown in a standard potting mix in February will germinate in about two weeks. Cover the flat with plastic or glass and keep out of direct light until seeds germinate. Gradually remove covering and move to brighter light (a south facing window is fine.) A weekly application of liquid fertilizer after germination will speed the seedlings toward transplanting into 3" pots in 4 to 6 weeks. After hardening off plants can be set in their permanent location in May.

Seeds can be sown outdoors in early spring or late summer.



Mulch seedlings first winter and transplant to permanent location the following spring. Seedlings will usually bloom the second summer.

Butterfly-weed can be propagated by cuttings: 1 ½ to 2" stem sections taken in May and set upright in moist sand will root readily.

I hope [your efforts] will result in more brilliant summer splashes of Butterfly-weed in Prince William County.

[Photos and illustrations: "Reproductive mechanism of *asclepias tuberosa*," *Annals of the Missouri Botanical Garden*, vol. 34 (1947), accessed at [www.plantillustrations.org](http://www.plantillustrations.org); *Asclepias* seed pod, courtesy of Deanna LaValle High]



## **VNPS 1992 Wildflower of the Year** **Butterfly-weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)**

### **Other Names**

Orange milkweed, pleurisy-root, orange-root, white-root, chigger-weed

### **Derivation of Latin name**

*Asclepias* honors Aesculapius, the Greek god of medicine; *tuberosa* means bearing tubers and refers to this species' habit of growing shoots upward from horizontal underground stems. What may look like a patch of several plants may be branches connected by underground tubers, forming a clone.

### **Description**

Butterfly-weed in bloom is one of our most easily spotted perennial wildflowers. In mid-to late summer the brilliant orange flower clusters stand out vividly along highways and in fallow fields throughout Virginia.

Orange milkweed, as it is also called, has typical milkweed flowers, symmetrical with five petals below an unusual crown, or corona, of petal-like expansions of the fused filaments. Each portion of the corona has a horn curving upward from inside, arching over the center of the flower. The anthers adhere to the stigma, forming a specialized central structure called the gynostegium. Pollen is united into a waxy mass called a pollinium.

The plants grow erect with stems from 5 to 30 inches high. Fuzzy, lance-shaped, nearly sessile leaves are alternate, unlike the opposite leaves of other Milkweeds. The shape and the density of leaves on the stem can vary. Also, unlike other milkweeds, the stems of butterfly-weed do not have milky juice. A young plant may produce just one umbel of flowers at the top of a stem, but often the stem branches to produce broad, flat clusters with several umbels of flowers, each about one-half inch long.

In the fall, these flower clusters are replaced by one or two narrow, three-inch-long seed pods. These pods, standing upright on stems bent downward, split down one side to release light, wafer-thin seeds, each with a gossamer parachute to aid wind dispersal.

Called butterfly-weed because of its attraction for butterflies, this vividly colored wildflower has earned many common names, indicating both its common occurrence and wide distribution. Some of the names reflect associations or ways of recognizing this plant.

Finding butterfly-weed in summer is easy. Watch for the flaming patches of flowers in abandoned fields or pastures and along unmowed rights-of-way. The shade of orange may vary from deep butter-yellow to fiery red-orange. Butterfly-weed thrives in a wide variety of soils from sandy loam to heavy clay as long as the soil is not too wet. Usually the plants are scattered singly or in small groups. Occasionally you may discover a spectacular display where plants have become established at the top of a slope and spread downhill. Since they spread both by seeds and by creeping tubers, large patches may develop where the soil is more fertile and the site is sunny and well drained. Butterfly-weed really is "weedy" in that it colonizes disturbed areas, tolerates a wide variety of conditions, and



persists in spite of grazing, mowing and plowing. Plants along roadsides often are multi-stemmed and appear almost prostrate, with blooms near the ground, as a result of mowing.

Butterfly-weed attracts many different butterflies, especially monarchs and viceroys whose orange and black colors complement the flowers. Although they also draw many other

insects, the flowers are pollinated only by wasps that are adapted to butterfly-weed's intricate flower structure, and some element of luck is also needed. Large numbers of blossoms thus produce very few fruits.

Finding butterfly-weed in the fall or winter is more difficult. The green or ripened brown pods are much less conspicuous. However, watching for the open pods with floss shining in the sunlight or following the path of parachuting seeds upwind will be rewarded. Butterfly-weed pods, less woody than other milkweed pods, tend to flatten out as they dry and curl into interesting shapes.

The showy flowers, although not very fragrant, are quite attractive and long-lasting in bouquets. Picking them early in the season from a large population may be acceptable when plants have time to bloom again. However, avoid picking from isolated plants or removing all blooms from one plant. Picking dry pods for winter bouquets does no harm once the seeds are dispersed. Plants should not be dug from the wild.

### **Propagation**

Butterfly-weed is an attractive specimen plant in any garden, especially striking as an accent in a perennial border. The dark green foliage stays neat and attractive through the driest summer. Its colors and low habit blend well with other plants, and it adapts to almost any soil with

reasonably good drainage. With a gardener's attention, less competition and more fertile soil than is usual in the wild, a butterfly-weed plant can become bushel-basket size after several seasons and bloom profusely from July well into fall. Not only will its color brighten the garden, it will live up to its name and attract butterflies as frequent visitors.

Butterfly-weed is most successfully grown from seedlings or seeds obtained from commercial sources. Sow seeds outdoors in spring or summer at least four months before frost. Sown indoors at 68-75 degrees F they should germinate within 21-28 days. Transplant to a permanent location after the second pair of leaves develops. Due to the difficulty of obtaining all of the deep taproot or sufficient tuber to support the plant, mature plants do not transplant well.

Too much water, rich soil, and shade are butterfly-weed's only enemies. Once the roots are established, it is impervious to burrowing animals, fire, over-zealous picking or cultivation. Unlike some other milkweeds, it does not become invasive and can provide flowers and seed pods for bouquets for many years. The flower clusters dry well in silica gel and hold their color for many months.

#### Where it grows

Its range extends throughout the East, Southeast and Midwest, from Minnesota and Ontario east to New York, south to Florida, and west to Texas and Arizona. Four distinct subspecies have been defined over this large range based on variations in leaf shape.

#### Where to see it in Virginia

You'll find butterfly-weed blooming throughout Virginia from July well into September along trails, roadsides, in abandoned fields and pastures, and along power-line and railroad rights-of-way. In Virginia, most plants have lanceolate to ovate-lanceolate leaves with even margins, but some show variations. According to the *Atlas of the Virginia Flora* (1986), butterfly-weed may be found in nearly every county in the Commonwealth, under pine trees in the Coastal Plain, as well as along the Blue Ridge Parkway, or in the pastures and fields of southwest Virginia.

*[Reprinted from the 1992 Virginia Wildflower of the Year, by Catharine Tucker; adapted for Wild News by Deanna High. Photo of Monarch on Butterfly-weed: Courtesy of Judy Gallagher.]*

*Surely here is a butterfly flower if ever there was one, and such are rare....While other bees, a few wasps, and even the ruby-throated humming bird, which ever delights in flowers with a suspicion of red about them, sometimes visit these bright clusters, it is to the ever-present butterfly that their marvelous structure is manifestly adapted. Only visitors long of limb can easily remove the pollinia, which are usually found dangling from the hairs of their legs. ...Lacking the quantity of sticky milky juice which protects [common milkweed] from crawling pilferers, the butterfly-weed suffers outrageous robberies from black ants. The hairs on its stem, not sufficient to form a stockade against them, serve only as a screen to reflect light lest too much may penetrate to the interior juices. [Neltje Blanchan, *Nature's Garden* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1915)].*



## PRINCE WILLIAM WILDFLOWER SOCIETY

A Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

P.O. Box 83, Manassas, Virginia, 20108-0083

*Next Meeting:* Monday, July 15, 2013, 7:30 p.m.

“Geology and Natural History of Prince William County” with Charlie Grymes

Bethel Lutheran Church, 8712 Plantation Lane, Manassas, Virginia 20110