

# Blue Ridge Wildflower Society

A CHAPTER OF THE  
VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Vol. 23, No. 3

July, 2006

## Calendar of Events

- August 5** **Potting Day at the Randolph-Macon Botanic Garden**, 8:00 a.m. til noon. Help us prepare for the Plant Sale. Rain date is August 12.
- August 19** **Picnic with the Cowins.** Our annual BRWS picnic will be at the Cowins' farm near Big Island. Plan to come around 10:30 a.m. There will be a tour of the garden at 11:00 and lunch around noon. Paul and Lucille will provide the meat, drinks, plates and cups. We need to bring salads, vegetables and desserts. Please call the Cowins, 434-239-4884, no later than August 14 if you are planning to attend. ***Please note the change of time and date.***  
There will be a Board of Directors meeting after lunch.
- Sept 9** **Fall Plant Sale at the Randolph-Macon Botanic Garden in Lynchburg from 10:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m.** Rain or Shine! See article in this Newsletter. Sandra Elder, 434-525-8433.
- Sept 23-24** **VNPS Annual Meeting hosted by the Shenandoah Chapter.** Doug Coleman will be the keynote speaker.
- Sept 25** **General Membership Meeting**, 7:00 p.m., Roanoke Church of Christ.
- October 23** **General Membership Meeting**, 7:00 p.m., Roanoke Church of Christ.
- November 27** **An Evening of Memories.** Members are encouraged to bring five to ten of their favorite photographs or slides from this year to share with the group. Perhaps you have seen a plant you cannot identify and other members could help you. Refreshments will follow. Feel free to bring finger foods. Bring a friend and come join us.

## Help Needed

To make the fall Plant Sale a success we need lots of help.

### WAYS YOU CAN HELP

1. Come to the Botanic Garden on Saturday, August 5th, between 8:00 a.m. and noon to help pot up plants from the garden for the sale.
2. Pot up NATIVE plants from your own garden.
3. Label your plants. If you need pots or labels call Paul Cowins at 434-239-4842 or Cindy Burks at 540-977-0868. Please label all of your plants before you bring them to the sale.

This will be a great help.

4. Help us work in the Randolph-Macon Botanic Garden so the garden will be beautiful for our sale. If you can help, call Dorothy Bliss at 434-845-5265.
5. Come to the sale on Saturday, Sept 9th, between 10:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.
6. Bring a friend.
7. If you bring plants for the sale, please get them there by 9:30 a.m.
8. Help at the plant sale.

Call Sandra Elder at 434-525-8433 if you have any questions.



that add color to the open fields and along roadsides. It stands about two to three feet tall and has flashing bright orange flowers, sometimes yellow to red but most often orange. Although a member of the milkweed family, the stems are not milky like most others of this family. It has a long tap root and is not easily dug in the wild and removed to the home garden. Better success can be had by planting seed, taking cuttings or buying nursery plants. As you would suspect from the name, butterflies like this plant. Monarch and other butterflies lay their eggs on the plant. Then the larvae feed on its foliage, making the adults distasteful to predators because of the sap.

Goldenrods, *Salidago*, produce yellow-rayed blossoms in masses of showy clusters. They are difficult to identify because some have plume like flower heads, some elm branched, others clublike, wandlike or flat topped and there are about sixty species through the eastern United States and Canada. An excellent source of identification is *Peterson Field Guide to Wildflowers - Northeastern/North Central North America*. They make fine garden plants but care should be given to planting, since some may become invasive. Most like full sun but ones that receive partial shade produce showy plants. This colorful wildflower is not the hay fever villain many people think it is.

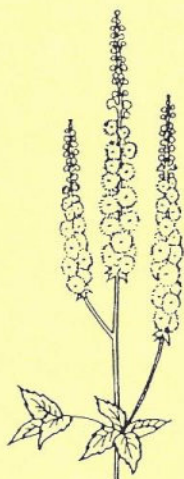
There are a number of asters to enjoy throughout the autumn months. There is no way to attempt to describe them because there are so many and they are also difficult to identify. Just take your Peterson Guide and head for the meadows and roadsides.

One plant to mention is the Cardinal flower, *Lobelia cardinalis*, the blossoms bring one of the true reds to the summer landscape. It is a slender spike and the flowers gradually open from the bottom to the top on two to three foot plants making a long bloom season. They prefer ample moisture, will tolerate full sun but really thrive in partial shade.

There are many more late summer plants too numerous to mention. Worth of mention are bouncing bet, welweed, the thistles, wingstem and ironweed. Many of these flowers can be seen from the roadside. Just ride and enjoy them.

## Black Cohosh

Marion Lobstein



*Cimicifuga racemosa*, commonly called bugbane or black cohosh, is a perennial member of the *Ranunculaceae* or buttercup family. This handsome plant which has a less-than-pleasant fragrance is more common in the mountains of Virginia, but can certainly be found in rich woods in the Northern Virginia area. The stems and leaves of this plant

appear in the spring and may be easily confused with blue cohosh, *Caulophyllum thalictroides*, a member of the *Berberidaceae* or barberry family. The long (up to 12 inches), slender wand-like inflorescences of small white flowers appear by June and plants may bloom into August. This species is found in rich open woods as well as shaded woodland borders and roadsides. The range of this species is from Massachusetts south into Georgia and west into Ohio and Tennessee. The genus name of *Cimicifuga* is from the Latin "cimex", for bug, and "fugate", meaning to drive away, referring to the pungent odor that may drive some insects away - thus the name "bugbane". The species name of *racemosa* refers to the raceme type of inflorescence typical of this species. Other common names are black cohosh (cohosh refers to the dark, rough rhizome of the plant), black snake root, and squawroot (the last two alluding to the Indian use of this species to treat snakebites and female problems, respectively).

The flowers of bugbane are small (only 1/4 inch or less long), with 4-5 sepals that are shed soon after the flower opens, no petals, but 1-8 showy petaloid stamens, numerous showy white stamens, and one to two carpels with short styles and broad stigmas. The flowers lack nectar, but present a good pollen reward to its insect pollinators, which are usually flies but may also be bees and bumblebees. The pungent fragrance is thought to attract flies but repel many other types of insects. The fruit that develops from each fertilized flower is a follicle that is 1/4 to 1/3

inch long, containing two rows of small, reddish-brown seeds. The dried fruits may remain on the plant, unopened, until early winter; the seeds may rattle within the fruit when it is disturbed by the wind or passing animals. Other less common names for this plant due to this characteristic are rattletop, rattleweed, or rattle snakeroot.

Each plant has a slender stem that may be up to six or more feet tall with alternate, thrice-compounded leaves, each with 2-5 coarsely-toothed leaflets that are up to 6 inches long and with up to 7 subdivisions. Each mature plant has a well-developed, dark-colored and rough-textured rhizome with short, fibrous roots. The rough and gnarled appearance of the rhizome is due to scars of leaf stems from previous years of growth. By the end of the growing season, pinkish buds for next season's growth may be seen on the rhizome.

The medicinal uses of this plant by American Indian tribes, as well as in folk or herbal medicine, are numerous. These medical uses (mainly of the rhizome) ranged from treating sore throats, bronchitis, coughs, colds, whooping cough, malaria, yellow fever, smallpox, measles, cholera, headaches, fatigue, hysteria, hives, itching, kidney problems, arthritis, rheumatism, snakebite (as a poultice), high blood pressure, and female problems such as menstrual cramps and the pain of childbirth. Extracts of this plant are thought to have anti-inflammatory properties (salicylates, similar to the active ingredient of aspirin, are found in the plant), as well as antispasmodic, sedative (even slightly narcotic), diuretic, and expectorant properties. It was not only important in American Indian medicine but was also listed in the U.S. *Pharmacopoeia* from 1820 to 1936 and in the national Formulary from 1936 to 1950. Bugbane was also introduced into Europe in the 1860's, where it was grown for its medicinal and ornamental properties.

Despite the less-than-pleasant odor of this attractive summer wildflower species, enjoy its beauty in rich woods of various parks in our area and on the Skyline Drive. The delicate wand-like inflorescences of bugbane add interest and beauty to local woods for you to enjoy during the summer months.

Reprinted from the Prince William Wildflower Society Wild News.

Marion is an Associate Professor of Biology at NVCC - Manassas Campus on sabbatical while working on the Flora of Virginia Project.



## Lynchburg Area

Dorothy C. Bliss

This is the time of year that is not spring with its great variety of early flowers that are so eagerly awaited and neither is it the fall season with its many colorful asters and goldenrods that line our roadways. What can we expect now that summer was officially ushered in on June 21st? By mid-June, Stokes aster, *Stokesia laevis*, was beginning to put forth its spectacular lavender flowers. One of the two clumps of this species in the Randolph-Macon Woman's College Botanic Garden can be seen just above the small pool. The deep red flowers of the smooth phlox, *P. glaberrima*, have added color to the same bed and continue to put forth new blooms. The three species of *Coreopsis* are showing off their bright yellow flowers, as is the Shrubby St. Johnswort, *Hypericum frondosum*, by the upper path. Come visit the Botanic Garden in June and July to discover more summer flowers.

A few weeks ago I took a close look at our specimens of Solomon's seal on the mound above the lower pool and I had reservations about the label. There are two species in the Virginia Atlas which are known to occur in Virginia, *Polygonatum biflorum* and *P. pubesens*. A third species is included in some of the wildflower guides. This species, *P. canaliculatum*, is listed in Newcomb, Audubon's Field Guide, Gray's Manual by Fernald, West Virginia Flora and other sources. I had labeled

our specimens

*Polygonatum  
biflorum*

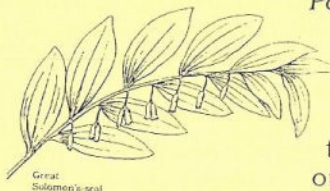
but I am  
having

second  
thoughts as

our plants

correspond more

closely to *P. canaliculatum* with their large graceful arching stem, five to six feet in length and, in the spring, bearing three or more flowers in each cluster, dangling below the stem. Is this specimen a larger, more robust condition of *P. biflorum* or is it a separate species? I remember this controversy from some of my early botanical studies. I look forward to seeing how it will be classified in the new Virginia Flora! Until then, I will put up a new sign that reads *Polygonatum canaliculatum*, Great Solomon's Seal.



We have been using cypress chips on most of the paths in the Botanic Garden and as these chips are chiefly wood they do not break down readily but last for several years. Since most of the native cypress trees along the Louisiana Gulf Coast were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina, now the immature cypress trees are being harvested for these chips. I cannot, without a feeling of guilt, continue using the chips since, if this present process continues, there will be no hope for the return of the cypress swamps which act as a barrier in time of floods and hurricanes.

Along the Botanic Garden paths, we would probably resort to pine needles which will have to be replenished each year. We have been using pine needles on the main path for several years and this has worked very well. We will also need to find an adequate source.

You can read more about this problem in an article entitled "Cypress Distress" in the April-May, 2006, issue of National Wildlife.

## Call for Volunteers

We need your help on Saturday, August 5, 8:00 til Noon; rain date August 12. This is the day we pot up plants for our fundraiser, the Plant Sale which will be on September 9. There are many plants that have reseeded themselves in the Garden so we should be able to have a good variety of species for the sale. Hope to see you on August 5.

## Thank You

Many thanks to all the volunteers who have worked so diligently in the Botanic Garden this year. It is due to your efforts that the Botanic Garden is prospering and attracting more visitors each year. Thank you very much!

## Black Eyed Susan

by Bob Tuggle

One can hardly ride Virginia's roads in the summer without seeing in abundance Black-eyed Susans - Ambassadors from the kingdom of the weeds. *Rudbeckia hirta*, the more common of the species in our area, ranges throughout the Eastern states where it is native. Most flower gardens contain one or another of the hybrid forms of this yellow and brown wildflower.

*Rudbeckias* are biennial with the plants blooming most during the second year. In the wild, the plants are highly

polymorphic varying in leaf size and shape and in flowering period. Like their cousins the sunflowers, they are monotropic, the inflorescence following the sun as it moves through the sky.

Cultivation can be accomplished in several ways. *Rudbeckia* spreads by sending out basal sprouts during the winter season. These grow into rosettes which can be easily transplanted by hand. Laying a stem horizontally on the ground will cause new growth at each leaf axil. Covering the parent stem with soil will result in roots at the new growth. Cut on both sides of the new plant to separate it from the parent and transplant.

Seeds are the best method for planting larger areas. They are best collected about a month after flowering. Break a seed head apart, if it breaks easily and the nutlets inside are dark they are ready to harvest. Mixed with the seed are lots of husks or chaff which is hard to remove. A fine sieve can be used to separate the seed from the unwanted material. In a lot of applications only minimum cleaning is necessary; just plant the chaff with the seed. Seeds should be dried and kept in the refrigerator until planting time. Sowing can be in any season. *Rudbeckia* does best in poor soil. Their tendency to spread can be controlled by removing the seedheads before they mature.

Black-eyed Susans are also known as Yellow Daisy, Brown Betty, Golden Glow, and Coneflower among other names. The name *Rudbeckia* is after Prof. Olaf Rudbeck, a forerunner of Linnaeus.

A few references list *Rudbeckia* as an herbal remedy, specifically as a diuretic, tonic or balsamic. Also it is mentioned to have been used by the Seminoles to treat headaches. Another source

describes the plants as being poisonous to livestock.

Bob Tuggle is a former member of the Blue Ridge Chapter Board of Directors.



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