

Blue Ridge Wildflower Society

A CHAPTER OF THE
VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Vol. 15, No. 4

October, 1998

Schedule of Events

- October 26** **General Membership Meeting**, 7:00 p.m., Center in the Square. Dorothy Bliss will be presenting a program on The Randolph-Macon Woman's College Botanical Garden.
- November 23** **An Evening of Shared Memories.** This is our time for sharing photographs, slides or short videos from the past year. Bring five to ten of your favorites for us to enjoy. A seed exchange will follow. Meet at 7:00 p.m., Center in the Square.
- December 5** **Saturday Evening Program** at 7:30 p.m., Room 225, Martin Science Building, Randolph-Macon Woman's College, Lynchburg. Bob Eubank will present a program, "Gardening With Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat".
- February 22** **General Membership Meeting**, 7:00 p.m. Center in The Square. Richard Crites will share highlights from his recent trip to Wales.

Annual Picnic

by Frieda Toler

Again this year Vi and Al Sheridan extended an invitation to the BRWS to have the Annual Picnic at their Smith Mountain Lake home.

So on August 23, 1998, the group gathered to enjoy the beauty of their gardens and home, take a boat ride on the lake with Capt. Sheridan at the helm and just relax on the deck. The Board of Directors met to make plans for meetings and activities for the remainder of 1998. That schedule is listed elsewhere in this newsletter.

Al and Vi provided the meat, bread and lemonade (too hot to drink coffee) and everyone brought wonderful food to round out the meal. One thing can be said about the BRWS - there are some GOOD cooks in the group.

Thanks again to two gracious hosts for this annual day of fun, fellowship and warm hospitality.

Fall Plant Sale and Garden Tour

by Sandra Elder

As a money maker our Fall Plant Sale in Lynchburg fell short of our previous sales.

However, the Randolph-Macon Woman's College Botanic Garden was a big success. We are grateful to Dorothy Bliss for establishing this garden that provides a perfect setting for our plant sale. The garden is maintained by volunteers

- Margaret Wenning, Jean Moore, Evelyn McMinn, Beth Weiland, Molly McClenon, Mary Adams and the much needed mulch is delivered by Dave Lowry. We work hard helping Dorothy care for the garden and are rewarded by the knowledge we gain.

With the heat and dry conditions of August I found potting plants and then keeping them looking good until the sale was a difficult task. Thanks to the following people who met the challenge and provided plants for the sale: Dorothy Bliss,

Lucille and Paul Cowins, Mary and Roger Dalton, Vi and Al Sheridan, Cindy Sandberg, Elizabeth Henderson, Simone Fraser, Dora Lee Ellington, Joli Horn, Nancy Cowden and John Snead.

John also sold over fifty tee shirts that day.

Other people who helped on the day of the sale were: Jim Elder (truly my helpmate on this day), Frieda and Bobby Toler, Betty and Butch Kelly and Carolyn Bates.

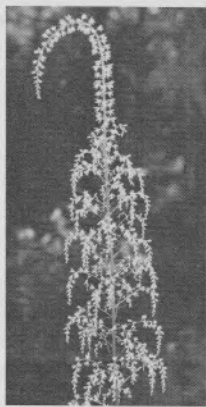


Featherbells

(*Stenanthium gramineum*)

by Sandra Elder

On July 22nd, I returned to Altavista to see and photograph the first plant of



featherbells to bloom since the area became a registry site.

During the past four years we had observed the foliage of two featherbells near the creek. When we visited the site in June, we noticed that one of the plants had buds.

I was eager to return

later in the summer to see how it looked. I was not disappointed. It was beautiful! Most books give the height as three to five feet. The height of this plant exceeded five feet.

The flowers have three sepals and three petals of the same color and shape. Color can vary from white to greenish or purplish. The flowers that covered about two thirds of the stalk were sparkling white. The scientific name is from the Greek *steno* meaning narrow and *anthos* meaning flower. The flowers at the top of the stalk contain one pistil and six stamens. The flowers on the drooping side branches are mostly staminate. These flowers had a wonderful fragrance.

As I stood there admiring this single plant, I tried to imagine what it must have been like when Drs. Ruskin Freer and Gwynn Ramsey came here in 1967 and found as many as one hundred featherbells. Normally a plant of the Blue Ridge Mountains, this was the first time it had been recorded in the Piedmont Province.

A few years later the Route 29 Bypass was constructed and many featherbells were destroyed. What a high price we pay for "progress".

Permission is hereby given to reprint.
Please give credit.

Karen Shepard, President
(540) 772-2733

Pamela M. Wieringo, Editor
(540) 343-8596

P.O. Box 20385 • Roanoke, VA 24018

Letter From The President

by Karen Shepard

Fall has come to the Blue Ridge and these old mountains are once again dressed in their colorful, splendid foliage. How fortunate we are to live in an area where we can watch the seasons turn.

The mountains rise like improbable monoliths to brook over the broad sweeping valleys, producing a landscape of such texture and hue that merely to see it is to thank God.

ORAL HISTORY-LEE SMITH

As the year is coming to a close so too is my term as a president. It has been a wonderful experience! I would be remiss if I didn't attempt to convey my thanks for your help and support during the last years. Within this organization there are so many generous members who give freely of their time, talent and expertise that working with you has been a pleasure. I know that the incoming president Cindy Sandberg will do a great job. She is knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and always seems to be smiling.

Winter Reading

As the gift giving season approaches, we offer the following suggestions. These are books our members have found particularly helpful. Some are currently out of print but can often be found in used book stores.

BOOKS FOR GROWING AND PROPAGATING

Growing and Propagating Wildflowers. Harry R. Phillips. Excellent for those plants which are easier to propagate.

The Wildflower Gardener's Guide. Henry W. Art. Guidelines for popular wildflowers, includes theme gardens and landscaping.

North Carolina Native Plant Propagation Handbook. N. C. Native Plant Society. Seed gathering and storage, propagation and cultivation.

The New Wildflowers and How To Grow Them. Edwin Steffek. Over 500 species including good conservation guidelines.

Growing Woodland Plants. Clarence and Eleanor Birdseye. Easy to understand.

Propagation of Wildflowers. Will C. Curtis. A reprint through New England Wild Flower Society.

Growing Wildflowers: A Gardener's Guide. Marie Sperka. Covers all aspects of growing wildflowers.

Landscaping with Wildflowers and Native Plants. Ortho Books. Good landscaping tips.

The Wildflower Meadow Book; A Gardener's Guide. Laura C. Martin. Covers all steps of meadow gardening.

Wildflower Perennials for Your Garden. Bebe Miles. Detailed guide to years of bloom from America's long-neglected native heritage.

Gardening with Native Wild Flowers. Samuel B. Jones, Jr. and Leonard E. Foote. Much useful information on propagation and cultivation techniques.

FOR AUTUMN AND WINTER

Weeds in Winter. Lauren Brown. Line drawings.

Pods, Wildflowers and Weeds in Their Final Beauty. Jane Embertson. Color photos from flower to pod to dried arrangement.

Winter Botany. William Trelease. A favorite of some of our more dedicated winter botanists.

CHECKLISTS

Spring Wildflowers of the Blue Ridge Mountains: A Checklist. Blue Ridge Wildflower Society.

Trees, Shrubs and Woody Vines of Virginia: A Checklist. Virginia Native Plant Society.

Ferns and Fern Relatives of Virginia: A Checklist. Virginia Native Plant Society.

Natives For The Garden

by Nancy Arrington
Propagation Chairman

Even in these days when much emphasis is put on "all season" plants *Euonymus americanus* is worth growing for its autumn fruit alone. Pinkish-red warty pods opening to reveal bright orange seeds are sure to elicit a curious "What's that?" from anyone seeing it for the first time. A heavy fruited shrub is truly spectacular. Almost as colorful are its common names, strawberry bush and hearts-a-bursting, referring to the shape of the fruit and the way it opens to expose the seeds.

Strawberry bush grows in woodlands from New York to Illinois and south to Florida and Texas. It occurs throughout Virginia except for a few mountainous counties where a more northern species, *E. atropurpureus*, is found. It is a widely

branching 3-6' shrub with green stems and branches and narrow lanceolate opposite leaves. Small clusters of greenish flowers in May and June are followed in September and October by the colorful fruit.

Like many other natives, strawberry bush responds well to cultivation. In its native habitat where it competes with trees and other shrubs for moisture and nutrients it tends to be sparse and lanky with some stems even trailing along the ground. When given a deeply prepared, humus-rich soil, adequate moisture, and morning sun or light shade, it becomes denser and more attractive, and produces a more abundant crop of fruit. However, one of its attributes is its ability to flower and fruit in fairly heavy shade.

Strawberry bush adds fall color to a naturalistic woodland garden and is lovely with the late blooming heart-leaved aster (*A. cordifolius*). A more structured autumn and winter garden with morning sun might feature it with other late bloomers including ornamental grasses, calico aster (*A. lateriflorus*), 'Autumn Joy' sedum, and for contrast, the intense blue flowers of leadwort (*Ceratostigma plumbaginoides*). Strawberry bush's green stems would add color through the winter.

Strawberry bush can be propagated by cuttings or division, or by seed sown after collection in the fall. Plants are available from mail order nurseries specializing in native plants and occasionally at our spring plant sale.



One of the most colorful native shrubs to set fruit in the fall is the strawberry bush or hearts-a-bursting (or bustin', if one's grammar slips). In September and October, *Euonymus americanus* sets bright red fruits that resemble a strawberry or a heart with three seeds bursting out of it. It is a member of the Celastraceae, the stafftree family, and is found in damp rich woods and on stream banks. Its range is from New York state south to Florida and West to Texas and Illinois. The genus *Euonymus* is from Greek "eu" meaning "good" and "onoma" meaning "name" and the species *americanus*, of course, means "American."

The strawberry bush blooms in May and into June. One to three flowers form on pedicels at leaf axils. The one-third inch wide flowers have 5 sepals, 5 yellow-green (sometimes with a touch of

Strawberry Bush (*Euonymus americanus*)

by Marion Blois Lobstein
Associate Professor, Biology, NVCC

purple) petals, 5 stamens, and a fleshy disk-like pistil. The nectaries at the base of the pistil secrete copious nectar, and the flowers give off a sweet fragrance that attracts short-tongued bees and flies that serve as pollinators. The fruits that form by September or October are red capsules just less than an inch in diameter. These warty capsules split open to reveal three oval orange seeds which are often eaten and dispersed by birds.

Strawberry bush is usually a straggly shrub that can be up to six feet tall. The stems are four-sided and green, which means they are photosynthetic, an unusual condition for a woody plant. Opposite bright green leaves are three inches long, one-half to an inch wide, finely toothed, smooth, and lanceolate to elliptical.

This native shrub was used by American Indians for a variety of purposes such as an antiseptic, expectorant, astringent, diuretic, and laxative as well as to reduce fever, to

induce vomiting, to treat female ailments and venereal disease, to relieve sinus, even to treat dandruff and scalp problems. The powdered bark or the root are the plant parts usually used, however the seeds can be used as a strong laxative.

Euonymus atropurpureus, known as wahoo or burning bush, is another member of this genus found in our area, although much less commonly. *Celastrus scandens*, native climbing bittersweet and *C. orbiculatus*, Asiatic bittersweet, a naturalized species from the Orient, are also found in our area. All of these family members have interesting fruits that split open in a manner similar to that of the strawberry bush.

This fall you may have already missed the bright red fruits of strawberry bush, but you can find its green, woody stems this winter. Once you have located a site for strawberry bush, next year enjoy the understated beauty of its flowers and then watch the handsome fruits develop in late summer and early fall.

Lynchburg Area Members

by Dorothy C. Bliss

Dry Weather and Fall Color

The spring season brought bountiful rain and the plants responded by growing luxuriantly but now in September the ample soil water has disappeared and many plants are showing signs of stress. We have seen our lawns dry up leaving a few hardy weeds and coarse grasses. Some of our common perennials that usually survive under drought conditions, such as black-eyed-Susans and goldenrods, are beginning to wilt and shrivel but spiderwort, Boltonia and sea-shore mallow appear to be thriving. Mulching and shade are two factors that enable many plants to overcome moderate dry conditions.

The leaves of flowering dogwood and deciduous azaleas are already curling up and dropping with a little premature coloring. Many of the trees - maple, ash, tulip poplar, etc., are also losing their leaves with the development of some yellow already present in leaves and tan (tannin) color. The brilliant reds and purples are produced from sugars stored in the leaves and under drought conditions photosynthesis and hence the manufacture of sugar may slow down or cease altogether. Unless there is adequate rain soon our fall will be less brilliant with little red and mostly yellow and brown hues. We can expect the peak fall color to be evident earlier and more subdued than normal except perhaps in those regions in gullies and low areas where the soil may still hold adequate moisture.

An Evening Primrose

For several years some of our members have grown a very large-flowered evening primrose, *Oenothera* sp., the flowers of which open at dusk and are more than 2 inches across. Last spring Sandra Elder gave me a plant that has been an intriguing entertainment for my friends and me as we watch the rapid unfolding of the petals just before dark. My plant was more than 4 feet in height and nearly as wide and displayed 50 or more flowers each evening during its maximum blooming period in August.

The *Oenothera* genus is a very large and plastic group complex that has puzzled many taxonomists. I had

been unable to determine the species of my plant. The Atlas of Virginia lists 12 species and Core in his West Virginia Flora lists 9 species but none of these fit the description of this plant. A few weeks ago I found a seed envelope from the National Audubon Society, labeled *Oenothera lamarckiana*. I rechecked Fernald and I found under *O. grandiflora* in parenthesis *O. lamarckiana* as a synonym. The detailed description fitted my unknown species exactly. This species is native south of Virginia but many of the plants were introduced into Europe and later reintroduced in the southeast. Until I have contrary information, my plant will be known as *O. grandiflora*.

Paulownia tomentosa - Princess Tree

This fast growing tree - 8 feet or more a year - was introduced from eastern Asia and is now naturalized in much of the eastern United States. It was named for Anna Paulowna (1795-1865), a Russian princess, daughter of Czar Paul I and Princess of the Netherlands, thus an ancestor of Queen Juliana. This tree is frequently encountered along our roadsides where the showy purple flowers in upright clusters are conspicuous. The capsules that follow contain hundreds of tiny winged seeds. Oftentimes vigorous shoots with leaves 2 to 3 feet long develop from cut or damaged trunks or on seedlings. The Princess or Empress tree is considered an invasive exotic replacing native species in woodlands and disturbed areas where it is tolerant of poor soil and atmospheric pollution.

A recent item in our Lynchburg newspaper recounted the activity of *Paulownia* thieves in King George County. I recall that a few years ago, several trees were removed from Blackwater Creek area by poachers. Many of these trees have been stolen from our national parks and forests. The valuable wood is exported to Japan to make ornate boxes, religious objects, sandals, etc. The above article suggested that owners of this tree might wish to "take steps to protect their trees or even cut them down and keep the profit".

Echinacea

In "The Virginia Gardener Newsletter" (Virginia Tech) for July-August I learned that *Echinacea purpurea* magnus has been named by the Perennial Plant Association as the perennial plant of the year. The article also discussed briefly that recent research has confirmed the benefits of this herb in the treatment of snake and insect bites, burns and internally for some infections and inflammations.

A note of interest - The term *Echinacea* is derived from the Greek *Echinos*, which means hedgehog. This alludes to the sharp-pointed bracts that protrude from the bristly central disks.

Fall Botanic Garden Tour and Plant Sale

This annual event held on September 5 was a great success with many strolling in the RMWC Botanic Garden to observe and enjoy the fall flowers, giving them a preview of how their own gardens might appear with the addition of some of the plants that were for sale. You will find details of this event elsewhere in the Newsletter.

Events of Interest

October 26

General Membership Meeting, 7:00 p.m., Center in the Square. Dorothy Bliss will be presenting a program on The Randolph-Macon Woman's College Botanical Garden.

November 10

Ted Scott will offer a program on **Invasives** to the Naturalist's Club (open to the public). Meet at 7:30 p.m. at the Virginia Museum of Natural History in Martinsville. For more information contact Barbara Winn, 540-650-8114.

November 12

Butterfly Club Meeting at Woodpecker Ridge Nature Center cabin at 7:30 p.m. WRNC is at 815 Stoney Battery Road, Troutville.