

# Blue Ridge Wildflower Society

A CHAPTER OF THE  
VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

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## Schedule of Events

- October 22**      **General Membership Meeting**, 7:00 p.m., Center in the Square. Jason Heizer with Bartlett Tree Company will show us ten ways to avoid killing our trees and how to keep pests, even deer, out of the garden.
- November 26**      **An Evening of Shared Memories**. Bring five to ten of your favorite photos or slides or a short video from the past year for us to share. A seed exchange will follow. Meet at 7:00 p.m., Center in the Square.
- December 8**      **Lynchburg Evening of Memories**. This Saturday evening program in Lynchburg is similar to the November meeting in Roanoke. Bring a few of your favorite slides or photographs for the group to enjoy. Meet at 7:30 p.m. in Room 225, Martin Science Building on the Randolph-Macon Woman's College Campus.

## Letter From The President

*Julie Alexander*

"In light of recent events" is a phrase that I have heard many times recently. It has been used to excuse or explain cancellations, postponements, delays, business failures, as well as to promote sales and events. Even my favorite station, National Public Radio, is reminding us that "in light of recent events," it is important for us to contribute money to their drive. The terrorist attacks of September 11 and the ensuing state of crisis have affected everyone. We are inundated with information. We are concerned about our future in a new way. It is more than a little scary to have our lives in a state of limbo while we wait for the next crisis.

Meanwhile we have our personal crises that affect our lives intimately. Recently my seventeen year old son was diagnosed with cancer. Suddenly all my priorities changed. I know that many of you have faced similar problems.

So what do we do "in light of recent events"? In large crises as well as in our personal ones, we can follow the same plan. After the shock has subsided, we must keep doing what we have to do: go to work and take care of family. Then we want to learn everything about what we are fighting. I now know more about cancer and Afghanistan than I ever thought I would. I can pronounce and spell difficult words like *Neutropenia* and *alQaida*. Knowledge helps us make better decisions. Don't just talk about helping - do something. There is something everyone can do - in

personal problems and collective ones. I can learn, support, give, encourage, pray, and love. When called upon to sacrifice, I can do so without complaint. All these things are vital in crises yet can be done by everyone. Finally, remember that while many things will change, many will stay the same. Learn to appreciate the constancy of the rising sun, the change of seasons, the moon and stars overhead, and the soil underfoot. Just like these things, our lives will go on. So, "in light of recent events," what should we do? Press on. And don't forget to stop and smell the wildflowers.

## Fall Plant Sale

*Sandra Elder*

We held our eighth Lynchburg area Wildflower Plant Sale on September 29th. This year's sale was a modest success. Lynchburg does have a faithful group of people who return each year to purchase plants. The Randolph-Macon Botanic Garden provides a wonderful setting for our sale. Each year a few new people are introduced to the joy of strolling through the garden and learn about membership in the Virginia Native Plant Society.

I wish to thank the following people for giving of their time and/or sharing their plants to help with the sale this year: Dorothy Bliss, Elizabeth Henderson, John Snead, Margaret Wenning, Lucille and Paul Cowins, Vi and Al Sheridan, Alex Newmark, Cindy Burks, Betty Kelly, Rudy Albert and thanks also to the owners of Zephyr Gardens for donating more than thirty plants to our sale.

# Conservation of Christmas Plants: Handle with Care

Marion Lobstein

(Associate Professor of Biology, Northern Virginia Community College, Manassas Campus)

Many of our native plants are traditionally used as Christmas decorations. Conservation and safety should be kept in mind when using these plants. Some have been over-collected such as species of clubmosses (ground pine and running cedar), Christmas fern, and holly. Other plants such as holly and mistletoe produce berries that are poisonous and may pose a health threat, especially to small children.

The clubmosses (*Lycopodium spp.*) are in a family (*Lycopodiaceae*) of non-flowering vascular plants. The spore-producing structures called strobili are finger-like structures which develop on top of the individual plants and may be mistaken for a flower. This time of year many species are releasing spores from these structures. Later, the spores will germinate to form the true reproductive stage of the plant. The strobili with spores were used for old-fashioned powder-flash photography. This material, called lycopodium powder, ignites easily producing a brilliant flash. Both *Lycopodium obscurum*, called ground pine because it resembles miniature pine trees, and *L. clavatum* known as running cedar (individual plants are connected by rhizomes) have been collected to the point these species may be locally rare. The Christmas fern (*Polystichium acrostichoides*), family Polypodiaceae, is another non-flowering plant that may be locally over-collected for Christmas decorating. This handsome fern is our most common fern. It derives its common name from the fact it is green at Christmas and also the leaflets of the compound leaf supposedly resemble a Christmas Stocking or Santa in his sled with reindeer (use your imagination!). This plant is more common than clubmoss species but still should be collected only if locally abundant.

The hollies (*Ilex spp.*) are sometimes over-collected resulting in damage to the tree or shrub. The hollies are in the Aquifoliaceae family, a true flowering plant family. The small, inconspicuous green flowers bloom in summer and are usually separate male and female flowers borne on separate plants (a condition known as dioecious or two households). The fruit is the lovely red berry (actually a drupe) that is prized for Christmas decorating. The most popular native holly is the American

holly (*Ilex opaca*) with the shiny evergreen sharp-pointed leaves that are familiar to us all as a Christmas symbol. American holly grows to 90 feet tall with a straight trunk and lovely gray bark. In our area trees this size are seldom seen though the species does compete well in a mixed deciduous forest. Over-collecting of holly can be especially damaging to young trees. Of course, only female flower-bearing trees will have berries.

The other species of holly, less frequently used in Christmas decorating, is the colorful *Ilex verticillata*, a deciduous shrub known as winterberry or black alder. Its leafless branches with whorls of red berries make a colorful addition to Christmas arrangements. Again, over collecting may damage individual plants. Berries from holly species are eaten by birds which are important in dispersing seeds of these species. However, holly berries may be poisonous to humans, especially small children.

Mistletoe, the "kissing plant," so popular at Christmas has a better known reputation for toxic berries. The evergreen plant with thick, leathery green leaves and lovely white waxy berries can make small children very

## When is an Aster not an Aster

Dorothy C. Bliss

We speak of Stokes' aster and Maryland or golden aster but we learn that the former is in the genus, *Stokesia* and the latter is in *Chrysopsis* or *Heterotheca*. Thus, these two are not true asters as they do not demonstrate the designated taxonomic characteristics of the *Aster* genus, however, they are members of the aster family, *Asteraceae*.

Stokes' aster is native to the pinewoods of the coastal plain from North Carolina to Florida and Louisiana. The basal leaves of *Stokesia laevis* form semi-evergreen clumps that are relatively drought tolerant. Stokes' aster is named for an Englishman, Dr. Jonathan Stokes, 1755-1831. The sky-blue frilly flowers appear in early to mid-summer in full sun or light shade. The detailed description of these flowers in "Growing and Propagating Wildflowers" by William Cullina is worthy of quoting. "The flowers are up to 3" across with lacy, finely notched ray petals and a

pincushion puff of feathery disk flowers in the center." It is easy to propagate from seed or root cuttings and is one of the finest perennials I know.

The Maryland or broad-leaved golden aster, *Chrysopsis mariana*, is one of the many species in this genus. It occurs in dry sandy or rocky soil in

nearly every county in Virginia. The beautiful golden flowers appear in mid-September through October. The leaves are spoon shaped and dark-green with a few long gray hairs. The plants are drought resistant with taproots sent down into the dry soil. Several clumps of these plants have persisted in the dry soil under the China fir in the Randolph-Macon Woman's College Botanic Garden and if the drought conditions of the last few years continue, perhaps we will see these bright yellow flowers more

frequently in our native wild flower gardens.



MARYLAND  
GOLDEN-ASTER

## Persimmons

### Autumn's Overlooked Golden Bounty

Enough folk songs and stories involve 'possums or 'coons and 'simmon trees to leave the impression these trees are commonplace. They are, indeed, spread throughout the Southern coast from Maryland and Delaware to Florida, but they tend to grow singularly, rarely forming groves.

Throughout the years people have wanted the trees, also known as possumwood, near their homes. Many specimens you find today near older homes or former homesites were planted generations ago.

With age, the heartwood darkens and in older trees is extremely dark, almost black, reflecting the persimmon's membership in the ebony family, *Ebenaceae*. The light beige or tan sapwood is a striking contrast to the heartwood.

Persimmon trees have been recorded as large as 120 feet tall and two and a half feet in diameter but this is uncommon. Typically they reach a height closer to 60 feet and are twelve to fifteen inches in diameter with a broad, rounded crown. With age the bark becomes very thick and dark and cleft into squares plates.

The alternate ovate leaves have smooth edges with the upper surface smooth and sometimes slightly glossy while the underside may be smooth or slightly hairy and is gray-green. They are 4-5 inches long and 3" across. Leaf buds are blunt and have irregular scales.

The fragrant creamy yellow or greenish blooms are bell shaped and have four petals. Male flowers, approximately half an inch across, are borne in clusters on separate plants from the one inch female flowers which are borne singly. Blooms are on the current year's growth.

*Diospyros virginiana*, fruit of the gods, from Virginia. The name conjures thoughts of a delectable, ambrosia-like morsel. If you've sampled it after a hard frost, you may agree it is quite sweet and tasty.

#### Christmas Plants . . . continued from page 3

ll, or even be fatal if several berries are consumed by a small child. Mistletoe (*Phoradendron flavescens*) is a strange flowering plant that is parasitic (but still photosynthetic with green leaves) in the upper limbs of deciduous trees. Birds eat the sticky berries, formed by small inconspicuous green flowers, and often disperse the seeds by wiping beaks on the bark of tree limbs to remove the sticky seeds. In the winter, it is easy to see a mass of mistletoe in the upper limbs of trees where birds have inadvertently planted the seeds.

As the title of this article suggests, our traditional Christmas plants should be "handled with care" by using them sparingly and by being aware of potentially dangerous leaves and fruits. If conservation and safety are kept in mind, plants can add much to a colorful Christmas.

Note: This article is based on a reprint of a *Wild News* article by Marion Lobstein, circa 1986.

*Wild News* is the newsletter of Prince William Wildflower Society.



If however, you've tasted it before autumn's first real frost, you would be more likely to agree with Captain John Smith who wrote in his diary, "If it be not ripe, it will draw a man's mouth awrie with much torment." After a hoarfrost, the astringent tannins are converted and the one and a half inch fruits become wrinkled and mellow and take on a whitish bloom. When the fruit drops or is plucked from the tree the calyx, consisting of 4-6 woody sepals, stays attached to it.

Upon ripening the fruits can be eaten fresh, made into jams and puddings or pureed and made into tea breads. Indians are said to have combined it with maize to make a bread which was used for trading with the English and French for various commodities. The fruit could also be sundried and eaten during the long winter months, providing much-needed vitamin C for both the Indians and the early settlers. It is used in some brandies and beers. Honey locust pods and fermented persimmon mash are combined to make locust beer.

The larger, firm persimmons seen in the marketplace are an Asian relative and are less tannic.

Most wildlife, especially opossums, racoons, skunks, foxes, bears and bobwhites, are quite fond of the fruits. Well-cleaned, flattened oblong seeds about a half inch long lie thick beneath the trees on autumn mornings, mute testimony to a midnight feast.

Seasoned persimmon wood is one of the hardest woods we have although under moist conditions it is subject to rotting more quickly than many other woods.

It is not often used in the furniture industry for various reasons. It is heavy, hard and resists bending. It holds nails firmly but does not glue well and it shrinks considerable during curing.

It is highly shock-resistant and does little or no warping after seasoning, making it ideal for golf clubs and cue sticks. It is widely used in the textile industry for bobbins and spools. It is an excellent wood for carving. Cobblers who preferred wood to iron have traditionally used it for making lasts.

Tradition says the Duke of Argyle gave a persimmon tree to King George III.

When you find a tree this winter, try the fruit. Just remember not to eat the peel which is almost pure cellulose and difficult for humans to digest.

## Lynchburg Area Members

Dorothy C. Bliss

The Fern Foray on September 25th along the Appalachian Trail that winds above the James River and below the rocky cliffs was enjoyed by 10 participants. Only nine species of ferns were encountered but several of these covered extensive areas beside the trail. The large nearly-evergreen fronds of the marginal shield fern were abundant and several colonies of rock polypody and maidenhair fern bordered the path. As expected, the Christmas fern was scattered throughout the slopes. Along the rocky shelves of the bluffs were healthy clumps of the mountain spleenwort, *Asplenium montanum*, whose tiny dark green fronds were only a few inches in length. At least two species of the club moss, *Botrychium*, were named. Although the number of species identified on this afternoon walk were few, the slopes were rich in populations of those that were identified.



STOKES  
ASTER

Many shrubs and trees were pointed out and among those in fruit were several fringe trees (*Chionanthus*), paw-paw, the fruit still green and hard, bladdernut, *Hydrangea*, maple-leaved *Viburnum*, spicebush and deciduous holly. The bloodroot was still in bloom, also tick trefoil, narrow-leaved harebell, white woods aster and the small flowered leafcup, *Polymnia canadensis*.

At the conclusion of the walk, several of us enjoyed a picnic supper at the James River Visitor's Center on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

## Gift Suggestions

As the holidays approach and we search for gifts, here are some ideas for your gardening friends. Our members have found these particularly useful. Some are current titles, others are out of print but can often be found in used book stores.

### Seed Germination and Perennial Gardening References:

#### *Ferns*

C. Colston Burrell, ed.

Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Inc., Brooklyn, NY

#### *Gardening with Native Wild Flowers*

Samuel B. Jones & Leonard E. Foote. Timber Press, Portland, OR

#### *Growing and Propagating Showy Native Trees and Shrubs*

Richard Bir. UNC Press, Chapel Hill, NC

#### *Growing and Propagating Wild Flowers*

Harry Phillips. UNC Press, Chapel Hill, NC

#### *North Carolina Native Plant Propagation Handbook*

NC Native Plant Society

#### *Propagation of Wildflowers*

Will C. Curtis

A reprint through New England Wild Flower Society

#### *Seeds of Wildland Plants*

James and Cheryl Young. Timber Press, Portland OR

#### *The Wildflower Gardener's Guide*

Henry W. Art.

#### *Wildflower Perennials for Your Garden*

Bebe Miles

#### *Wildflowers — A Gardener's Encyclopedia of*

C. Colston Burrell. Rodale Press, Emmaus, PA

## Autumn's Grand Finale

Julie Alexander

Fall is a most glorious season. The weather is perfect — not too cold, not too hot, not too humid. The sun shines in a clear blue sky. While we welcome spring for its warmth and new life, we welcome autumn for its relief from heat and a sense of accomplishment. Nature has done its work - grown and flourished and reproduced. Now is the time to rest and store energy for the next cycle. Nature doesn't enter dormancy with understated finality but rather with a grand finale. We have been out enjoying the beautiful weather recently. We have seen fields of ironweed, goldenrod, and boneset interspersed with flecks of brilliant red cardinal flower. This certainly rivals the beauty of our delicate spring wildflowers. I think nature has saved the best for last. The blue asters and tickseed sunflowers add color to roadside banks. Soon everyone will be oohing and aahing about the quilt of color sewn by fall foliage. I encourage you to take a few minutes away from the yellows and reds of poplars and oaks and soak up the blues and yellows and reds of blue lobelia, goldenrod, and cardinal flower.

## Evening of Memories

Please join us for the December 8th meeting at 7:30 p.m. in Martin Science Building on Randolph-Macon Woman's College campus — Bring slides, pictures, albums, etc., for the group to enjoy.

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Julie Alexander, *President*  
(540) 427-0117

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

P.O. Box 20385 • Roanoke, VA 24018