



Blue Ridge Wildflower Society

A chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

Spring 2026

Vol. 47, No. 1

Why I Volunteer: Discovering the Roots of Our Region

When neighbors saw my husband and me pulling up English boxwoods and nandina to make room for Sweetspire, American Beautyberry, and Joe Pye Weed, they often asked, "Why the change?" And when they hear I drive to Roanoke for meetings, they usually ask, "Is it worth the trip?" My answer is simple: **Our local landscape is the foundation of everything else—and honestly, I'm just having a blast learning how it all works.**

Joining the Blue Ridge Wildflower Society (BRWS) started as a curiosity, but it has turned into a way for me to truly care for the place I call home. I'm certainly no botanist, but I've learned that the small changes we make in our own backyards can have a massive ripple effect. Here are some reasons why this group has become so important to me:

1. Rebuilding the Food Web (One Caterpillar at a Time)

I used to plant things because they looked nice or the deer didn't eat them. Now, I try to use my garden as an insect buffet. Most of the birds and butterflies we love can't survive without specific native plants. Native plants and local insects have been "best friends" for thousands of years. As many of you already know, more native plants = more caterpillars = more songbirds. It's been fun to watch our yard come to life!

2. We're All Students Here

A lot of us want to help the environment, but it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Our chapter is the perfect "bridge." Through plant sales and guided walks, I've found that you don't need a degree to make a difference. We're just neighbors helping neighbors turn "biological desert" lawns into vibrant, living spaces.

3. Protecting Our "Blue Ridge" Treasure

The Blue Ridge isn't just a pretty view on a postcard; it's a unique biological treasure. By being part of the statewide Virginia Native Plant Society (VNPS), I feel like I'm doing my small part to protect the plants that belong here. We're building "corridors of life" so that bees and birds have a safe path to travel through our neighborhoods.

4. Finding "My People"

Beyond the science, and the dirt under my fingernails, there's the community. There is a special kind of joy in connecting with people who respect the natural world. Whether we're squinting at a tiny wildflower on a trail or chatting at a plant sale, this society has given me a wonderful sense of belonging.

The Bottom Line: We don't have to wait for big changes to save the planet. We can start right here in our own soil, one native plant at a time. I'm still learning, but I'm so glad to be doing it with all of you .

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-Jennifer McCarthy

Spicebush Snickerdoodles by Julia Carter

Native plants and cooking are two of my greatest passions, and I'm always thrilled when I get to combine them. I made spicebush snickerdoodles for the September BRWS meeting, and they were a big hit! The dried spicebush berries have a sweet and spicy flavor, like nutmeg with a bit of fruitiness. I have included the recipe here, along with a short guide to harvesting spicebush berries.

Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) is a native shrub found in mesic forests. The tiny yellow flowers bloom in early spring, with male and female flowers on separate plants (dioecious). In late summer and fall, the female plants bear fruits called drupes that turn from green to red as they ripen. The green and red fruits have a different flavor profile. I used all red spicebush fruits for the snickerdoodles.

When foraging for spicebush fruits, make sure you identify them correctly. Spicebush leaves are simple and oval-shaped, and the leaves, twigs, and fruits all have a spicy scent. Be sure not to overharvest – only take around 30% of the fruits on any one plant before moving on to another. This allows the spicebush population to reproduce, and leaves food for birds.

Always be respectful of your surroundings and remember that you aren't the only organism that depends on a healthy environment! Once you have harvested your spicebush berries, they need to be dried and ground up. You can remove the seeds if you wish. The fruits can be dried either in a dehydrator or by setting them out in a dry place for several days. Once they are dry, they will be hard and dark-colored, like a coffee bean. They can then be ground up in a mortar and pestle or a coffee grinder, and stored in a jar. Use them like nutmeg or allspice. Don't be afraid to get creative with your Appalachian allspice, cooking with native plants is a wonderful opportunity to experience unique flavors!

Here is my spicebush snickerdoodle recipe:



Spicebush Snickerdoodles

Ingredients:

- 1-2 tbsps sugar
- 1-2 tbsps dried and ground red spicebush berries
- 1 cup shortening
- 1 ½ cups sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 2 ¾ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp salt
- 2 tsp cream of tartar

Directions:

Combine sugar and ground spicebush berries in a small bowl and set aside. Cream the shortening in a stand mixer and gradually add sugar. Add eggs and vanilla.

In another bowl, mix flour, baking soda, salt, and cream of tartar. Add to the sugar mixture.

Shape the dough into one-inch balls and roll in the spicebush sugar. Bake on a greased cookie sheet at 400° for 6-10 minutes. Cool on wire racks and enjoy!

Spring Events, Speakers, and Field Trips



Monday, MARCH 23

6 p.m. meeting & 6:30 p.m. program: “Pollinator Waystations”

Directions: Roanoke Council of Garden Clubs, 3640 Colonial Avenue, Roanoke, VA

William (Bill) Lewis, State Roadside Program Supervisor, VA Dept. of Transportation (VDOT) will give us insights into VDOT’s programs for creating places along the highways for pollinators to rest and feed on plants. Bill has worked for VDOT for 37 years in Vegetation Management. He is an ISA Certified Arborist and is also Certified in Forestry, Ornamental Plants, Turf, Right of Way, Public Health and serves as a dual Inspector of Erosion and Sediment Control along Virginia’s highways. **A 30 min workshop on the app Flora of VA (pls download in advance) will follow.**

Tuesday, APRIL 7

1 - 4 p.m. Field Trip: Wildflower Walk at Green Hill Park, Salem

This annual walk features a magnificent hillside of large-flowered trillium and riverbanks packed with Virginia bluebells. The walk will be self-guided and at your own pace. Flowers will be marked with numbered flags and leaders Ellen Holtman, Rebecca Ross, and Michael Wise will provide a list of corresponding plant names with information about each plant. **Directions:** Inside Green Hill Park turn right and follow the road along the river. You will find us with the lists at the picnic shelter at the very end of the road. You may begin the walk anytime between 1 and 3 p.m. The flags will in place until around 4 p.m. **Contact Ellen Holtman w/ questions at 540-797-2350.**

Saturday, APRIL 11

10 - 3 p.m. Spring Wildflower/Native Plant Event: Explore Park, Roanoke

Explore Park is partnering with BRWS, Master Naturalists, Wild Ones, and ten more local groups to offer a day of learning and experiencing native plants. It will be a free event with information stations, walks, and indoor speakers. BRWS will have two tables—one on spring wildflowers and another on the Virginia Native Plant Society. BRWS and Master Naturalists will offer a program on the Flora of Virginia app at 11 a.m. We are looking for volunteers to help out in 2 hour shifts.

Contact Ellen Holtman at 540-797-2350 if you would like to volunteer at the event.

Tuesday, APRIL 14

10:00 a.m. Field Trip: Beale Gardens in Spring at Hollins University

This historic garden was bequeathed by Lucy Beale Huffman to Hollins in honor of her mother, Lucy Preston Beale in 1930. The Garden Club of Virginia restored the garden under the direction of landscape designer William Rieley. The garden includes stone walls, bridges, benches, and both landscape and native plantings. Led by Ellen Holtman and Rebecca Ross. **Directions:** As you enter the Hollins University campus, take a left and park in the Moody lot. Bring water, field guides, and insect repellent.

Contact Rebecca Ross at 540-855-4713 to sign up for this highly anticipated “revisit” trip.

Friday, APRIL 17

2 p.m. Field Trip: Wildwood Park, Radford (Limited to 20 people)

Brenda Graff, former president of the VNPS New River Chapter and Debra Graff, NRV master gardener will lead us through this park with a profusion of wildflowers such as trillium, wild ginger, mayapple, and hepatica. **Directions:** Meet at the Park and Ride at Exit 140 in Salem at 12:15 pm to carpool to this site. Bring field guides, water, and insect repellent.

Contact Ellen Holtman at 540-797-2350 to sign up for this trip.

Spring Events, Speakers, and Field Trips



Saturday, APRIL 18

1 p.m. Field Trip: Dorothy Bliss Botanical Garden, Randolph College, Lynchburg

Wildflower Walk led by head gardener **Sandra Elder**. The garden was established in 1994 through the efforts of Dr. Bliss, Professor of Biology and contains more than 150 species of plants native to the Southeastern U.S. **Directions:** We will meet at the campus gates on Norfolk Avenue, between the Martin Science Building and Lipscomb Library. Parking is available in the lot opposite the garden. We will also visit a member garden within walking distance. **Contact Lissa Paulson at 917-767-3117 if you plan to attend or have questions.**

Saturday, APRIL 18

10 - 3 p.m. EARTH DAY CELEBRATION: Grandin Village, Roanoke

Fun event for the eco-conscious family. BRWS is a long-time collaborator in this annual event organized by Clean River Valley and supported by many local organizations, artisans, and performers. **Contact Linda Harrison at 540-588-0777 to sign up to volunteer for 2hr slots.**

Tuesday, APRIL 21

11 - 2 p.m. EARTH DAY CELEBRATION: Old City Cemetery, Lynchburg

Take a lunchtime stroll among the historic native trees with Nick Meyer, Lynchburg's Urban Forester. Bring the whole family to swing on the wooden swing, learn about native plants, and experience the country's oldest municipal cemetery and Level II arboretum in Spring! **Contact Jennifer McCarthy at info.blueridgewildflower@gmail.com with questions and to sign up to volunteer for 2hr slots. Walks at 11:30 a.m. and 1 p.m. More details to follow.**

Saturday, APRIL 25

10 a.m. Field Trip: Smartview Park, Blue Ridge Parkway, Floyd. (Limited to 20 people).

Wildflower Walk led by **Dr. Bob Pohl** of Ferrum College. This loop trail around the park has many beautiful spring wildflowers such as dwarf crested iris, showy orchid, hepatica, columbine, fire pink, trillium and other spring ephemerals. **Directions:** We will meet at Cave Spring Baptist Church in the first parking lot on Va. 221 across from Cave Spring Middle School to carpool to the site. Bring water, field guides, and insect repellent.

Contact Rebecca Ross at 540-855-4713 if you plan to go.

Monday, APRIL 27

6 p.m. meeting & 6:30 p.m. program "Exotic Invasives"

Directions: Roanoke Council of Garden Clubs, 3640 Colonial Avenue, Roanoke, VA

Dr. Jacob Barney, of the Fralin Life Sciences Institute and Director of the Invasive Species Collaborative at Virginia Tech, holds a BS from the University of Kentucky, and a MS and PhD from Cornell University. He completed post-doctoral work at UC-Davis. Dr. Barney has written over 100 peer-reviewed papers in his field. Dr. Barney's research focuses on the effects of invasive plant species on our ecosystems. He is currently part of a research team developing mitigation projects to combat invasive species at the Global Change Center at Virginia Tech.

Spring Events, Speakers, and Field Trips



Saturday, MAY 2

9 - 12 p.m. ANNUAL BRWS NATIVE PLANT SALE

Directions: Roanoke Council of Garden Clubs, 3640 Colonial Avenue

A great opportunity to buy native plants while supporting our chapter. Free entry. Plants are priced at \$5 and up. We will be selling herbaceous plants, shrubs, and trees. We always need volunteers for this event. **Contact Heather Butler to volunteer for two hour time slots at 540-598-7087 or at hmbutler48@gmail.com.**

Saturday, MAY 9

9 a.m. Field Trip: Lapsley's Run, Botetourt County

This walk will be led by Dr. Michael Wise of Roanoke College and Heather Butler of Virginia Western and will feature areas with wildflowers such as bluebells, twinleaf, turkeybeard, mayappples, and trillium. **Directions:** We will meet in the parking lot of Bojangles in Daleville to carpool to the site. **Contact Rebecca Ross at 540-855-4713 if you plan to go.**

Monday, MAY 18

6 p.m. meeting & 6:30 p.m. program "Lycopods and Dragons"

Directions: Roanoke Council of Garden Clubs, 3640 Colonial Avenue, Roanoke, VA

Dr. Dorothy Belle (DB) Poli teaches Biology at Roanoke College. She will explore how fossils of ancient plants such as horsetails may have influenced dragon lore around the world. She holds degrees from the University of Pittsburgh and the University of Maryland. Her research interests focus on the adaptive structures in the evolution of lycopods and innovative pedagogy.

Monday, JUNE 8

6 p.m. meeting & 6:30 p.m. program "Deer-Oh Dear"

Directions: Roanoke Council of Garden Clubs, 3640 Colonial Avenue, Roanoke, VA

Sharon Burnham will share her vast experience in holistic gardening with deer and rabbits. Sharon is a Master Gardener, a chemist and lawyer by profession, and has developed modules for the Roanoke Master Gardener training program. She serves as an advisor on native plants to the VWCC Arboretum, Old Southwest, Inc., and Saint Elizabeth's Church. She is a member of our chapter, a part of the Plant Virginia Natives campaign, and founder and president of the Roanoke chapter of Wild Ones. Many of our members have enjoyed touring her local garden which includes 235 species of native plants, a vegetable garden, and courtyard.

Annual Native Plant Sale
MAY 2, 9:00A.M. - 12:00 P.M.
ROANOKE COUNCIL OF GARDEN CLUBS
3640 COLONIAL AVE., ROANOKE, VA



Scan for plant list



WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Lindsey Cline, Amherst, VA
Sophia Fonseca, Hardy, VA
Trista Nealon, Arlington, VA
Farhad Sahebjam, Roanoke, VA
Kyle Drebes, Fredericksburg, VA
Daniel and Julie Baker, Fincastle, VA
Jon Casado, Roanoke, VA
Dolly Frazier, Staunton, VA
Olga Kudrina, Roanoke, VA
Jessica Driver, Java, VA



Blue Ridge Wildflower Society and Roanoke Valley Bird Club

Cordially invite you to the

Annual Picnic

Saturday, JULY 18, 2026, 5:00 PM

Roanoke Council of Garden Clubs inside facility
3640 Colonial Avenue, Roanoke, VA 24018

- Rain or shine, we are inside with unloading in the covered portico entrance
- Please bring a side dish or dessert to share including the serving utensil, and a card with your name and food title or recipe (for allergy inquiries)
- The RVBC will provide fried chicken and the BRWS will provide barbecue
- Drinks and ice are provided, or you may bring your favorite beverage
- Door Prize Drawing

Schedule:

- 5:00 PM Social gathering
- 5:30 PM Welcome and picnic dining

Please RSVP by Friday, July 10, to:
Carol Whiteside
540-774-2143 or
whitesidemules@yahoo.com
With the number in your party attending

See you then and there!

Save the date!



Please Share!

Post fun finds from a walk or field trip, garden successes, or tips on nurturing natives at:



[blueridgewildflowersociety](https://www.facebook.com/blueridgewildflowersociety)



[blueridgewildflower](https://www.instagram.com/blueridgewildflower)

EARLY APRIL Self-guided Walks

Mill Mountain Wildflower Garden

Looking for a wildflower garden you can visit at your leisure during April to see spring ephemerals?

We recommend the Mill Mountain Wildflower Garden, located at the top of Mill Mountain near the Discovery Center. It is open from 6 a.m. until 11 p.m. The garden was founded, created, and continues to be maintained by the Mill Mountain Garden Club.

You will find several kinds of trillium, wild phlox, ginger, bloodroot, spring beauties, spiderworts, jack in the pulpit, dwarf iris, flame azalea, and many others.

Booker T. Washington Jack-o-Lantern Branch Heritage Trail

Enter this trail at the parking lot of the Booker T. Washington National Monument in Hardy, VA.

Walk 1.5 miles through wooded areas to find ferns and spring ephemerals.

Happy Hollow Garden Park

A spectacular floral display of 800 azaleas amidst 34 acres of gardens and woodlands. Meander at your own pace along five trails. To visit, go south on Va. 221 towards Bent Mt., turn right onto Mt. Chestnut Rd (Va. 692). Go two miles to park entrance on the left at 6697 Mt. Chestnut Rd.



Blue Ridge Wildflower Society

Meetings held at Roanoke Council of Garden Clubs Headquarters
3640 Colonial Avenue, Roanoke, VA
6:00 p.m. Social & Business / 6:30 p.m. Program

Meetings are generally held on the fourth Monday during the months of March, April, May, September, October, and November, unless changed or canceled due to holidays, inclement weather and/or other related closures. Club business is presented at membership meetings, followed by a program at 6:30 p.m. Currently, members must be present (in-person) to vote. Our picnic is held in July. We welcome and encourage members to bring guests to club activities. Membership is open to everyone!

News and events are posted on our chapter webpage at <https://vnps.org/chapters>. We also share updates via email and post information on our Facebook page. Members are invited to post pictures, share sightings, helpful tips, and other fun facts related to native wildflowers in our area on our Facebook page or submit them to our newsletter.

BRWS is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

Virginia Native Plant Society

Website: www.vnps.org

The Virginia Native Plant Society (VNPS), founded in 1982 as the Virginia Wildflower Preservation Society, is a nonprofit organization of individuals who share an interest in Virginia's native plants and habitats. The Society and its chapters seek to further the appreciation and conservation of this priceless heritage.

Our Mission: The Virginia Native Plant Society is dedicated to the protection and preservation of the native plants of Virginia and their habitats, to sustain for generations to come the integrity of the Commonwealth's rich natural heritage of ecosystems and biodiversity for purposes of enjoyment, enlightenment, sustainable use, and our own very survival. To this end, we advocate and follow practices that will conserve our natural endowment, and we discourage and combat practices that will endanger or destroy it. We are committed to do all we can to slow the accelerating conversion of natural landscape to built and planted landscape and to reduce its damage to natural ecosystems.

Our Purpose and Services

State Level: Virginia Native Plant Society

- Working for measures to protect endangered plant species, and preserve habitats and plant communities of special interest;
- Learning and teaching about native plants and their special needs;
- Encouraging the appropriate use of nursery or home propagated native plants in public landscapes and private gardens;
- Assisting in writing and updating Flora of Virginia;
- Providing money for graduate botanical research;
- Working with nurseries to protect native species;
- Offering a spring workshop on timely botanical subjects;
- Offering field trips state wide and some in surrounding states; and,
- Conducting the annual meeting with speakers and field trips provided.

Local level: Blue Ridge Wildflower Chapter

Counties of Appomattox, Bedford, Botetourt, Campbell, Craig, Franklin, Henry, Patrick and Roanoke, and the cities of Lynchburg, Roanoke, and Salem

- To present meetings that offer informative programs concerning a variety of areas and native plants they support;
- To lead free field trips to a wide variety of local habitats spring through fall;
- To conduct an annual spring native plant sale;
- To provide education and outreach to individuals and public groups by way of speakers, guided walks, and community events; and,
- To donate money to local conservation and related education efforts.

Blue Ridge Wildflower Society

P. O. Box 20011, Roanoke, VA 24018

*A chapter of the
Virginia Native Plant Society*

*Follow us on Facebook at
[Facebook.com/blueridgewildflowersociety](https://www.facebook.com/blueridgewildflowersociety)*

Member inquiries, events, submissions:
brws.membership@gmail.com

General information and requests:
info.blueridgewildflower@gmail.com

Officers and Board Members

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Jennifer McCarthy, Lynchburg

Vice President

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Kathy Sink, Roanoke

Secretary

vacant

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vacant

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Rebecca Ross, Roanoke

Garden Coordinator

Linda Harrison, Salem

Membership/Digital outreach

Rodelin Palmer, Roanoke

Newsletter Editor

Lissa Paulson, Lynchburg

Picnic Coordinator

Carol Whiteside, Roanoke

Plant Sale Coordinator

Heather Butler, Fincastle

The BRWS newsletter is published three times annually: spring, summer, and fall. Photos and articles for publication are welcome and encouraged. Please send them via email to brws.membership@gmail.com.
Deadline for summer issue: June 30



Blue Ridge Wildflower Society
P. O. Box 20011
Roanoke, VA 24018

At a Glance: Spring 2026 activities

March 23 th 6 p.m.	Meeting: "Pollinator Waystations"
April 7 th 1 - 4 p.m.	Wildflower Walk at Green Hill Park, Salem
April 11 th 10 - 3 p.m.	Native Plant Event at Explore Park, Roanoke
April 14 th 10 a.m.	Beale Garden in the Spring, Hollins University, Roanoke
April 17 th 2 p.m.	Wildwood Park, Radford
April 18 th 1 p.m.	Dorothy Bliss Botanic Garden, Lynchburg
April 18 th 10 - 3 p.m.	Earth Day Celebration, Grandin Village, Roanoke
April 21 st 11 - 2 p.m.	Earth Day Celebration, Old City Cemetery, Lynchburg
April 25 th 10 a.m.	Smartview Park, Blue Ridge Parkway, Floyd
April 27 th 6 p.m.	Meeting: "Exotic Invasives"
May 2 nd 1 p.m.	BRWS's Annual Native Plant Sale, Roanoke
May 9 th 9 a.m.	Lapsley's Run, Boutetourt County
May 18 th 10 a.m.	Meeting: "Lycopods and Dragons"
June 8 th 6 p.m.	Meeting: "Deer--Oh Dear"

