



Claytonia

Newsletter of the John Clayton Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society

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Our Zoom meeting at 7pm on Thursday, Jan 21st: VNPS President Nancy Vehrs on “Spring Wildflowers of Northern Virginia”



Brigitte Hartke

Nancy and a Swamp Milkweed pose for a photo.

Nancy Vehrs joined the Virginia Native Plant Society in 1988 shortly after buying her own home in suburbia. She has served as its president since 2012 and also serves as the president of her local chapter, the Prince William Wildflower Society. Growing up in Manassas near the banks of Bull Run, Nancy traces her love of wildflowers to her discovery of masses of Virginia bluebells in bloom there when she was a young girl. She is an alumna of the College of William & Mary, where she majored in Economics. In 2012 she retired from a 32-year career in Fairfax County government, with the last 21 years as clerk to its Board of Supervisors. Nancy is a member and former board director of the Prince William Conservation Alliance, a member and past president of the Prince William Committee of 100, a board director of the Upper Occoquan Service Authority (a water reclamation public utility), and a member of a number of conservation organizations. Along with her companion Harry Glasgow, she helps lead regular bird walks at Huntley Meadows Park in Fairfax County and at Merrimac Farm Wildlife Management Area in Prince William County. She enjoys visiting parks and natural areas where she can immerse herself in nature. Nancy and Harry share their Manassas home with two delightful kitties, Little Nicky and Henry David.



From the President

My best wishes to every one of you for a Happy New Year in 2021. May it be filled with good health, many native plants, and happiness! May the pandemic end and may there be good beginnings for us all.

If you are, as I was, innocent in your admiration of the cute red berries of *Nandina domestica* in winter, stop right there! Yes, we planted it in our yards. We also thought that it would provide food for birds like Cedar Waxwing, American Robin, Northern Mockingbird, Eastern Bluebird, and other birds that depend on winter fruits to survive. Nevertheless, it turns out that this so-called Heavenly Bamboo or Sacred Bamboo is a murderous plant in spite of its lovely names. It turns out that it contains the poison hydrogen cyanide (HCN), which is highly toxic to all animals. Sudden death with no visible explanation can occur in one minute to an hour. How did we discover this after so long a period of having it in our gardens? When dozens of Cedar Waxwings were found dead in Thomas County, Georgia, researchers at the College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Georgia, were curious to know why. They found the cause to be Nandina berries. All the dead birds had intact Nandina berries in their crops. There was hemorrhaging in the heart, lungs, trachea, abdominal cavity, and other organs. When I thought of how much these birds had suffered, it was a powerful reason for me to remove those plants from my yard and to write about it in my letter to you. In fact, there have been “sudden deaths” of birds reported in many parts of the country without people realizing the reason why this had occurred. Nandina is also poisonous to cats, dogs and other animals. Nandina has also become invasive and invaded our national parks, national wildlife refuges, and national forests. Please plant natives instead, and if you do not wish to remove the plant, please be sure to remove the berries each year so as not to harm wildlife or pets. In fact, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and most states classify *Nandina domestica* as a noxious, non-native, invasive weed from China and Japan. Unfortunately, many commercial landscapers are still planting Nandinas. Read more about it at: https://ar.audubon.org/news/nandina-berries-kill-birds?fbclid=IwAR1_BQXeKDZ-rFGDnddpjR1qIQ4IoJCuA-gEfO7XXBC5vLhTri9Y2pM2w8QI

Late in October, I took a ride through the curving up and down Route 6 near Charlottesville towards the Quarry Gardens at Schuyler with three friends. We entered the gardens via a very rural road passing the area where *The Waltons* was filmed; there is a museum and you can buy souvenirs. We turned into Schuyler Road and found a huge stone announcing the Quarry Garden site. It is closed because of Covid-19 but one of the staff who was working allowed us to come and visit the garden when we told him we were VNPS members from the Coastal area. It is located near the Rockfish River. The gardens are in a 40-acre site where two retired soapstone quarries were located, and 400 acres of Virginia Conservation Easement surround it. In the Quarry Garden property, there are three forest communities. The *Sempervirens* issue of September 2020 described the garden and announced that it has become our newest registry site. The garden consists of trails where native plants abound. You can see prairie plantings,



A view of the quarry

butterfly and pollinator gardens, wetlands, vernal pools, a fern gully, and a talus pool. The first thing I noticed was the multitude of beautiful rocks and stones around the property. We walked to an overlook over the 45-foot deep pits and 45-foot deep water. As we continued on to the path made of steps going towards the former quarries, we saw a huge area covered in moss and lichens with a view to the pool, which has filled one of the former quarries. I looked around and found one patch of lichens on top of the moss. On top of the lichen, there were little tiny mushroom-looking things. I finally found a name for it, Pink Earth Lichen, that is in no way a mushroom. One can find this Pink Earth Lichen in Eastern North America from Alabama and Georgia north to the Arctic Circle. It prefers to grow directly on unstable soils such as loose sand or dry clay, and in full sun. It also prefers acid soils to neutral or alkaline. It is related to British Soldiers (*Cladonia cristatella*) that look like, but are not, tiny red mushrooms. It is also related to Candy Lichen. Candy Lichen is green with pink shapes like mushrooms. Its informal name is “Fairy Puke” (I will spare you the photograph of it). All these lichens are very important to ecology because they transfer nitrogen from the air to the soil so that plants can use it. They break down old wood and eventually rocks on which they can grow so it becomes bits of soil. For more information check out the article Helen Hamilton wrote about British Soldiers in the February 2019 Flower of the Month. You can find her article on the Virginia Native Plant site.



Pink Earth Lichen

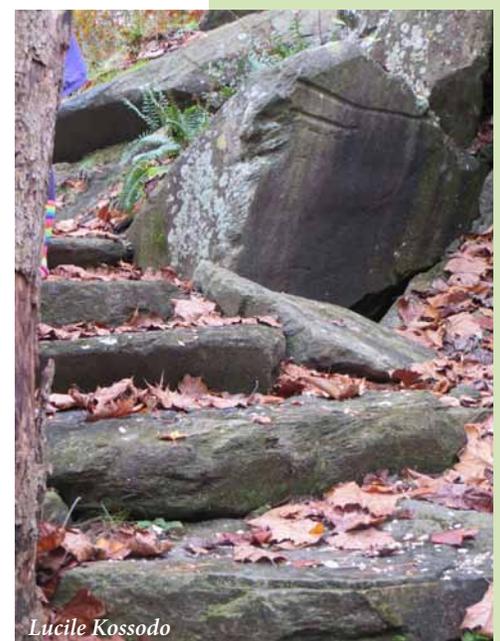


British Soldiers Lichen



Mosses and lichens covering the ground

The view from above continued and it felt magical because of the mossy patches toward the steps. We then took a path down to the ponds via huge stone steps, made with stones removed before the workers arrived to the layers of the soapstone quarries. We came upon a huge stand of tall Royal Ferns (*Osmunda spectabilis*). There were Asters still in bloom. One such was a New England Aster (*Syphyotrichum novae-angliae*). There were many Wavy-leaved Asters (*Symphyotrichum undulatum*) with their pale colors blooming everywhere. I even saw some Zigzag Goldenrods (*Solidago flexicaulis*) in bloom; although there were other goldenrods, they were not in bloom. There were also many grasses in their fall colors and native plants no longer blooming.



Those huge stone steps

All along the path going down there were leaves of Crane-fly Orchids (*Tipularia discolor*). These plants have puckered green leaves that are purple underneath. These orchids were growing on the path between stepping-stones and the sides of the path all along the area. It is quite a dramatic setting in which to descend the steps to arrive at the ponds. There were even wooden steps up and down with a bridge made of wood to make the descent slow and beautiful. There are huge stones everywhere that are amazing to those of us from the coast where every stone that we have in our gardens has been carefully brought from elsewhere. There was a fern gully filled with Northern Maidenhair Ferns (*Adiantum pedatum*). Other fern gullies has all sorts of different ferns, including maidenhair ferns. Seeing the leaves of plants that bloom in spring and summer made me wish to return next April. I also smelled and saw the Elegant Stinkhorn mushroom, *Mutinus elegans*. This mushroom feeds on decaying material on the wood floor and has mycelium that spread out quite far underground and dissolve leaves and decaying wood. It seems that when there is a lot of rain, the Elegant Stinkhorn appears above ground. It is the fruiting reproductive form.

There was also Common Stinkhorn, *Phallus impudicus*, which has a green top. Both mushrooms have a nasty smell. They exude a liquid to attract insects like flies that feed on it and spread the spores in the forest. I also saw two lovely bell-shaped mushrooms that are Shaggy Mane Mushrooms (*Coprinus comatus*). They first appear like a closed umbrella and then open up to a bell-shape, at which time their white gills turn black. The white top looks like a nice shaggy skirt. They live off decaying matter, being a sort of recycler. I admired the yellow Jack O'Lantern mushrooms (*Omphalotus olearius*) that were appropriate during the Halloween time of the year.

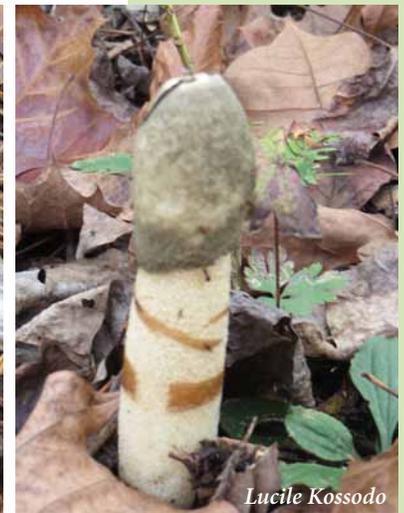
They may look like chanterelle mushrooms, but these are poisonous even though they have an aroma like apricots. As you continue on the main path, there are paths that lead to benches overlooking the water where one could sit and admire the huge walls of the



Crane-fly Orchids



Elegant Stinkhorn



Common Stinkhorn



Jack O'Lanterns



Shaggy Mane

quarry and various views into the water and across to the hills nearby—a place to enjoy the peace and beauty of the garden. On the path back up to the top above the quarry, there are interesting stone items that are fun to admire. As you go back up the steps to the top of the quarry, you have the tranquil feeling of having walked in such a peaceful place. Across the top of the garden, you see that the garden is even bigger than the places I explored. I could have hiked towards the forests and mountains on other paths I left unseen. I dream of visiting it in spring bloom. One can hope that this garden will be open soon.



Wayne Moyer, Lucile, and Kim Schlopp enjoy the view from a bench overlooking the quarry.

Below is an article I have copied with permission from the **Hummingbird Hill Native Plant Nursery's November/December newsletter**, explaining why we should not cut down our plants in winter:

Fall & Winter Habitats

Here in Virginia, our flowering season for native plants is approximately 6 months long, followed by a dormant season of around 6 months. Native habitats are just as important for wildlife and the ecosystem during this dormant half of the year. During the colder weather, food supplies and shelter are scarcer for wildlife. How native plantings are treated in fall/winter will also greatly affect the wildlife at a planting and the health of its plants through the next spring and summer, since a large amount of what they need is derived from this cold period.

... for insects



Perhaps the most noticeable wildlife at native plantings during the blooming season, insects are still present (but less visible) during winter. Many insects begin their life in late summer/early fall, overwintering as eggs or larvae in stems during the cold weather. Others overwinter as adults, hibernating in the standing stems of plants. Some species also hibernate in leaf matter, beneath bark, or under the ground. All of these insects are the ones that will be visibly using native planting when warm weather arrives again. If native plants are cut back as is routinely done in fall with non-native plants, these vulnerable insects may accidentally get cut. Cold air and rain may also get in the opening in the stem that is created and, since the insect is hibernating, it will not be able to move if the spot is no longer suitable. Insects may also not be able to emerge from man-made piles of dead stems.

... for birds

While insects may be the most prominent wildlife seen at native plantings in summer, birds will be the ones visibly seen during the fall and winter. Many insect-eating birds search dead stems and leaves for



hibernating insects at this time of year. Seed-eating birds depend on the standing seedheads of natives and will often not look for the seeds or will be unable to reach them if dead stems have been cut and put in a pile. The grasses and perennials that remain standing will also be of utmost importance to the birds in spring as they are beginning to make their nests.



... for mammals

A variety of mammals use seeds as food, or plant stalks and leaves to create their nests. One example of this is the Meadow Jumping Mouse, which we were lucky to find inhabiting a wet meadow nearby (part of the meadow is wild and is planted to mimic a natural habitat). Native grass seeds are an essential part of this mouse's diet. It harvests these by stretching upwards and gradually snipping the grass stalk bit by bit until the seedheads are near the ground. When the weather turns especially cold, these mice hibernate in a nest made of grasses on the ground in undisturbed territory.



... for amphibians & reptiles

Many amphibians depend on organic matter remaining in native plantings. Salamanders and red efts need the moisture that comes from leaf litter and decomposing plant stalks throughout the year to keep their skin damp and create a place where they can hibernate. Skinks, native lizards, also need this environment to lay their eggs. Along ponds and streams, frogs use the standing plant matter as protection from predators and use the old stems early in spring as support for the eggs they lay.

Standing plant stalks create shelter for all animals by offering protection from predators and the weather. The wildlife difference you'll notice when you keep stems standing is remarkable.

... for the plant

Seeds need to fully develop on standing stalks in order to disperse and continue their cycle, spreading elsewhere to add more native plants to the world to counteract rapidly-diminishing plant populations. Having decomposing matter in native plantings helps to keep the circle of nature unbroken—the old stems, leaves, and seedheads will go back into the ground, giving nutrients to the planting and helping to strengthen the soil composition.

Lucile Kossodo

New Members

We welcome new members **Michael Binder** of Gloucester and **Yuisa** and **Meho Jasarevic** of Yorktown to the John Clayton Chapter.

From Helen...

Wildflower of the Month for December: American Bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*)

Bittersweet is popular for home decorations around the holiday season. It blooms in the spring with small green flowers that produce yellow fruit. In the fall hanging clusters of yellow-orange fruit split open to show bright red-orange seed coats. The broad oval leaves turn clear yellow in the fall, and then drop, allowing the berries to show to best advantage.

This twining, woody vine will grow to 20 feet or more vertically or sprawling horizontally over bushes and fences, but it can be pruned to a desirable shape. It prefers rich, evenly moist soil in full sun or light shade and will grow in many habitats, including fencerows, forest edges and roadsides. The plant will tolerate abuse, including heat, drought, and even salt. It is native to the Virginia peninsula and mountains and ranges south to Florida and Texas.

Plants are male or female, and both sexes are needed for fruit set. Pollination is by insects, especially bees, and also by wind. There is a cultivar “Autumn Revolution” that is self-pollinating; only one plant is needed to produce large and abundant fruits.

Unfortunately, the native American bittersweet is declining, while the nonnative Oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*) is spreading and increasing in abundance. Oriental Bittersweet is commonly sold for home decorations in the holiday season because the small fruits occur in clusters all along the stem, and the native American Bittersweet grows large fruits in profusion only at the tips of the stems.

Oriental Bittersweet is a highly invasive species in Virginia. It is native to Japan, Korea, and China and was brought to this country in the mid 1800s as an ornamental. Now naturalized in states from Maine to Georgia and west to Iowa, this robust vine covers natural vegetation, forming thick pure stands. It can girdle trees, strangle shrubs, and the weight of the vine weakens the crown and eventually kills the tree. It takes over the landscape, like kudzu. Control is difficult—a few vines can be pulled by hand but any roots remaining will resprout.



Larry Reis

The fruits of American Bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*)



Seig Kopinitz

...and those of Oriental Bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*)

Be careful when buying bittersweet at garden centers and farmer’s markets—if the fruits occur along the stem at leaf axils, it is Oriental Bittersweet. When used as home decorations, the seeds are released to the landscape after the stems are discarded.

Don’t buy Oriental Bittersweet!

Sidewalk Crack Mosses

The growing season for most plants is over by the end of fall—even the asters that can persist into December have shriveled and finished their blooming for the season.

But winter is the season when many mosses are green and reproducing. Easy to see on cold rainy days in January are those that live in the mortar between the concrete in sidewalks and brick walls and in asphalt.

Mosses don’t require much to make a life. A little moisture and a tiny amount of mineral soil and their spores open to start new growth. These small plants are pioneer species, making a home for the plants that have tubes to transport water (vascular plants). Only one cell thick, they soak up water from the environment. If no water is available, they will be dormant until the next drop arrives. A vigorous population of mosses allows the seeds of vascular plants to sprout; Norie Burnet of Eden Woods in Chesterfield tells visitors that a moss garden is just as much work as a wildflower garden since the vascular plants are constantly “invading” the moss carpet.

Here are 3 common mosses easily recognized without magnification. These tiny plants usually do not carry common names since there are so few observers. A few authors have invented some names that try to describe the plant.

Bryum argenteum a.k.a. “Silver Moss”

This is the moss most characteristic of cracks in sidewalks, also found along paths and in gardens and fields. The entire plant is no more than 1 cm tall (less than ½ inch) and the leaves are only 1 mm long. Round stems are upright, tightly packed, and appear silvery to pale green since the leaves have lost their chlorophyll at the tips. Nothing else looks like this moss in sidewalk cracks. The second name “*argenteum*” is Latin for “silver.”

The photo includes an emerging vascular plant enjoying the lush environment provided by the moss.



Helen Hamilton

***Entodon seductrix* a.k.a.
“Cord Glaze Moss”**

Named probably by a female botanist who reports “Dried, the moss looks like glossy embroidery floss.” It is found everywhere—on tree bases, rocks, concrete blocks, roof shingles, asphalt, in mortar, and on sidewalks. It is easily recognized by shiny, green-yellow stems that are round and wormlike, with scaly overlapping leaves.

“*Entodon*” refers to the teeth in the capsule; Ralph Pope, author of a field guide, says the name “*seductrix*” suggests the author “clearly spent too many years in the lab.”

***Weissia controversa* a.k.a.
“Pigtail Moss”**

The bright yellow-greenish leaves are twisted, like pigtails. This small moss often forms large cushions in open bare soil or on soil over rock and cement. The genus name honors botanist F.W. Weiss and the epithet (species name) refers to problems with nomenclature.

Helen Hamilton



A closeup



John Clayton Chapter’s 2021 Native Plant Sale

Anticipated Date: Saturday, May 1

Yes, we are planning a Native Plant Sale this spring. Because of the COVID pandemic, like last year, we are planning to have a Limited Plant Sale for invited members and friends. Early in April, 1–2 weeks in advance, we will ask you to register for times, so be ready to sign up for those early slots.

On May 1st, Jim and Joan Etchberger have graciously offered to hold the sale again at their home at 100 Woodland Road just north of Williamsburg. On April 24th, we may also offer a smaller sale in Newport News, location to be determined.

Our annual native plant sale is how we achieve our mission of education and use of native plants in our landscapes. The proceeds also help raise funds for our educational programs and Nature Camp scholarships. Nature Camp is offering modified programs during the pandemic.

**VNPS
Plant Sale
2021**

We will need your help! In early spring, we will be holding physically distant potting parties and organizing other volunteer tasks to prepare for and conduct the sale itself. In the spring, we will need many more plants potted, labeled, and sorted. We will also purchase plants from organic nurseries.

This fall, we held a couple of very successful potting parties and have stored over 100 plants for the winter. We especially appreciate our volunteers who were willing to help while keeping distant.

If you have any thoughts or questions about the sale, please contact Adrienne Frank at Adrienne-gary@cox.net.

Thank you from the 2021 Plant Sale Committee,
Adrienne Frank, Cathy Flanagan, Sue Voigt, and Lucile Kossodo

From Sue...

Stonehouse Habitat Report

Thanks to VNPS members who helped in October and November at the Stonehouse schoolyard habitat by weeding, thinning plants, and potting them for our native plant sale next spring. Weeds continue to thrive there, but I recently cleaned up many dead plants including Mistflowers, Goldenrod, and Maypop. Teachers continue to enjoy the garden for lunch breaks even during the pandemic. Watch for opportunities to help in the garden in 2021.

Sue Voigt

Sue included these photos—



Sue Voigt

No leaves left, but plenty of fruit on a Winterberry at Stonehouse on December 13



Sue Voigt

A colorful dogwood on the top of a bank on her property overlooking cypress trees on both sides of Diascund Creek between New Kent and James City Counties. This photo was taken on November 10—they are all bare now.

From Out in Left Field

Ailanthus: Tree of Heck—Looking for another plant to hate, and kill?

In August, I got an email from the Blue Ridge PRISM (Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management, blueridgeprism.org) announcing that Ailanthus, or tree of “heaven,” has been added to Virginia’s Noxious Weeds List, along with Porcelainberry, Oriental bittersweet, Mile-a-minute, Hydrilla, and Incised fumewort.

What does it mean to be on that list? Here’s a quote from PRISM’s website, under “News”:

“Once a plant is on this list it may not be sold at your local nursery nor be moved across State lines (except where a permit has been approved for use such as for experimental research). You are also not allowed to transport it anywhere within Virginia. Any person who fails to comply with this law is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor.”

Okay! Bad plant! We already knew that, but it’s good news that it’s been officially designated. As if that isn’t bad enough, it has come to the attention of the scientific community that “Spotted Lanternfly adults primarily feed on branches and trunks of tree-of-heaven and willow.” (Also quoted from PRISM website.)

How to identify it?

On my frequent walks, I had started noticing some ailanthus trees at the edge of my neighborhood. As expected, they were making my teeth gnash every time I spotted them. They were smallish, and looked like a new outbreak, which always gets me going...if you can stop it early, it’s a little more...doable).

The first step was to make sure I knew what I was looking at. I checked the PRISM website, again (the ailanthus Fact Sheet is titled “Furiously Aggressive Invasive”) and saw photos of the ailanthus leaves, alongside trees that look similar. Finally, I found the best way for me to i.d. the small trees...pick off a leaf, crush it, and smell it, for the “rancid peanut-butter odor of its crushed leaves and stems.” Wow. Very stinky! That, along with the un-toothed edges and weird little blobby shapes at the base of the leaflets made it clear that they were, indeed, ailanthus (ailanthi?).

How to kill it?

At the end of August, I got an email from PRISM that said: “Alert—Treat Ailanthus (Tree of Heaven) Now.” Okay, perfect timing! Apparently, the best time to kill them is fall, before the leaves fall off.

The Fact Sheet recommended, for trees with trunks less than 6 inches in diameter, basal bark treatment with herbicide, applied in a complete circle, onto the lowest 12 inches of the trunk. No hacking the bark at this early growth stage, but for larger trees, they suggest hacking around the trunk, leaving about 2 inches between the cuts, to move the herbicide into the roots more effectively, and to prevent the tree from sending up suckers. Interesting.



The Virginia Department of Forestry recommends using Triclopyr ester at 20–25%, and the PRISM fact sheet said to dilute it in mineral oil. So, I purchased, online, Pathfinder 2, which is pre-mixed, so I didn't have to find the right oil and...whatever. I applied it around the bark of the young trees with a sponge applicator (to avoid having to spray it) in October, and they are looking pretty...dead...right now.

What next?

Of course, I'm keeping my eye on them, in case they come back from the dead. And, FYI, I have a LOT of the Pathfinder 2 left over; I had to buy a very large amount because it was the only way it was available. So, if you have some ailanthus you want to kill, let me know. There's plenty to share.

And don't forget english ivy! Now's the time to cut-and-dab the vines, with a much-lower likelihood of ticks, chiggers, and the like. What could be more fun?



Dead ailanthus trees, still under surveillance.

Kathi Mestayer

This just in!

Register for Chris Ludwig's "The Conservation of Virginia's Native Plants" via Zoom on Wednesday, January 13, 7:00–9:00 pm!

Here's how:

On the VNPS website, go to "Calendar" under "Events" to learn more about Chris Ludwig's work on the *Flora of Virginia* project and to register for this Zoom meeting.

John Clayton Chapter Calendar

Wednesday, January 13 **7:00–9:00 pm: Chris Ludwig on Zoom: “The Conservation of Virginia’s Native Plants”** (See Page 12.)

Thursday, January 21 **7:00 pm: Our January Zoom Meeting: VNPS President Nancy Vehrs on “Spring Wildflowers of Northern Virginia”** (See Page 1.)

Saturday, May 1 **John Clayton Chapter's 2021 Native Plant Sale** (Details on Page 9)

There are no Chapter walks planned for January and February.

Keep a lookout for announcements about any additional walks or other events in the local newspapers and on our website at www.vnps.org/johnclayton.

Renew online at www.vnps.org or use the membership renewal form below.
Please contact Membership Chair **Cathy Flanagan** at 757-879-1997 or at flanagan.catherine@gmail.com with questions about your membership.

Membership Form for John Clayton Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society

(Place checks in the boxes below next to your selections.)

I am a **new member** of the John Clayton Chapter **renewing member** of the John Clayton Chapter

Name		
Address		
City	State	Zip
Email*	Phone*	

I would like to receive my newsletters electronically at the email address above.

Membership dues

Individual (\$30) Family (\$40) Patron (\$50) Sustaining (\$100) Life (\$500)

Student (\$15) Associate (\$40)—for groups who designate one person as delegate

I wish to make an additional contribution in the amount of \$ to John Clayton Chapter to VNPS

This is a gift membership; please include a card with my name as donor.

I have time a little time no time to help with activities.

I do not wish to be listed in a chapter directory.

**Please Note:* John Clayton Chapter does not distribute any of our membership information to other organizations. It is used only by the officers and chairpersons of our chapter.

Make your check payable to **VNPS** and mail to: VNPS Membership Chair
400 Blandy Farm Lane, Unit 2
Boyce, VA 22610