



# Claytonia

Newsletter of the John Clayton Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society

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[www.claytonvnps.org](http://www.claytonvnps.org)

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## Our Zoom meeting at 7 pm on May 20: Mary Lee Epps on “The Pipevine Swallowtail Butterfly and Its Virginia Host Plants”



After teaching economics for twenty-five years at the University of Virginia, Mary Lee Epps is focusing on learning more about natural history in retirement. She is president of the Jefferson Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society, a member of the Rivanna Master Naturalists, and part of the leadership team for the Blue Ridge PRISM, a new multi-county effort to encourage both public agencies and private landowners to co-operate in controlling invasives. She

is a frequent volunteer for the Ivy Creek Natural Area, where she leads plant walks and school tours and serves on the Education Committee. She also for many years served as a 4-H leader, most recently working with a Junior Naturalist 4-H Club based at Ivy Creek.

## From the President



Spring is here; I saw my first hummingbird on April 14. He came to my bird feeder and sat on the little red metal hummingbird finial to tell me that he was back in Virginia and ready for the beauty of spring.

In other news, the US Senate declared April as Native Plant Month. The great news is that it was a bipartisan resolution. Introduced by Senators Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii) and Rob Portman (R-Ohio), it means that finally, they are declaring that native plants benefit people, birds, and other wildlife. It has always been our belief but now it is inspiring others to plant natives to benefit our environments. As they stated, “Many of our green spaces are dominated by non-native species like ginkgoes, London plane trees, and other popular imports. These plantings often require extra water in drier climates or

the use of pesticides or other types of additional care in general.” I have seen this to be true. In the square opposite the Williamsburg Library Japanese wisteria has been cultivated to cover the pergola. Why? Instead, they could have covered it with our native wisteria that is less invasive. When I recently walked in New Quarter Park, I noticed areas of the park planted with Nandina, a non-native plant that has berries that are poisonous to birds. A native plant like Mountain Laurel, Coneflower, Button Bush, or Joe-pye-weed could help birds. Birds need to have native plants with berries that they will eat and which are hosts to caterpillars birds need to feed their babies. True, native plants are not easy to come by unless one knows that the Virginia Native Plant Society has a list of native plant nurseries. Our sale of Native Plants will be a great resource for our members and friends (see article talking about our sale).

One of the natives that appear in April is the well-named Spring Beauty, *Claytonia virginica*. It is tiny but lovely. The leaves are thin and spring green with a little flower which can be white or pink, with stripes on its five petals. Ants disperse the seeds but many insects visit these plants. Carol Gracie’s book *Spring Wildflowers of the Northeast* answers the mystery of the changing color of white or pink. “Selective pressures are working at cross-purposes: in years of high herbivory by slugs (usually years of high rainfall), white flowers are more successful at producing seeds; in years when herbivory is diminished but fungal infection is high, pink flowers are more reproductively successful.” Whatever the reason for the colors, these flowers are a beautiful sight.

Another of the beautiful sights in April are the Mayapples emerging from the ground and opening up as if an umbrella is unfurled in the rain. Mayapples are like a green carpet on the ground. Some people call Mayapples by the name of Mandrakes. The fruit of a Mayapple resembles the Mediterranean plum *Mandragora officinarum*. In fact, Mandrake is even mentioned in the Bible (Gen 30 14–16). This plant was supposed to increase fertility; today, most of us have forgotten about Mandrake. Be aware that all parts of Mayapples, apart from the ripe fruit, are poisonous—even touching a root may cause dermatitis. Mayapples contain the alkaloids hyoscamine and scopolamine. These produce hallucinogenic effects as well as narcotic, emetic and purgative results; one could end up in the hospital for a long time or dead if one eats anything but the ripe fruit. The fruit is ripe when it turns yellow and falls off the plant in May. Chipmunks and deer like the taste of the ripe Mayapples and seem to know when the fruit is ripe and safe to eat so they can harvest them. Other sources say that deer do not eat them. Who knows? In the July 16, 2011 edition of *Edible Manhattan*, Forager Marie Viljoen writes that the scent of a ripe Mayapple is like “passion fruit and a little like pineapple with a hint of guava.” The taste is “mildly astringent and utterly delicious,” she says. She took two bites but then fear hit her as she realized that in two bites, she had eaten the poisoned inseparable seeds, but since they were ripe, she suffered no bad effects.

Mayapples are perennials often found in Eastern woodlands from the north all the way to Texas in zones 3–8. It is the only member in the genus of barberry. One can easily identify it. It grows 12–18 inches and each plant has a single stem with one or two large umbrella-like leaves. If it has two leaves it may produce a white flower with 6–8 petals in early spring. The flower is difficult to see, as the leaves hide it underneath. The fruit is green and turns to yellow when it ripens and falls off. The best use of the fruit is in preserves and jellies. The Latin name is *Podophyllum peltatum*. *Podo* in Latin means foot and *phyllon* means leaf in Greek. Apparently, the people who named plants thought it looked like a duck's foot. *Peltatum* is the Greek word for a shield. It means that the leaves form what biologists name a “peltate” formation. The stem below the leaf comes up to join it around the center of the leaf's underside (as opposed to around the margins of the leaf). It is the tubers connected by fleshy fibers that help give Mayapple its appearance of an umbrella. Mayapples grow in full to partial shade. This plant appears in spring and then disappears in summer. It has peltate and downward spreading roots at the nodes. Last week I took a walk on a friend's property and came upon a magical sight; the area in the woods had moist soil and there Mayapples grew in profusion. I could see between them hundreds of Spring Beauties (*Claytonia virginica*) blooming, along with violets. The Mayapple and *Claytonia virginica* bring much of April's beauty to woods and gardens. I felt lucky to have seen them all in such profusion. I felt grateful to come home and see that the Mayapples in my backyard were expanding. I hope that in fall I can plant some *Claytonia virginica* next to them.

### Be on the lookout for Chamber Bitter!

A few years ago, I started seeing something which at a very quick glance I thought was Common Partridge Pea, *Chamaecrista fasciculata*. I regret to say I ignored it the first year, maybe because I hoped it was Common Partridge Pea having expanded in my garden. The next year this mimosa-like weed had spread beyond my wildest nightmares all over the yard, in flower beds, and in the lawn. I then researched it and found out it was something called Chamber Bitter, *Phyllanthus urinaria*. It is an Asian plant that people thought helped with urination problems. Well, it is harder to remove than Asian Stilt Grass and incredibly invasive. I removed it in the thousands but was unable to remove it all before winter arrived. I am aware that I shall have to work on this removal for quite a while since I do not use chemicals in my yard on account of pollinators. Now that I have studied it, I can tell



A Mayapple flower hanging beneath its foliage



Spring Beauties in bloom among the Mayapples



The flowers and leaves of Partridge Pea

that it is similar but different. The leaves are wider and more sturdy than those of Common Partridge Pea. Behind each stem there are seeds to be sure they spread all over. If you see it, remove it immediately. Below are two photos of Chamber Bitter; the second one shows the seeds in back of the stem. **Lucile Kossodo**



*Left, Chamber Bitter's foliage;  
above, its seeds*

## New Members

We welcome new members **Karen Crockett Clements** of Yorktown, **Judy Kline** of Gloucester, and **Deborah Ward McKeon** of Cobbs Creek to the John Clayton Chapter!

## 2021 JCC VNPS Plant Sale

Our chapter's 2021 Native Plant Sale was a great success. It was held in two locations: on April 24th in Newport News and May 1st in Williamsburg, both at private homes. For a second year, the sale was limited to members of our John Clayton Chapter and local master naturalists, because so many were dual members. The Newport News location sold approximately 340 plants to 40 buyers and Williamsburg approximately 550 plants to 80 buyers. A few buyers bought 1 or 2 plants and others bought 3 wheelbarrows full.



Native plant buyers browse at our April 24 Plant Sale in Newport News.



The cashier's table at our May 1 Williamsburg Plant Sale

## VNPS Plant Sale 2021

The on-line sign-up this year helped keep COVID restrictions in place. For each half hour slot, 10 buyers could sign-up. In advance of the sale, we were also able to send out information and handouts, making it more cost effective and organized. Buyers were able to come with a list of which plants they wanted to purchase. Buyers could be directed to the specific plants, if available. Shade plants, ferns, and Spicebush were requested often, and that is quite different than the butterfly plants so desired last year. Thankfully, members were very understanding about availability; they understood that we never know what we are going to get.

This year, we grew, collected, and purchased over 800 plants. When we started planning this year's sale, we had no plants. Early in the year, we sent orders of plants to two nurseries for about 200 plants, guessing as to what we might need. The rest of the plants were donated.

Potting parties at Stonehouse School gave us a large quantity of plants, and home gardeners offered many more. Two of our members propagated numerous plants to sell in Newport News and offered plants to Williamsburg, increasing our plant diversity and numbers.

American Wisteria is the 2021 Native Plant of the Year. We had several donors of Wisteria and 8 of the plants were large and beginning to bloom. The plants generated a lot of discussion about growth, planting, and comparison to the invasive Chinese Wisteria. We also had some beautiful specimens of John Clayton and Coral Honeysuckle that were purchased.

Trees, shrubs, and vines were donated by a gentleman from Gloucester who has been donating to us for several years. He nurtures plants throughout the year and took several of our seedling plants back to his little nursery to nurture for next year's sale. The Flowering Dogwoods that he brought this year were priced to sell and sold out quickly. During the last few months, we have also made a few new friends and have at least one other option for trees and shrubs next year.

We have quite a few volunteers to thank. We had members who propagated plants, purchased and donated plants, who dug plants from their own gardens, and those that helped at potting parties. We had those who helped on sale day including greeters, talliers, experts, and cashiers. We also had 10 Boy Scouts. The plant sale could not take place without all of their help.

At the Williamsburg sale, we had four members in the role of expert, helping buyers to understand the needs of the plants. There was a bit of identification using the Flora of Virginia and other reference books. There was a bit of encouraging purchase of specific plants to meet garden needs.



Shirley Devan

Two of our experts, Edie Bradbury and Donna Ware (American Wisteria is on the table beside them.)

In Williamsburg, 10 Boy Scouts from Troop 103 helped with set up, transport, and clean up. They set up stakes to designate areas for holding plants for buyers, while buyers were deciding about purchases. They wheeled carts of plants to the cashier and out to the cars. They moved all of the left-over plants back off of the driveway at the end of the sale. Parents of the scouts were invited to purchase plants, and at the end of the sale, scouts were able to pick out one plant for free as a reward for service. They were able to choose which plant they wanted and they chose a wide variety.

As we did last year, after the sale we plan to bring plants to the Botanical Garden for a Lock-Box Sale. Plants will be set out and the public can purchase them on the honor system. The sale profits will be split and the partnership benefits both the Botanical Garden and our chapter. It extends our profit and reach.

The JCC VNPS' mission is primarily education and the native plant sale is an opportunity to educate members, friends, and the public. Next year, we anticipate having a public sale and we want to prepare and conduct it in a way that will promote education. We would like to have more members grow plants that can be donated and distributed. We want to learn more about propagation and intend on holding Propagation Parties, where we can learn more about seeds and plant needs.

Educating youth is also an objective and we would like to promote more activities to achieve that. We need your help. Please let us know your thoughts and what you can offer our chapter. What skills do you have? How can you contribute? Can you help to propagate, grow, educate, and/or volunteer in next year's sale.

Thank you for all of your volunteering, supporting, and purchasing.

**The 2021 Plant Sale Committee**

## Upcoming Events

### **A Plant Walk on Saturday, May 15, 10:00 am: Mountain Laurel Meander, Mariners Museum Park, Newport News**

Enjoy meandering through a natural bower of mature Mountain Laurel. Mountain Laurel is infrequent in Virginia's outer Coastal Plain, but there is no good place along the Noland Trail for close observation, so we will leave the trail and take to the woods. We will walk an older, unimproved trail through the woods, in places steep, slanted, soft, or uneven, with loose logs, protruding roots, fallen trees, an occasional depression or hole, and possibly mud. Spray feet, ankles and cuffs against ticks and chiggers. The Mountain Laurel bloom season is short and its timing is variable depending on weather conditions; we will hope to catch this spring's bloom. We will also see masses of Christmas Fern, Bracken Fern, and Galax with a smattering of Mayapple and Trailing Arbutus. The walk will be led by Virginia Master Naturalist **Larry Lewis** and **Meegan Wallace**.



Mountain Laurel in bloom

Meet at the Mariners Museum Park's meadow area on Warwick Blvd, across from Warwick High School's athletic fields. If you're using GPS, go to the Warwick High School Soccer Field on Warwick Blvd, but turn into the meadow across from the soccer field. Email **Meegan Wallace** at [clmoo3@verizon.net](mailto:clmoo3@verizon.net) to register.

**Saturday, May 22, 10:00 am:**

**Propagation Party at 1212 Country Club Rd, Newport News**  
(rain date May 23, 12:00 pm)

Come help start native plants from seeds and cuttings for future JCC plant sales. We'll provide seeds, cuttings, soil, and flats. You provide the labor and care needed until the plants are large enough to sell or plant out.

Register with **Meegan Wallace**, [clmoo3@verizon.net](mailto:clmoo3@verizon.net).

## **From Helen...**

### **Weeds or Flowers?**

There can be a lot of advantages of growing wildflowers, a.k.a. "weeds" in a lawn or garden. While most are non-native, many bloom early in spring and will furnish nectar for insects that nesting birds need to feed young. These low-growing annuals require no maintenance, no watering, no fertilizer, and will survive mowing, blooming even when a few inches tall. A weedy lawn will grow on steep slopes and rocky areas where the habitat is difficult for turf.

Violets are one of the few Virginia native plants that do well as lawn weeds or ground cover; soon after blooming, the seeds that formed last year sprout new leaves. Virginia Pepperweed has peppery seeds used to season soups and stews, and the young leaves are a healthy addition to salads or used as cooked greens. Wild Pansy is attractive to many small bees and butterflies, including the fritillaries.

Common Dandelion is a familiar perennial weed with a long taproot and milky juice. The rosette of deeply divided bright green leaves is highly nutritious and many gardeners enjoy the early leaves in salads. Dandelion is a member of the Aster Family with no disc flowers, only rays (petals) which are visited by a variety of insects to feed on nectar and collect pollen.

Clovers, members of the Pea Family, add nitrogen to the soil and are favorite foods for bees. Many species of birds and mammals feed on the foliage, flowers, and seeds of White Clover.

Other introduced weeds that appear in early spring are annuals—Bird's-eye Speedwell, Hairy Bittercress, Chickweeds, and Field Madder. These small plants are everywhere in spring, and usually die back in summer. They cover bare soil before favorite garden perennials emerge, and can be viewed as a free cover crop, their roots aerating the soil. Before these little wildflowers set seed in gardens the whole plant can be composted.



Purple Deadnettle  
(*Lamium purpureum*)

Bulbous Buttercup fills fields with golden yellow, while Henbit and Purple Deadnettle furnish purple color all over meadows and along roadsides throughout the summer. But there are 3 weeds that are extremely aggressive and highly invasive. Blooming April through June and then releasing copious amounts of seed, Asiatic False Hawksbeard has a long taproot difficult to pull when the plant is mature. The leaves in a basal rosette superficially resemble those of Common Dandelion, but they are gray-green and the stems are hairy. The yellow flower is small and soon releases wind-blown seeds covered with white bristles. Unless the plant is removed when young, the seeds will sprout plants next spring in sun or shade in gardens and sidewalk cracks.



Mulberry-weed (*Fatoua villosa*)

Asian Stiltgrass has no redeeming qualities, forming extensive patches that overwhelm and eliminate other herbaceous plants. Deer will not eat this plant—it has no nutritive value—they browse on native plants instead, and the invasion of Stiltgrass increases. Wherever a light gap appears in the forest or along a roadside, this extremely invasive plant is everywhere, and impossible to eradicate. The seeds live for years in the soil, and are inconspicuous at the tips of the stems in late summer.

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Asiatic False Hawksbeard  
(*Youngia japonica*)

Mulberry-weed is a recent invasive weed, first reported in Louisiana in 1964 growing in greenhouses and nurseries, possibly spreading from topsoil containing the abundantly produced seeds. The seedling suggests mulberry, but the leaves and stems are densely hairy, and the plant will produce seed when only an inch or so tall. Appearing in mid-summer, it continues to produce seed through October. Hand-pulling before the seeds mature is the best control method in the home garden. All parts of the plant should be placed in the trash, not composted.



Asian Stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*)

In the home garden, hand-pulling or mowing before seeds are produced is helpful. While most spring weeds are more helpful than harmful, these last 3 are noxious invaders, and should be controlled wherever possible.

For more information about native plants visit [www.vnps.org](http://www.vnps.org).

Helen Hamilton

## A Habitat Garden Report from Sue Voigt...

Harry Fahl and JCCW interns Susan Barton and Julie Smith spent two Thursday mornings in April pruning small trees and shrubs in the Stonehouse Elementary schoolyard Habitat maintained by our VNPS chapter. Elizabeth McCoy also helped in the pruning. Sue Voigt, habitat coordinator, appreciated their expertise.



Harry Fahl, Susan Barton, and Julie Smith pause for a photo.



Sue at work in the Habitat Garden



## From Out in Left Field...

### Surprises Springing Up...in Your Own Back Yard

It wasn't long after I became interested in native plants that my observation skills started getting more...intense. My husband says I'm always looking straight down at the trail in front of me, stopping only to pull up a bad plant or photograph a good one. It's his job to look upward...

This spring, a few interesting things popped up right in our wooded back yard. First, the english ivy seedlings are staging a come-back. Could it have something to do with the ivy-wipeout crusade that a neighbor and I conspired on? Her yard was an "ivy desert," covered with it. Not now! (See photo).



Just a few of the trees adjacent to my back yard that we have rescued from english ivy

Then, the ice storm cometh, coating the trees (and everything else), followed by some windy weather. The ice blew off the trees, dropping little bark impressions all over the ground. When I looked (very) closely at the photo, I could see that it was composed of tiny little irregular hexagonal ice segments. Is this hyper-focussing?



Ice crystal

A few weeks later, I wandered out to one corner of the back yard to see if the trout lilies were coming back. YES! After several years, they have finally decided to take over their corner! What a show!



Perfoliate bellwort

At the other corner of the yard, the perfoliate bellwort is still there! It's been thinning out a bit, while moving farther into the sun. I'm just keeping my fingers crossed.

Then, the pollen storm. I've "confirmed" that this year has been an epic year for pollen. Even my doctor agreed. At one point, there was a little sprinkle of rain, and the pollen collected with individual raindrops to form lovely polka-dots on everything. Perhaps the most dramatic were the may-apples.



Trout lilies taking over



Dotty mayapples



Does this look like a fern?  
Really?

Another pleasant surprise is that adder's-tongue has been appearing in new spots. When Helen Hamilton told me it was a fern, I was flabbergasted. Go figure.

And my last spring surprise...a dandelion in the driveway, posing like a real adder, ready to strike!

So, it only takes about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an acre to be constantly intrigued, surprised, and delighted. Especially if you pay (a little too much?) attention.

**Kathi Mestayer**



## John Clayton Chapter Calendar

<b>Saturday, May 15</b>	<b>10:00 am: Mountain Laurel Meander, a Plant Walk at Mariner's Museum Park in Newport News</b> Email <b>Meegan Wallace</b> at <a href="mailto:clm003@verizon.net">clm003@verizon.net</a> to register. (See Page 6.)
<b>Thursday, May 20</b>	<b>7:00 pm: Our May Zoom Meeting</b> <b>Mary Lee Epps on "The Pipevine Swallowtail Butterfly and Its Virginia Host Plants"</b> (See Page 1.)
<b>Saturday, May 22</b>	<b>10:00 am: Propagation Party at 1212 Country Club Rd., Newport News</b> Email <b>Meegan Wallace</b> at <a href="mailto:clm003@verizon.net">clm003@verizon.net</a> to register. (See Page 7.)
<b>A June walk</b>	<b>Donna Ware is working on a plant walk for a date in June; we'll send out an email as soon as the details are firmed up!</b>

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](http://www.vnps.org/johnclayton).

Renew online at [www.vnps.org](http://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](mailto: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