



# 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 July 15: Dr. Christopher Puttock will speak on “How to Propagate Native Plants”

Dr. Christopher (Chris) Puttock is a botanist with four decades of experience in environmental conservation and habitat restoration. He is particularly concerned with the maintenance of ecosystems to function naturally, sustainably, and in preventing the demise of ecological services by human exploitation reaching past the tipping point where nature is permanently damaged.

Since moving to Maryland from Hawaii in 2008 Chris has been a Research Associate at the Smithsonian Institute, National Museum of Natural History, and Executive Director and CEO of Chesapeake Natives, Inc., the only local ecotype nursery producing hundreds of species of plants to sustain the native flora and fauna of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, and he is the current President of the Maryland Native Plant Society. He has supervised more than 40 environmental grants, including Rotary Global Grants with environmental components. He is a founding Director of the Environmental Sustainability Rotary Action Group (ESRAG) and is its current Chair. He is a member of the Rotary Cadre of Technical Advisors.

Chris is a regular speaker at meetings of Rotary Clubs, botanical and native plant societies, master gardeners, master naturalists and garden clubs. He can speak on anything to do with the environment, biodiversity, ecosystem restoration, sustainable food production, environmental resilience, global warming, and the environment.



## From the President

Here I am writing to you again. I am especially writing to new members this time around and all of you who wish they knew what native plants they should have in their yards and how to propagate them. Our speaker at the July meeting will cover this subject.



It is also for those of you who would like to incorporate native plants in your landscape. I saw several interesting articles on the Ecological Landscape Alliance website. Look at the site and you may want to see more articles. They have a series of fantastic photographs of beautiful

native plants.

The first article was entitled something like Lawn Murder or Killing the Lawn, sorry I cannot find it anymore to be sure of the exact title. The funny title interested me right away. The author is Leslie Duthie. She is a lifelong gardener. Formerly, she worked at the Norcross Wildlife Sanctuary, where she was the horticulturist and plant propagator for over 38 years. In her article, she tells what she did to create a 10×10 native plant area. She began with an area that is in the sun. The first step is very important. She had made the decision not to dig up the lawn because she would lose top soil. She also did not want to use herbicides or other chemicals that would harm beneficial insects. Therefore, she collected lots of cardboard. Imagine all the boxes of cardboard from our internet orders during the pandemic. She placed the cardboard on the lawn in spring in the shape of the native plant area she wanted to create. In some places, she had to cut the curves she wanted to have. The second necessity was something to hold down the cardboard. She used decomposing wood chips to cover the cardboard and keep it in place. If you have no decomposing woodchips, you could use branches, bricks or even compost. Wanting to have the cardboard decompose and become part of the soil, she put a 2 to 4 inch cover of soil and compost on top of the decomposing wood chips. The following spring, she was ready to plant. She chose to use some native annuals like Partridge Pea (*Chamaecrista fasciculata*) and scattered them across the soil's surface. Then in May, she planted the plugs and plants she had purchased. She was lucky to have had lots of rain so it all grew well. The plants she chose are those you can find in the Native Plant Guide for Southeast Virginia, including the Hampton Roads Region. In the summer, she removed some of the Partridge Pea to give the perennials more room to develop. Yes, in the heat of summer she did water, not wanting to lose the plants she had bought. She was delighted to see that the pollinators came in big numbers and the birds as well. After the success of this area, she decided that her next project was to do a shade garden. She repeated the process and now her lawn is smaller and she has two native areas.

In another article, “Notable Natives: Large Shrubs and Trees”, written by Sarah W. Middleler, she argues that a native plant border is less effort and work than a native perennial border. It is a different approach to an environmental native area. A lawn with big trees is not a native border because it does not attract wildlife to the garden. A border with small trees and shrubs offers a better visual interest. A border that has flowering plants attracts the eye and the wildlife. The differing layers of plants will protect the landscape in severe weather and offer a varying view in the different seasons. As the author says, “However, the benefits to beneficial insects and birds offered by these plants are perhaps their best features.” Although she wrote about the northeast, she recommends some plants that are native in this area also. One is Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*). Let me tell you, the beautiful blooms that



Above, Lucile's photo of Elderberry flowers in her yard; below, its shiny black fruit



are now in my yard are magnificent. It seems that forty butterflies and moths flock to the flowers. Birds love the berries that follow.

Another plant she recommends is American Hazelnut (*Corylus Americana*), which attracts 124 kinds of butterflies and moths. Birds feast on the catkins that follow the male flowers (both male and female flowers are on the same



American Hazelnut

plant). I just planted a bareroot American Hazelnut as I was totally taken by its interesting details. She recommends native Azaleas that attract 40 species of butterflies and moths as well as hummingbirds. Native azaleas bloom when woodland plants are finished blooming and unlike Asian azaleas may exude a beautiful perfume. Next is the Buttonbush, our 2022 Native Plant of the Year. It has sputnik-like balls

in summer. The blooms attract 62 types of butterflies and moths. As the author says, "It tolerates wet soils but adapts to various soil types except for dry ones." I love mine and hope to get another one at our 2022 Native Plant Sale. Other shrubs the author recommends are Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*), Silky Dogwood (*Cornus amomum*) shrub, Ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*), and Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*). That is a shrub I really like and have in my garden because the red berries are so pretty in the fall. There are many beautiful native Viburnums which we offer for sale at our Native Plant Sales. They look beautiful in the garden. The important thing to remember is that native shrubs attract pollinators, birds, and mammals. You can find all the native trees and more shrubs in the *Native Plants for Southeast Virginia* booklet. You can also find information on many more native shrubs and trees in Douglas W. Tallamy's book *Bringing Nature Home* and Rick Darke and Douglas Tallamy's book *The Living Landscape*. After all of these



Lucile Kossodo

Buttonbush flowers

descriptions and instructions, I hope you will embark on adding these native trees and shrubs in your own yard. All your neighbors will comment on the many birds and butterflies in your yard that they do not see in theirs. Plant them and they will come.

Lucile Kossodo

## New Members

We welcome new member **Susan Walton** of Gloucester to the John Clayton Chapter!

## From Meegan...

### May 15th's walk at the Mariner's Museum

Larry Lewis and Meegan Wallace led a small group along portions of older, less known trails than the Noland Trail at the Mariner's Museum in Newport News. Ferns were the main focus during the early part of the walk where Larry discussed the similarities and differences in each of 5 species encountered; Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*), southern lady fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*), New York fern (*Thelypteris noveboracensis*), netted chain fern (*Woodwardia areolata*), and sensitive fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*). Later in the walk we also saw bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*), cinnamon fern (*Osmunda cinnamomeum*), royal fern (*Osmunda spectabilis*), huge drifts of broad beech fern (*Phegopteris hexagonoptera*) and New York fern, ebony spleenwort (*Asplenium platyneuron*), and adder's-tongue (*Ophioglossum pycnostichum*), for a total of 11 fern species.

Just after the first fern bed we found an American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) that was infested with scale insects. These insects are likely the same scale that affects crape myrtle and is known to cross over to several native species. We picked and crushed all visible scales off the beautyberry.



Mountain Laurel

As we walked along the wooded path, a notable number of sourwoods (*Oxydendrum arboreum*) were observed. This mid-sized understory species occurs on acidic dry to mesic sites and typically develops a contorted form as it leans and twists to reach sunlight. A little farther along the trail we came to a dense thicket of mountain laurels (*Kalmia latifolia*) in full bloom. The flower's interesting pollination strategy was discussed and we all enjoyed trying



Broad Beech Fern

to release the pollen-covered anthers from their protective pouches.

With side-by-side patches of dangleberry or blue huckleberry (*Gaylussacia frondosa*) and black huckleberry (*Gaylussacia baccata*) we were able to see the clear differences in these two Ericaceous shrubs; resin dots on the back of the black huckleberry leaf and on the front and back of the dangleberry leaf. Other ericaceous shrubs found elsewhere included deerberry (*Vaccinium stamineum*), southern highbush blueberry (*V. formosum*), and fetterbush (*Eubotrys racemosa*).



Meegan Wallace

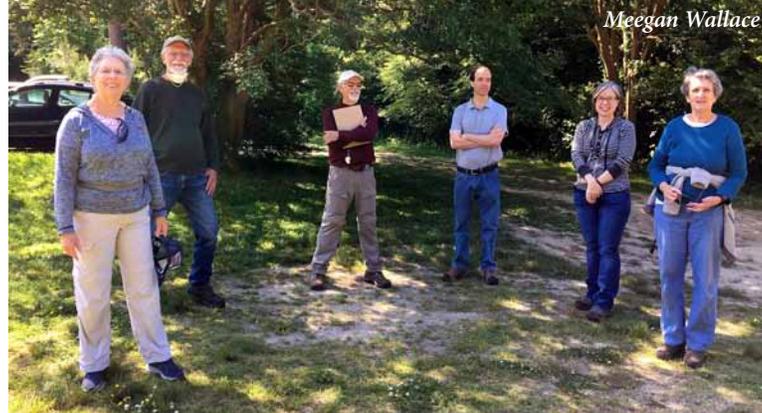
Deerberry in bloom

Galax (*Galax urceolata*) and trailing arbutus (*Epigaea repens*), two species that are infrequent in the coastal plain, occur in a couple of places along the Noland Trail. We found numerous galax in flower, though somewhat past its peak bloom, and saw no arbutus flowers. Maybe we'll try one to two weeks earlier next year.



Meegan Wallace

Flowering Galax



Meegan Wallace

Meegan's happy (and socially distanced) walkers

### ...and a May 22 Propagation Party

Although I thought no one was going to come, I had two late registrants for the first propagation party of 2021. **Camille Fisher** and **Eric Beckhusen** came to help start native plants for future JCC plant sales. They selected seeds from my collection of about 50 species, seeded three full flats each, and started several pots of cuttings to take home and care for. We'll check in later to see how the seedlings are coming along.

Meegan Wallace



Meegan Wallace

Camille and Eric at work

### A Cool Walk in a Calcareous Ravine on June 26, led by Donna Ware

It was, indeed, a pleasantly cool walk. As we splashed our way down a sandy-bottomed small tributary to Colby Swamp in Freedom Park, our feet were bathed in the cool, clear waters of its meanders. Early that morning this outing looked like it might be rained out. Instead, it was book-ended by rain squalls. So, though we did get wet, it was only below the knees.

The overstory of this ravine is what one would expect—red maple, green ash, and black gum, but it is essentially devoid of shrubs. In the winter, the entire ravine bottom is very watery and mucky. On this early summer day, though, by skirting the wetter areas, it was possible to negotiate it without getting muddy. But by choosing the stream as our pathway much of the time, we had a better chance of spotting those species of interest that grow on the slightly elevated berm on either side of the stream where the soil is significantly better-drained.

The timing of this foray fell in the lull between the springtime burst of flowering and that of late summer/early fall, and we noticed only two species in flower, white avens (*Geum canadense*) and enchanter's nightshade (*Circaea canadense*). Both have small white flowers and occur throughout Virginia. Keith Navia identified an elegant damselfly that was flitting around near the enchanter's nightshade as an ebony jewelwing. Its wings were jet black and its abdomen emerald.

Fossil shells scattered in the streambed were a clue that there might be elevated calcium levels in the soils of this ravine, as was the presence of several species presumed to be indicative of such soils. Those species included the already mentioned enchanter's nightshade, which has a smaller cousin, *Circaea alpina*, restricted to high elevations in the mountains; shadow-witch (*Ponthieva racemosa*), a fall-blooming orchid with all of its leaves in a ground-hugging basal rosette, and its lip petal borne uppermost, that ranges northward from South America to southeastern Virginia; a few dog violets (*Viola labradorica*), a blue-flowered violet with aerial leafy stems and roundish lower leaves that is strongly disjunct from the mountains; and blue monkshood (*Aconitum uncinatum*), a member of the buttercup family with lower leaves misleadingly similar to those of certain larkspurs and geraniums. The eye-catching components of its flowers are the deep blue sepals that hide small petals. The uppermost sepal is shaped like a hood. Its primary range is in the mountains and Piedmont, and though rare in the coastal plain, it is locally common in this ravine. We hope to get to



Donna points out something of interest.

see it in flower next year. We saw a stand of tall pawpaws (*Asimina triloba*), too. Although it commonly grows in more acidic places, it especially thrives in calcareous soils. We were happy to spot fruits on some of the pawpaw trees, and even a fat cluster of three fruits on one of them. A single flower contains a few to several pistils and sometimes ripens as many as four pawpaws. Helen Hamilton noted that this ravine harbors, in obvious greater abundance, several bryophyte species that she has seen in other ravines in this area.



A group photo, framed by pawpaw leaves

Two of the species in this ravine are highly poisonous: blue monkshood and spotted water-hemlock (*Cicuta maculata*). Ingestion of monkshood causes symptoms anyone would consider horrific and that may prove fatal. However, spotted water-hemlock trumps that. It has been referred to as “an absurdly violently deadly plant in a family of delicious relatives”. Socrates drank tea made from poison-hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), a close relative of spotted water-hemlock. Though its poison is acutely toxic, poison-hemlock is a much friendlier poison than is spotted water-hemlock, the symptoms of which are too grisly to describe here.

At the end of the trip, Seig Kopinitz shared with the group the cell phone record of an app that charted our course in the ravine. When we saw the graph of our meanderings (at right), it appeared that we surely were under the influence of something!

A sad coda: private property immediately adjacent to this ravine has recently been clear-cut. Japanese stilt grass has invaded and is particularly rampant near the large population of Blue Monkshood.



Donna Ware

## Upcoming Plant Walks



**Wednesday, July 21, 11:00 am**

### Cherry Orchard Bog Natural Area Preserve

Join Natural Heritage Chesapeake Bay Region Steward **Zach Bradford** for a visit to Cherry Orchard Bog Natural Area Preserve in Sussex and Prince George counties. This site features a Coastal Plain Seepage Bog community supporting an unusual assemblage of plants, including large Death-camas (*Zigadenus glaberrimus*), Bog-buttons (*Lachnocaulon anceps*), White Fringed Orchid (*Platanthera blephariglottis*), Cuthbert's Turtlehead (*Chelone cuthbertii*) and Red Milkweed (*Asclepias rubra*). This 354-acre site is maintained by prescribed fire by the DCR Natural Heritage Program. No public facilities are on-site, so perhaps plan to make a pit stop on your way.

The entrance road to the preserve is on Baxter Road (Route 627) at these coordinates: 37.0458258, -77.2837225. Drive down this road a short distance and park in the power line.



**Saturday, July 24, 10:00 am–noon:**

### A Cool Walk in a Calcareous Ravine Revisited

Rainy weather on the June date for this trip led some who signed up to think it had been rained-out. Therefore, this ravine will be visited again on Saturday, July 24th, 10:00 to noon. Meet at the bald cypress trees beside the sidewalk at the little wooden bridge adjoining the parking lot at the Interpretive Center of Freedom Park. Rubber boots or old running shoes are appropriate for safe wading; it is also a very good idea to wear insect repellent. Please see the article in this newsletter to learn about the June visit. Let's go primed to spot other intriguing species and to move into new territory further downstream! Please register by email at [dmeware1001@gmail.com](mailto:dmeware1001@gmail.com) or by text at 757-719-3414.

**Donna Ware**



**Saturday, Aug. 21, 9:00 am: Ferns, Mosses and Forest Plants**

Join **Helen Hamilton** to look for summer forest plants, ferns and mosses on a short trail in **Freedom Park**. The Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists were involved in developing a path that leads to a deep ravine heavily covered with low herbaceous plants. Bring a magnifier to look at tiny plants and a camera to photograph the larger ones. Park near the playground beyond Go Ape.

Contact Helen at 757-564-4494 or [helen48@cox.net](mailto:helen48@cox.net) to register.

## Invaluable contributions from JCC member Susie Yager

Susie Yager joined the JCC of the Virginia Native Plant Society in 2013. She came to us as a Virginia Certified Horticulturist, Peninsula Master Naturalist, and Virginia Living Museum horticulture volunteer. Over the past eight years Susie has become an indispensable member of the chapter and has contributed in so many ways.

Since 2015, she has led two to three plant walks per year at local natural areas including Newport News Park, the Mariner's Museum Noland Trail, and the Matteson Trail. Susie also led a walk at the White Oak Trail at Newport News Park for the 2018 VNPS Annual Meeting. She always made each walk interesting and informative, and no matter how much you thought you knew about plants, you'd learn something new. She has also participated in numerous potting parties, plant rescues, plant sales, the plant sale committee, booth sitting and educational outreach activities, and work days at the Stonehouse Elementary school. What's more, Susie is an avid plant propagator and has started many hundreds of plants for her own vast native wildflower garden, which is a National Wildlife Federation Certified Wildlife Habitat, and for the JCC and other local native plant sales.

During a recent plant dig in Susie's yard, over a two-day period, a few volunteers dug more than 175 plants representing at least 55 species, and Susie was starting even more plants from cuttings while we were digging! Now it's up to us to keep these plants alive until the next plant sale. A few of the special plants dug include perennials such as foam flower (*Tiarella cordifolia*), bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*), Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*), Green-and-gold (*Chrysogonum virginianum*), and wild strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*); several fern species; shrubs including lowbush blueberry (*Vaccinium pallidum*) and New Jersey tea (*Ceanothus americanus*); and trees such as sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) and eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*).

Meegan Wallace

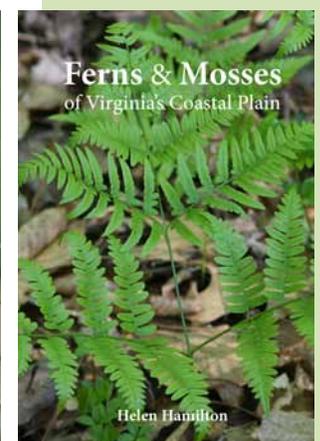
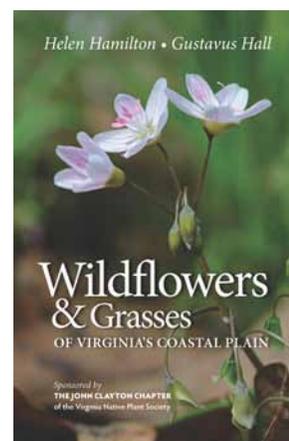
## From Helen...

*Wildflowers & Grasses of Virginia's Coastal Plain* is almost out of print—fewer than a dozen copies remain in the BRIT warehouse. Copies can be purchased from the publisher at BRIT.org and on Amazon.

*Ferns & Mosses of Virginia's Coastal Plain* is available as an ebook on Amazon.



A photo of Susie, front, and other members of the digging party at her home





## From Out in Left Field...

### Saving, and Feeding, Wildlife using Native Plants

Walking out the front door a couple of days ago, I saw a cat (!) in my front yard. It's been awhile since that happened, so I didn't have the slingshot handy\*, but I ran out the front door, hissing loudly, and

chased it across the street, and another yard, until it disappeared.

Okay. I have bird feeders and baths in two areas in the front yard, and they're pretty well-attended. I knew what I had to do.

I grabbed my anvil pruners, and went into the back yard, clipping greenbrier vine sections, and placed them on the ground around the feeder/bath areas. It wasn't easy; the thorns on those vines are really big, and really sharp, but that's why they keep the cats away from wherever you place them. An old friend told us once that you can eat the early sprouts of the vines, which I've done, but I tried to stay focused on the work at hand, and got it done.

This morning, looking out the bathroom window at the feeder area, I saw our little baby bunny hopping over toward them. Oh, no! Would the bunny be injured?

"He" edged up to where I had placed the vines, and flipped one of the leaves over with his paw. Okay, at least he saw them there. Then he started eating the leaves, moving from one vine to another, not showing any sign of distress. So, a good solution. Will keep my eyes out for cats, but this has worked fine in the past. If needed, there are more vines in my backyard to recruit to the effort.

I'm feeling a little bad for the greenbrier, but...it's going like gangbusters.

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\*I used to shoot sweetgum balls at them, just to scare them away.



Chez Mestayer Eat and Splash Stop



Semi-concealed weapons and/or brunch

**Kathi Mestayer**

## John Clayton Chapter Calendar

- Thursday, July 15**     **7:00 pm: Our July Zoom Meeting**  
 Dr. Christopher Puttock will speak on "How to Propagate Native Plants."  
 (See Page 1.)
- Wednesday, July 21**     **11:00 am: A visit to Cherry Orchard Bog Natural Area Preserve** with Natural Heritage Chesapeake Bay Region Steward **Zach Bradford**  
 (See Page 8.)
- Saturday, July 24**     **10:00 am–noon: A Cool Walk in a Calcareous Ravine** with **Donna Ware *Revisited***  
 Please register by email at dmeware1001@gmail.com or by text at 757-719-3414.  
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 Join **Helen Hamilton** to look at summer forest plants, ferns, and mosses.  
 Contact Helen at 757-564-4494 or helen48@cox.net to sign up and for more information.  
 (See Page 8.)

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