



# 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 January 20: Lisa Deaton on “Coastal Oaks”

The Middle and Lower Peninsulas of Virginia are home to two very interesting oak species: *Quercus virginiana*, live oak, and *Quercus pagoda*, cherrybark oak. Live oak's historical uses include vegetable oil, live trail markers, and ship-building. Cherrybark oak was considered a subspecies of *Quercus falcata*, southern red oak, until about 25 years ago. Both species can be good options for shoreline homes and communities due to their resilience to flooding. Learn about the characteristics of these two species and current efforts to preserve the genetics of our native “northern-range” live oaks.



“Kudzu and me”

**Lisa Deaton** is an Area Forester for the Virginia Department of Forestry based in Gloucester. She spent her first 15 years with the Department serving as the Virginia Project Learning Tree State Coordinator and coordinating forest education activities at the New Kent Forestry Center. Lisa holds a B.S. in Forestry and Wildlife from Virginia Tech and has also worked for the U.S. Forest Service, Chesapeake Corporation, and Union Camp Corporation. Lisa has served as a member of the Town of Ashland Parks and Recreation Committee and Roots and Shoots School Garden Coordinator for Henry Clay Elementary School. She is currently a member of the Society of American Foresters and the Virginia Forestry Association.



## From the President

First, I want to wish you all a Happy New Year for 2022. I hope that you had a good holiday in December. Winter is upon us all although it does not look like it today as I write to you. I finally finished a months-long project of putting poultry fencing at the bottom



of the new fencing around my yard. I am hoping, probably foolishly, that it will deter many rabbits from entering my yard and eating my favorite native plants. Yes, they love to eat asters, milkweeds, butterfly weed, Great Blue Lobelia and Wild Yellow Indigo (*Baptisia tinctora*). At present, I have finished the bottom fencing. While I was busy with that project, I did absolutely nothing to remove any stems of plants that are dead until spring. However, the truth is that I would not have done that even if I were not involved in my project. Why not? There are many reasons to leave them alone. Many of us are conditioned to have the garden look orderly and neat. After all, that is what we see in magazines pictures. No, there is a huge reason to leave the plants dying for winter as they are when fall comes upon us. Why? Wildlife is inside those stems.

Many insects exist in the cold by hibernating inside the stems. Leaf litter protects frogs, toads, a butterfly chrysalis, a mantis egg case, or even a butterfly. Some butterflies, like Monarchs, travel south to Mexico, but most stay in our gardens hiding from the winter. Many of these chrysalises either hang from dead plant stems or tuck themselves into the soil or leaf litter. Each time you clean the litter, well, you are killing them, alas. We do not want to waste our resources. Pollinating insects are precious and important.

If it rains or snows, the leaves you leave around your plants help the plant retain moisture in winter. Imagine, if it snows or if there is a frost, all those shapes become visible in a beauty all of its own as compared to snow or ice on a flat landscape. There is so much beauty to be seen in a winter garden. Snow resting on dried seed pods, berries clinging to bare branches, goldfinches flitting around spent sunflowers, juncos hopping beneath old goldenrod fronds, frost kissing the autumn leaves collected at the base of a plant, and ice collected on blades of ornamental grasses and in the veins of leaves. If you enjoy birds, then you will see that more birds will come to the plants and feed on fermenting berries and seeds still on the stems.



A section of the poultry fencing Lucile installed



More homes for insects in an uncleared area



Blue Mistflower's stems and dried flower heads

If you do not clean up your yard, there will be more protein available for the birds when they collect “hibernating” insects away from the dead plant stems, branches or leaf litter. Birds do eat seed at your feeder but they absolutely need protein to survive and breed. Remember that the most insect-nurturing habitat you have, the greater bird population in your yard.

There are also important predatory insects such as assassin bugs, lacewings, big-eyed bugs, damsel bugs, ground beetles, to name some, in your garden’s dead leaves and litter. They overwinter as adults, eggs or pupae. To help them control our early-emerging pests in spring, you have to have them spend the winter in location in your own garden, not elsewhere. They may not be beautiful but they are very useful to us if we let them be.

Native bees are another reason not to clean your fall garden. There are more than 3500 of them. Indeed, they also need a place so that they can be protected from cold and predators. They spend the winter under a piece of peeled bark fallen from the tree or in the hollow stem of a bee balm plant. Bees also hibernate in ornamental grasses.

Native ladybugs also need to have leaf litter so they can nest at the bottom of a plant. We have over 400 ladybugs that are native but do not have the red body and black dots that are familiar to us. These ladybugs do not want to come inside and become pests and they are not Asian ones. Our native ladybugs huddle in groups from small to huge groups of thousands and eat pests in the winter. They eat the soft-bodied pest insects and pest insect eggs. Yes, they are doing us a favor by also helping control pests in spring.

Of course, my silliest reason not to clean the fall garden is the cold. I love to work outside in cool and warm weather but do not enjoy it in the cold, so it is important for me. It is said that all this winter activity helps us enjoy the winter more and feel less stressed while waiting for spring.

OK, so when is it that we are supposed to clean up the garden? According to “Savvy Gardening” newsletter, it is “when the temperatures are in the 50s for at least 7 consecutive days. By then, all the critters living there will be emerging from their long winter nap. And even if they haven’t managed to get out of bed by the time you head out to the garden, most of them will still manage to find their way out of a loosely layered compost pile before it begins to decompose.” We can then have the orderly spring and summer garden we have awaited and planned for all winter.

If there is only one book to recommend to you to read this winter, it is *The Naure of Oaks* by Douglas Tallamy. I began reading it a few nights ago and I discovered that even in January, when everything feels dead, little birds can feed on caterpillars in the small branches of oaks. These caterpillars may be dormant and not moving but birds do seek and eat them. This book follows the oaks’ development month to month, starting in October. Every month there is something going on inside, around, and



on an oak. I cannot wait to read what happens in spring. He explains how to plant oaks so that they will be less likely to fall in storms, why you need oaks, and how to protect all the life forms that live with oaks. Check this book out.

### Native Hollies are not just for Christmas

Holiday cards always show beautiful evergreen hollies with bright red berries, but hollies are more than just a holiday plant. In fact, there are many native species of Holly (*Ilex* genus) in Virginia. **American Holly** is the one you see pictured on cards. It prefers an area of low light and is an understory tree. In my yard, they grow in a mesic area as well as next to the lake. It can grow in well-drained floodplain forests and swamp hummocks. American Holly grows nearly all over Virginia, but not in the area around the Shenandoah mountains. It is evergreen, but like all hollies, only the female trees grow the beautiful bright red berries (drupes). Birds and mammals can eat them, but it is poisonous to humans and pets. The tree's bark is smooth and greyish. The leaves have spines and are leathery. Normal growth is between 15 and 25 feet but if grown with access to moisture, it can reach 60 feet. True, those by Queen's Lake are very tall indeed. Bees, moths, and ants are the important holly pollinators when hollies produce greenish flowers after four years of growth. The Holly tree is associated with many myths both here and in other countries. During the Christmas season, holy or secular, we bring branches into the home for colors to add to the festivities. For Druids hollies signified fertility and life and were thought to have magical powers. For Christians, the green symbolized life. In early times, people brought holly indoors to protect themselves from malevolent faeries. In Celtic mythology there was a Holly King who ruled from mid-summer to the winter solstice. The rest of the year, it was the turn of the Oak King. Many societies believed that cutting a tree was very bad luck, although cutting boughs was acceptable. In Scotland, the name Chuillin is the name for holly, so the local Mc Lean clan adopted holly as the clan badge. In European mythology it was important to plant a holly tree near a house to protect it from lightning. Birds like to nest in hollies, as the spiny leaves can help protect them from predators. My favorite sight in late fall or winter is when I see flocks of Cedar Waxwings gobbling as many red seeds as possible. Other birds that eat them are Eastern Bluebirds, American Robins, Northern Mockingbirds, Hermit Thrushes, Gray Catbirds, and Northern Cardinals.



American Holly (*Ilex opaca*)

Three evergreen hollies can grow in our area. **Inkberry** (*Ilex glabra*) grows mostly in our area with a few in the Piedmont. Inkberry is a shrub rather than a tree and has black drupes rather than red, with leaves lacking spines. It flowers in solitary or three-flowered clusters and is common in the south and central Coastal Plains in peaty forests and swamps. **Yaupon Holly** (*Ilex vomitoria*) grows in maritime forests and



Yaupon Holly

dune woodlands, usually near the coast, and grows north to Mathews and Northampton Counties. There are several species growing in Colonial Williamsburg. Yaupon Holly is a small tree and has very abundant tiny flowers in Spring; its flowers attract bees and other pollinators.

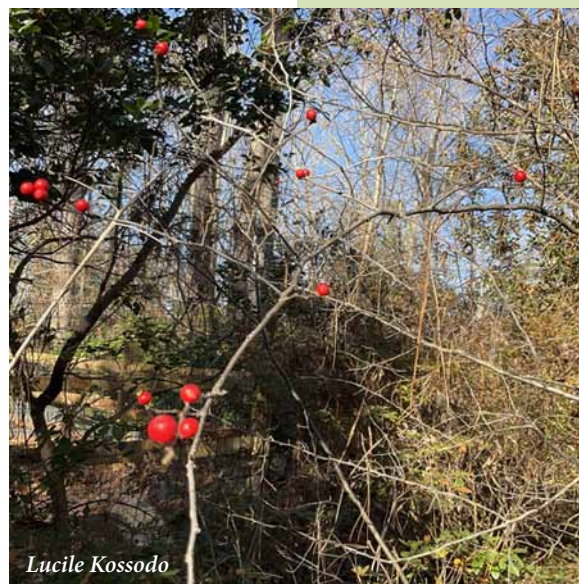
Its drupes can be red, although there are rare varieties with yellow drupes. When the drupes form birds eat them

with pleasure. However, like all hollies, the drupes are poisonous to humans and pets. I have one in my garden which I have had to protect with a fence because the rabbits love to eat it. I hope to see its yellow drupes and flowers this spring.

Three deciduous Hollies can grow in our area in sun or shade. One is **Possum-haw** (*Ilex decidua*). This is a small tree found in the South and Central Coastal Plain as well as in the central Piedmont. Possum-haw prefers to grow in forests and swamps but can grow in mesic flatwoods. It has no thorns. The second deciduous holly is **Winterberry** (*Ilex verticillata*), which grows all over Virginia. It is a shrub and rarely tree-like. It likes to grow in swamps, bogs, ponds, and occasionally in mesic forests and well-drained forests. It also has no thorns. The flowers on the male and female plants are different and the red drupes are beautiful when they remain on the branches in winter. **Smooth Winterberry** (*Ilex laevigata*), a relative of Winterberry, is also not evergreen. It has smooth unlobed leaves, long and short shoots, and its orange-red drupes are popular with birds. It grows in moist and wet soils in the Coastal Plain and in the Piedmont around the Coastal Plain only.



Inkberry



Winterberry



Several other native species of holly in Virginia do not grow in our area. **Big Gallberry** or **Sweet Gallberry** (*Ilex coriacea*) grows in part sun to shade in the southernmost part of Virginia. It prefers wet and moist soils in the area of the Great Dismal Swamp, as well as in the areas of Suffolk, Virginia Beach and Chesapeake. It is evergreen with fleshy drupes. **Long-stalked Holly** (*Ilex collina*) grows in sun or shade. Alas, it is at risk of extinction in Virginia, found only in three counties:



Mountain Holly

Giles, Grayson, and Tazewell in the southwest mountains. With beautiful bright red drupes, it can grow in bogs, seeps and high-elevation stream banks. **Mountain Holly** (*Ilex montana*) is found in mesic and dry-mesic forests in the mixed oak and Northern red oak forests at middle to higher elevations. It is a small tree or shrub in size and can grow in sun or shade.

There are many interesting facts about hollies. The leaves at the top are less spiny, maybe because we have no long necked animals that could browse up high. Hollies are dioecious, that is have female and male plants. You need both to get the female to form the drupes. When the drupes first ripen, they contain high concentrations of chemicals, and are not eaten until later in the season. As the season progresses, the chemicals disintegrate but still remain so they are tastier to birds who seem to come and only eat a few at a time. This way the holly trees and shrubs control what is eaten and when. The leaves are not really edible for insects, except for the holly blue butterfly (*Celastrina argiolus*). Yaupon Holly leaves and twigs contain caffeine. American natives used this plant to prepare tea for ceremonies. After drinking huge quantities, they vomited the tea, hence the name. The Yaupon holly tea made from leaves does not really cause vomiting and is still enjoyed today. Hollies are beautiful natives.

Lucile Kossodo

## New Members

We welcome new members **Allison Romo** of Williamsburg and **Stacy Pruitt** of Bena to the John Clayton Chapter!

## In Review: The Fascinating Milkweeds and Relatives of Tidewater Virginia—and Three Cheers for John Clayton!

If you missed Marion Lobstein's November presentation, the recorded Zoom presentation can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/showcase/8054025>

Marion began her talk with a discussion of the many uses and remedies attributed to milkweed. From fiber for ropes, "floss" for stuffing lifejackets during War II, to the popular Lydia Pinkham's Herbal Liquid Supplement, which was first marketed

in 1875, and is still available for purchase today, (Marion does not endorse!) the list was both interesting and amusing. Also interesting, is even though milkweed contains a milky latex sap, there is not enough for it to be an important source of rubber. It is however, as Marion pointed out, a mega source of food for insects. Over 450 insects feed on some portion of the plant!

Marion next covered the long history of oscillation between classifying milkweeds as *Asclepias* or *Apocynum*. While the details of taxonomy and plant morphology are not the easiest to grasp (or pronounce!) we were fortunate to have the benefit of Marion's many years of experience teaching plant ID and taxonomy to guide us through and give our brains some good exercise!

It all began with an error in the year 65 CE! It was named after the Greek god of medicine, Asclepius, but the physician describing it was likely describing *Vincetoxicum* a member of the dogbane family (Apocynaceae) The first drawing of the true milkweed in North America was in 1585 by John White, who was one of the “lost colony” in Roanoke. In 1789 the dogbanes and milkweeds were combined into one family, then split again in 1810 due to the way the milkweed pollen is contained in a little bag called a pollinia. Most recently, DNA analysis has put the two back together again. *Asclepias* is now in a subfamily of the Apocynaceae. You can two of Marion's articles on this subject “The Dog Banes of Summer?” and “There and Back Again at the Prince William Wildflower Society Website under “Wild News” the Sep-Oct 2020 issue. You can also see excellent photographs of the milkweed flower structure at [https://www.backyardnature.net/fl\\_milkw.htm](https://www.backyardnature.net/fl_milkw.htm)

Marion next pointed out how fortunate we are to have so many species of milkweed native to our specific locale.

There are 13 species of milkweed in the Flora of Virginia and 10 are found in our area:

Clasping Milkweed (*Asclepias amplexicaulis*)

Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*)

Few-flower Milkweed (*Asclepias lanceolata*) **James City only**

Purple Milkweed (*Asclepias purpurascens*) **James City only**

Red Milkweed (*Asclepias rubra*) **James City only**

Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)

Butterfly-weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)

White Milkweed (*Asclepias variegata*)

Whorled Milkweed (*Asclepias verticillata*) **James City and York**

Green Milkweed (*Asclepias viridiflora*) **York only**

3 species **not** found in our area:

Tall Milkweed (*Asclepias exaltata*)

Long-leaf Milkweed (*Asclepias longifolia*)

Four-leaf Milkweed (*Asclepias quadrifolia*)

Towards the end of her talk Marion let us know she is a big fan of John Clayton, the botanist. We viewed slides from the British museum of very well-preserved specimens including our own symbol the Spring Beauty (*Claytonia virginica*) named for and collected by John Clayton himself well over 200 years ago. During his lifetime, Clayton sent hundreds of specimens to Mark Catesby, and from there they went to Johann Gronovius and Carl Linnaeus all of which formed the basis of the Flora of Virginia.

For further reading, Marion recommends:

*John Clayton: Pioneer of American Botany* by Edmund Berkeley and Dorothy Smith Berkeley.

Want to learn more? Marion's work with the Flora of Virginia Project has helped produce seven free online education modules on using the Flora and the Flora App. They also include basic botany, taxonomy, keying, plant families, and habitats!

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/8814177>

**Cathy Flanagan**



**There are no Plant walks scheduled for January and February as of publication.**

## **Winter Green: A Moss Walk with Helen Hamilton on December 11**

On December 11, several John Clayton VNPS Chapter members showed up at Freedom Park for a Helen Hamilton plant walk. We were there to focus on mosses and ferns. The walk was the result of a fundraising auction by the state-level VNPS, and had been won by a person from Norfolk or Va Beach who had recently moved to the area.

What we didn't know, until we got there, was that the winning auction bidder was the wife of a moss and fern enthusiast, and it was a surprise gift for her husband. He had no clue until they arrived at Freedom Park that he was going to look at, and learn about, mosses and ferns!

We took off for a stroll in the woods, not realizing, at least at first, how many varieties of moss there were in those woods! Approximately every twenty feet, a different variety of moss popped up, plus a few ferns, and other plants of interest.

It was one of those times when a hand-lens comes in really "handy," and I was happy that I had brought a spare to loan out. On the next page are a few interesting shots of our discoveries, with their names.

**Kathi Mestayer**





Fern Moss (*Thuidium delicatulum*)



Snakeskin Liverwort  
(*Conocephalum salebrosumcatulum*)



Woolly Wort (*Trichocolea tomentella*)



## November's Plant of the Month: Baldcypress (*Taxodium distichum*)

Baldcypress is an unforgettable sight all year, but in late fall when its soft foliage turns vibrant shades of copper-orange, it lights up the entire landscape. They are called “bald” because, unlike most other conifers, they are deciduous and lose their needles in winter. Baldcypresses are an icon of our southern swamps and coastal areas and can reach towering heights of over 100 feet (145 feet is the Virginia record). Adding to their impressive stature, they have huge, buttressed trunks that flare out at the base; the largest diameter tree known is 17 feet in diameter. In the wet, swampy soils they prefer, they are usually surrounded by a host of knobby, conical “knees” looking like gnomes or “bark-covered stalagmites”. The cypress knees can be more than 3 feet in height, but the reported record is an astonishing 14 feet. Scientists believe these knees help anchor these massive trees in the swampy soils, although this is still open to debate. Their bark is warm cinnamon-brown and exfoliates in shaggy vertical strips. Like all conifers, Baldcypress have cones held at the tips of their drooping branches, but even these are distinctive. The cones are short-stalked and round, up to 1-1/2" wide, green to purple in color, eventually turning brown with 5–10 wrinkled scales.

Baldcypress naturally occur in coastal areas from southern Delaware south to east Texas and up the Mississippi River valley. They are found in swamp forests and occasionally seepage swamps that are flooded for protracted periods of time. They are locally common in the Coastal Plain of Virginia including the Northern Neck.

Joan Maloof, founder of the Old Growth Forest Network, says of Baldcypress, “They are the Redwoods of the East...and the longest-lived trees we have”, with one recently discovered tree on the Black River in N. C. documented as an astonishing 2624 years old! Virginia’s own Cypress Bridge Swamp Natural Area Preserve has many ancient Baldcypress that are over 1000 years old. Along Dragon Run in Middlesex County, measurements of one large Baldcypress suggests an age of 800–1200 years.



Cypress knees



Fall foliage with cones

Entering a cypress swamp on any day is an unforgettable experience, with the massive buttressed trunks rising high overhead creating nature's own spectacular cathedral.

Surprisingly, Baldcypress are easy to grow in average, moisture retentive soils in full sun to part shade. Although they naturally prefer acidic, alluvial soils rich in organic matter, they are adaptable and have been used successfully in a wide range of sites from parking lots to large parks to rain gardens. They are at their best in damp to wet soils along streams, ponds, or swamps where they are especially beautiful planted in groups and draped with Spanish

Moss, as in nature and where their surreal beauty is reflected in the water. Here they will also improve water quality and provide flood control. Baldcypress are tolerant of extended flooding as well as slightly tolerant of salt and deer resistant.

The wood of older Baldcypress is dense, straight grained and very decay resistant and has long been used as building material, leading to the decimation of many of our oldest swamps. They are also important for wildlife, providing seeds for wood-ducks and other waterfowl, evening grosbeaks, turkeys, prothonotary warbler and the yellow-throated warblers that search for insects in the Spanish moss festooning their branches. They provide nesting habitat for a variety of birds as well as frogs.

Baldcypress are best planted while dormant in late fall or early spring. Consider adding one or a group of these magnificent trees to your own property, knowing that these trees will outlive you and your grandchildren, becoming more spectacular with great age.



Jeff Wright

Old Baldcypress dwarf kayakers on Dragon Run in King and Queen County. A paddle on the Dragon Run is one of the best ways to see Baldcypresses in our area.

**Betsy Washington, Northern Neck Chapter**



## John Clayton Chapter Calendar

**Thursday,  
January 20**

**7:00 pm: Our January Zoom Meeting—Lisa Deaton on “Coastal Oaks”**

(See Page 1.)

**There are no walks currently scheduled 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\*\*](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