



Claytonia

Newsletter of the John Clayton Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society

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Our Zoom meeting at 7 pm on March 17: Helen Kuhns on “Native Ground Covers and Lawn Alternatives”



Turf grass is overwhelmingly the most common plant used in our yards. However, it is not the best way to make our lawns sustainable. Explore groundcovers native to Hampton Roads, avoid the insidious, invasive non-natives, and learn to plan just enough lawn for your needs.

Helen W. Kuhns is the Assistant Director, Pearl Faith and Pearl Programs Coordinator with Lynnhaven River Now, a Virginia Beach-based watershed organization. Serving as a founding executive officer with the Virginia Association for Environmental Education, a committee member of Hampton Roads Association for Environmental Education, and having served on Governor Northam’s Virginia STEM Education Commission, Helen Kuhns continues to capitalize on 30 years of environmental and conservation education, and non-profit administration experience. She received a Bachelor of Science in Biology with an emphasis on Environmental Science from Christopher Newport University and earned a Certificate of Non-Profit Management through Tidewater Community College. Through her work Helen Kuhns has experience with native plants, invasive removal, protected lands management, and conservation landscaping, as well as shoreline and oyster restoration. However, she is first and foremost an Environmental Educator. A native of coastal Virginia, she believes developing a personal connection to our natural resources is key to conserving and sustaining our world for future generations.



From the President

Yesterday was a true spring day: sunshine and cool weather. The birds were singing loudly and it felt as if the plants were ready to start growing. Today is gray and still warm. We are expecting rain. Although the world news are far from joyful, I have already one gardening goal to take my mind away. I always had a row of ever-green non-native plants; I have decided to remove them because last year I suddenly became aware that many little ones were growing all around them. That is how it goes, a plant seems innocuous and suddenly you see it is changing and trying to take over the landscape. Yes, one never knows when a plant becomes too aggressive. I recently finished my experimental project of trying to prevent little rabbits from entering my property and eating voraciously all my plants. I attached a wire netting of about 18 inches all around my fence in the front yard. To prevent any diggers I then had a layer of stones in front of that netting. Mind you, I am well aware that this may not work, but I wanted to try it out. It will not be until May that I will know if this hard effort is successful.

Spring brings to mind our plant sale. This is our first post-Covid public sale. The details are still being developed. As many of you know, this is our one and only moneymaker to support our efforts to educate about native plants by giving nature camp scholarships and having speakers at our meetings. There is no native plant nursery closer than Norfolk, Chesapeake, or partially in Richmond. Our sale gives you the opportunity to purchase native plants. Our plant sale needs volunteers to pot, help set-up, and sell these plants. Please consider volunteering to help at this sale. This plant sale is going to be different and like my project, it has many unknowns. We are holding our native plant sale in a new location: The Williamsburg Botanical Garden. In addition, we have a very different date: May 14 and a rain date of May 15. We will be extending the plant sale times from 9 am to 3 pm. Why so late in May? The rationale for this is that we will have many baby plants that will need to grow and look like a desirable plant. In fact, apart from spring ephemerals, many of these plants do not present themselves out of the ground until early May. We want to give you plants that look good and are ready to grow successfully in your yard. Your plant sale committee has been working very hard to find ways to have great plants. We will evaluate this new sale and see if the public liked it.

In case you wondered, the Native Plant of 2022 is our great Buttonbush, *Cephalanthus occidentalis*. It is a bush and can become a small tree. It prefers to grow in moist soil or near a stream. In fact, it can be used to control erosion near a riverbank. Buttonbush can adapt to garden soil if watered. It grows in sun and part-shade and is a quick growing plant. If grown in shade, it may not bloom. At our sale, we will have small plants in pots and bare-root plants. With trees and bushes, smaller is better, as it has more of a chance to succeed. What pollinates a Button-

bush? Skippers, monarchs, and virtually any butterflies that happen to be passing by like to visit Buttonbushes.. The attractiveness to butterflies makes button bush an excellent alternative to the non-native Butterfly Bush, *Buddleia* species that is invasive in our area. There are no insects that can invade the Buttonbush and destroy it.. Some insects eat the leaves but cause no damage to the plant. The Buttonbush is fun to grow, as the flowers are like little white balls called by some sputniks, honey balls, and butterballs.

Where are seeds, including native plant seeds, from around the world stored for the future? One location is at the famous Kew Gardens. The seeds from around the world are placed between layers of paper to dry so that they can safely be classified, identified and stored at the Kew Garden Herbarium. Every year scientists discover 2,000 new species. While the seeds dry, they are studied to find their similarities and differences. According to the scientists working there, any plant identified is really a hypothesis, not an absolute. Another seed storage place is the Kuban experimental station in Russia, where more than 333,000 seeds are stored. The scope is awe-inspiring. It seems that during World War II, a dozen scientists starved to death protecting those seeds during a siege. Another source of storage is in the Arctic archipelago on a remote island between Norway and the pole in the permafrost region. This is where there are one million seeds stored, equal to one-third of the world's food crop seeds. It provides a final back up to the world's gene banks. To access this seed bank you first pass via a 100-meter cold tunnel. This storage is only accessed once or twice a year for delivery of new seeds. In case of disaster, the doors would be opened so that these seeds could be planted again. The only problem for this cold storage could be the earth's future warming. In Exeter last year there was an interesting art exhibition about these seed banks in which artists photographed and used paints and lights to show the various storages of seeds. I'm sorry that I could not see it.

What are three of the rarest natives in Virginia? I often wondered about that. Virginia Round-leaf Birch, *Betula lenta* var. *uber*, is a small tree with a wild population. Smyth County is the ONE county in Virginia to have these trees. It is critically imperiled. There are beautiful photos of it in the *Flora*. According to the Virginia National Resources Education Guide, there is some disagreement over whether it is a species on its own or just a variety of birch. Another rare native plant is the Mattaponi Quillwort, *Isoetes mattaponica*, only found in four Coastal Plain areas: Prince George, Charles City, New Kent, King William, and King and Queen. This is a plant that is in danger of disappearing due to its small numbers. It grows in freshwater tidal shores (often gravelly) near the head of tide along estuaries on the western side of the Chesapeake Bay. This means in the fresh tidal reaches of the following rivers: the Mattaponi, the Pamunkey, the Chickahomini, and the James. It is so rare that there are no photographs of it on either the *Flora of Virginia* or the *Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora*. It is in the fern ally plant group, which is aquatic or amphibious.

It is a corm (like a daffodil) about 1 centimeter wide and has leaves that are about 10 in long and bright green but pale at the base. Like a fern, it has spores. Use your imagination to see this plant. The third rarest Virginia Native is Peter's Mountain Mallow, *Iliamna corei*, found only in Giles County. Peter's Mountain Mallow is a perennial with pretty pink-colored flowers. The stems are up to 1 meter long and erect. It is critically endangered but beautiful. Deer graze on it. There used to be 20 and it's now down to only three. It has been encouraged to grow by prescribed burning. There are beautiful pictures of it in the *Virginia Flora*.

There are no Plant Walks scheduled for March and April...

...and A Plant Walk Leader Is Needed!

One of the ways we fulfill our mission to educate the public is by offering plant walks. Before I became a member, I joined several plant walks. That is how I became so enchanted by our native plants. It led me to join the John Clayton Native Plant Chapter. And so I became more and more enthusiastic and enthralled by native plants and more and more involved in our chapter. As you can see in my story, it is also the way to recruit more members.

Our last plant walk organizer before we all went into the pandemic isolation was **Meegan Wallace**. We were looking forward to having many walks coming up in Spring and Summer. Alas, it is not to be so, since Meegan and her husband are moving from Newport News to further north.

We would love to have a person willing to organize walks to the natural areas where native plants are found; the second part of the job is finding leaders for those walks. It is not necessary for this person to be in Williamsburg. At this time there are no walks organized, which is unfortunate. Please consider volunteering to organize plant walks—there are so many areas and plants to visit!

Lucile Kossodo

New Members

We welcome new members **Sean Finkel, Linda Guthrie, Martha and Ralph Moss, Connie Reitz, and Gary Streb**, all of Williamsburg, to the John Clayton Chapter!

The Annual Native Plant Sale Needs Your Help!

May 13–14, 2022, Williamsburg Botanical Garden

Spring is slowly taking center stage everywhere around us! This week one of our members spotted a mourning cloak butterfly! With lengthening days and warmer air, many of us are ready to get out and start gardening. Like spring, the sale is also just around the corner. Hopefully you have received the flyer, but if you would like a copy, send an email to the address on the next page.

VNPS
Plant Sale
2022

Our annual sale would be impossible without the involvement of many chapter members and friends. As you are marking your calendars, please consider volunteering. Whether you love potting up new plants, can lend a hand transporting plants to the botanical garden, or prefer one of the many other ways to volunteer listed below, the plant sale committee would be grateful if you contacted us as soon as you know your availability.

Please use this email address, jccvnps1@gmail.com, to volunteer, ask questions, or request a flyer.

Plant Donations

Yes!! We still need a variety of donated plants! Please let us know if you have any and we will gladly help you dig them. We can accept native plants that are labeled with the correct common name or botanical name.

Potting Parties

If you enjoy potting plants, we have three such opportunities (all on Saturdays): March 26 at 9 am, April 24 at 1 pm, and April 30 at 9 am. Come have fun with others who enjoy planting as much as you do. Bring any empty pots you may spare—the best size is at least 6.5" (W) × 5" (D) × 7" (H). Reminder notices will be sent out a week before.

Volunteer Assistance Before, During, and After the Plant Sale

There are plenty of opportunities on both days for you to help make this year's plant sale a great success: set-up and clean-up, cashiers, plant experts, plant table monitors, and just being available to pitch in when needed.

Plant Transportation

We need people with a van, truck, or SUV to help transport plants to the plant sale site, Williamsburg Botanical Garden, on Friday, May 13, and early Saturday, May 14.

Plant Loading

Volunteers are needed to help load plants into vehicles for delivery to the botanical garden. Also, on both days of the sale volunteers will be needed to help buyers take plants to their cars.

As the plant sale committee is busy putting together all the pieces for this event, we'd like to thank all who sign up for assisting with this year's sale. We are very excited about the location at the Botanical Garden—and with signs of spring everywhere, we can't wait to dig in!



Witch Hazel blooming in Libbey Oliver's garden



From Betsy Washington, Northern Neck Chapter

January 2022 Plant of the Month:

Christmas Fern, *Polystichum acrostichoides*

Our deciduous woods are graced by many native ferns, but in winter the evergreen Christmas Fern, *Polystichum acrostichoides*, takes center stage. It literally lights up the woods with its rich green, lustrous foliage that catches the low-angled winter sun, adding sparkle and color. Christmas Ferns are one of the most common ferns in the Southeast and occur in every county in Virginia. They are extremely adaptable, tolerant of the heat and humidity of the Deep South as well as the cold and ice of northern hardwood forests, ranging from New Brunswick to Northern Florida and west to the Plains. They are found in a diverse array of habitats from stream banks to steep forested slopes and ravines in both dry and mesic forests and in both acidic and neutral soils. Christmas ferns often form extensive colonies on steep slopes and banks, where their fibrous roots hold the soil.

The foliage of Christmas Fern forms a vase-shaped clump, growing from a central root-like structure or rhizome. It is not uncommon to find a small cluster of two or three Christmas ferns growing together forming a handsome clump. Each leathery, dark-green leaf or frond has a sword-like blade (the leafy part) that arches gently at the tip and is about 2–2.5' long. The lower stalk of each frond is covered in distinctive shaggy brown scales. Individual fronds are finely toothed and divided into a number of lance-shaped leaflets (pinnae) arranged regularly along either side of the midrib, each with a distinctive lobe at the base. This small lobe at the



Christmas Ferns form handsome vase-shaped clumps.

base of each long pinna is said to resemble the toe of Santa's boot or a Christmas stocking leading to one theory on the origin of the common name, Christmas Fern. The lustrous evergreen fronds have long been used for Christmas decorations, also likely giving rise to the common name.

Christmas ferns produce two types of fronds—fertile and sterile. The fertile fronds are so named as they produce spores for reproduction and are taller and held erect. If you look closely you will see rusty brown structures that contain the spores arranged in rows on the undersides of the tips of the fertile fronds. The sterile fronds are flatter and encircle the upright fertile fronds forming a green skirt at the base of the fern. This helps prevent erosion and creates great shelter and nesting habitat for wild turkeys, grouse, ovenbirds, and veery. In early spring, the new fiddleheads or croziers emerge tightly furled and covered in silvery scales adding ethereal beauty to the woodland garden and contrasting beautifully with the dark green of the old fronds.

Christmas Ferns are one of the most garden-worthy ferns east of the Mississippi River. They are beautiful in every season of the year. They handle snow and ice, as well as summer heat, humidity, and drought with ease, and are “ridiculously easy to grow,” as William Cullina so aptly says in his 2008 classic book, *Native Ferns, Moss, and Grasses*. Although they prefer shady sites, they will handle a fair amount of sun with adequate moisture. While Christmas Ferns may form extensive colonies in the wild, they are distinctly clump-forming, and well-behaved. They are beautiful simply lining a woodland path or interspersed with spring wildflowers where they provide year round structure, texture, and color. They also make a wonderful evergreen groundcover beneath deciduous trees, where their lustrous foliage sparkles and reflects the winter sun. As often seen in the wild, they make superb groundcovers for stream banks and steep slopes, where their fibrous roots hold the soil preventing erosion and soil loss. Dense clumps can be divided to increase plantings in spring or fall, and in favorable conditions they may naturalize from spores. Deer and other herbivores find Christmas ferns distasteful and rarely bother them. So take a walk in the woods this month and admire the beautiful clumps and colonies of Christmas ferns often intermingled with vibrant green mosses and clubmosses. And take note of the lush patches lining the banks of streams and hillsides and imagine how this adaptable evergreen plant might bring your own garden to life!

March 2022 Plant of the Month:

Yellow or American Trout Lily, *Erythronium americanum*

Trout Lily is one of our earliest woodland wildflowers to bloom each spring with exquisite nodding yellow flowers with back-swept petals. The entire plant is only 4-6” high with smooth lance to oblong gray-green leaves exquisitely mottled with purplish brown, supposedly resembling dappled coloring of a Brook Trout. As with other members of the lily family, each flower has parts in threes or multiples thereof. What appears to be six yellow petals are actually three yellow sepals and three yellow petals (tepals) with six stamens tipped with yellowish to rusty anthers that protrude from the flower. The delicate petals are blushed with reddish-purple on the undersides adding to their charm. The flowers track the sun, opening each morning and closing again at night to



Detail of a Christmas Fern frond



The reflexed flowers of American Trout Lily, *Erythronium americanum*

protect the pollen and reproductive parts from the vagaries of early spring cold and rain. The small green seed capsules develop by May, maturing to brown and split into three sections to release the seeds. As with many spring ephemerals, ants are the primary disperser of the seeds. They relish the nutritious fatty bundles (called elaiosomes) attached to each seed and carry them back to their nests, eating the fatty bundles and discarding the seeds.

This diminutive wildflower is one of our loveliest spring ephemerals, so called because they are short lived and brilliantly adapted to emerge in very early spring while the forest trees are still bare, and the forest floor is bathed in sunlight. Their leaves emerge in February to March, quickly followed by the solitary flowers—one flower per plant (with two leaves). The precocious flowers are pollinated and form seeds in just a few short weeks, all before the canopy trees have fully leafed out in May. Trout lilies grow from a corm, a bulb-like structure resembling a garlic clove (or ‘dog tooth’) with a papery husk and a ring of fibrous roots at the base. Smaller corms appear to be sterile, sending up only a single leaf and no flowers. Larger corms produce a pair of leaves and a single flower. Trout lilies are strongly colonial and spread by runners or offshoots, often forming extensive colonies. Larger colonies can be 100 years old or more! The plants gradually wither away by summer and go dormant until the next spring. What a great strategy to beat the summer heat, drought, and competition in a heavily shaded forest! Individual flowers can last up to 10 days and produce an abundance of nectar and pollen. Trout Lilies are pollinated by long-tongued bees, blowflies, and early spring flying butterflies. They also have their own specialist miner bee (*Andrena erythronii*) that depends on the pollen of Trout Lilies to feed its young. The corms themselves are full of carbohydrates and are eaten by mammals such as chipmunks and black bears.

Uncommon in the coastal plain, they are recorded in both Lancaster and Richmond Counties in the Northern Neck. They typically occur in rich, moist forests and well-drained floodplain forests.

In our gardens, Trout Lilies prefer rich, moist soil with lots of humus under the shade of deciduous trees. They are difficult to grow from seed so are not widely available in the nursery trade. Buy only from reputable native plant nurseries that propagate



A colony of Yellow Trout Lilies with their mottled foliage

them responsibly without threatening wild populations. If you are fortunate enough to have them growing on your property, you can increase your plantings by dividing offsets, and replanting right away before the corms dry out.

Sometimes it is best to simply enjoy these beautiful spring ephemerals in their natural habitat. Plan an early spring hike to Hickory Hollow Natural Area Preserve in Lancaster County and look for these exquisite wildflowers on the moist slopes near the bottom of the Cabin Swamp trail. And be sure to admire the many other spring ephemerals such as Spring Beauties, Marsh Marigolds, Toothworts, Golden Ragwort, Spicebushes, and so many more! Happy Spring!

Photos: Betsy Washington



From Out in Left Field In the Cross-Hairs: Nonnative Invasives

Here are a few photos of nonnative invasives I've targeted this winter.

If you want to learn more about which nonnative invasives to “manage” in different seasons, and the alternatives approaches, you can visit the Blue Ridge PRISM website, here: <https://blueridgeprism.org/training-materials/>.

They are a wonderful, responsive resource for this information. As you will see from that web page, they share the slide shows from their recent online Spring Invasive Plant Workshops.

My photos are of winter activities, informed by PRISM's workshop on Invasive Plant management in winter. In many cases, controlling trees and shrubs is most-effective in the winter, when the sap is not flowing upward, but is flowing toward the roots, or being pulled down by gravity. You'll see more on this topic if you click through the “Control of Invasive Plants” slide presentation on the PRISM web site. Start at slide #57.



At left is wintercreeper, looking very sad. When we first met, it was green and happy, climbing up the tree trunk, but I didn't even know its name. Then, after identifying it, I applied some herbicide to the surface of the big mother vine, and watched to see what happened. Things are going well; it is drooping, has some yellow leaves, and is still under surveillance.

Here's some Japanese honeysuckle in my side yard, which seemed to magically appear while I wasn't, apparently, paying attention. I will not ignore it again!



At right are the remains of a large *Pawlonia* tree at Freedom Park. It was at the edge of the big field near the beginning of the main walking path, in the narrow, wooded area between the field and the Botanical Garden. Not anymore, thanks to the Park staff (not my work).

Finally, my biggest target this fall has been Autumn Olive, below. Once you recognize it, you're going to see it everywhere...you've been warned. It can take several weeks for the shrub to look like it's even having a "bad hair day," but it seems to have worked. The application of herbicide was via basal-bark and hack-and-dab. Now, monitoring time.



So, Blue Ridge PRISM is my go-to source of info, in part because they have links to lots of other resources, like this guidance from the Virginia Department of Forestry: https://dof.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/FT0031-Nonnative-Invasive-Plant-Species-Control-Treatments_pub.pdf. Also, there are fact sheets on specific species: <https://blueridge-prism.org/factsheets/>.

Let's free up more habitat for our wonderful native plants!

Kathi Mestayer

John Clayton Chapter Calendar

**Thursday,
March 17**

**7:00 pm: Our March Zoom Meeting—Helen Kuhns on “Native Ground Covers
& Lawn Alternatives”**

(See Page 1.)

There are no walks currently scheduled for March and April.

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