



Claytonia

Newsletter of the John Clayton Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society

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www.claytonvnps.org

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Our Zoom meeting at 7 pm on May 19: Marion Lobstein on “An Overview of the Flora of Virginia Education Modules and Using the Flora of Virginia App”



In this Zoom presentation for the John Clayton Chapter, Marion will discuss the Flora of Virginia Education Modules that were developed and released in the summer of 2021, and will summarize the focus of each of the seven modules. For several of the modules, she will highlight the importance of John Clayton and the *Flora Virginica*. Also, she will point out the use of Spring

Beauty, *Claytonia virginica*, the symbol of the chapter and Foundation of the Flora of Virginia Project, in a number of these modules. Participants are encouraged to have their Mobile Apps available to use the App's Graphic Key for real-time identification of a specimen of Spring Beauty.

Marion requested that members who have the Flora of Virginia app follow along during the presentation. Members who do not have the app and wish to do so prior to the meeting can find more information regarding the app at the Flora of Virginia website (<https://floraofvirginia.org/flora-app/>).

Marion Lobstein is a professor emerita of Northern Virginia Community College where she taught biology for 36 years. Her academic degrees include a BSEd (Biology) from Western Carolina University, a MAT (with a concentration in botany) from UNC-Chapel Hill, and a MS in Biology from George Mason University. She currently lives in Warrenton, VA.

Marion, a VNPS life member, served on the original board of directors for VNPS and serves as the Botany Chair of the Prince William Wildflower Society chapter of VNPS. She was involved in establishing the Foundation of the Flora of Virginia Project and served for twenty years on the Project's Board of Directors. As well, she is active in the Virginia Academy of Science and is a life member of the State Arboretum (at Blandy Experimental Farm) where she teaches as a volunteer. She and her husband have been active motorhome travelers for the last 31 years. In retirement, watercolor painting is another of her favorite activities.



From the President

On the Saturday before Easter, I went on a walk in New Quarter Park. It was a beautiful sunny day with clouds high in the sky. As I walked the two paths which make for a good hike, I began to admire the multitude of Wild Comfrey (*Andersonglossium virginianum*). It grows in bottomland forests, moist upland forests along rivers and pastures, and along rivers and streams. In Virginia, it is also called American Comfrey. This plant has long leaves similar to Bluebells and little white or blue flowers. The leaves grow in a coiling cluster around the blooming stem. Below ground, one can find a long taproot. It belongs to the Borage Family, as does the European Comfrey. You can find this plant in most areas of Virginia. This perennial thrives in partial shade in medium to medium dry and even moist soil. The pubescent leaves are below the single flowering stem that stands at a height of 2 feet. The top of the stem will branch out and each little branch can hold up to five little flowers in late April, May, and June. The flowers bloom for about a month and start out blue, fading to whitish green. The flowers, also known by the name of Giant Forget-me-not in other areas, are crinkly at the edges with no visible pistil or stamen. The fruit that follows is a small nutlet, spiny and barbed, clinging to clothes and animals. Amazingly, this plant is native to most of the Eastern United States. A smaller and even rarer relative, *Andersonglossum boreale*, is native to Canada, and *Andersonglossum occidentale*, Western Houndstongue, exists in California and Oregon. Details on how to germinate Wild Comfrey are still unknown. Although native in so many areas, it is rare due to overharvesting. Native Americans used this plant for multiple ailments: to help



Lucile Kossodo



Lucile Kossodo

treat wounds, to flush out any internal digestive disorders, and for respiratory infections. It also acts as a sedative medication. Caution: due to alkaloids, it is not to be consumed and may cause skin irritations. I also saw this former tree destroyed by nature that looked like a modern sculpture. This last Wednesday, I repeated the walk in a different direction and discovered, quite by accident, a new Orchid to me, the Showy Orchid, *Galearis spectabilis*. There was just one near the path with no other ones near it.

With all the horrors of the war in the Ukraine, nature is also suffering in that area, as an article in the *Guardian* by Phoebe Weston on



Lucile Kossodo

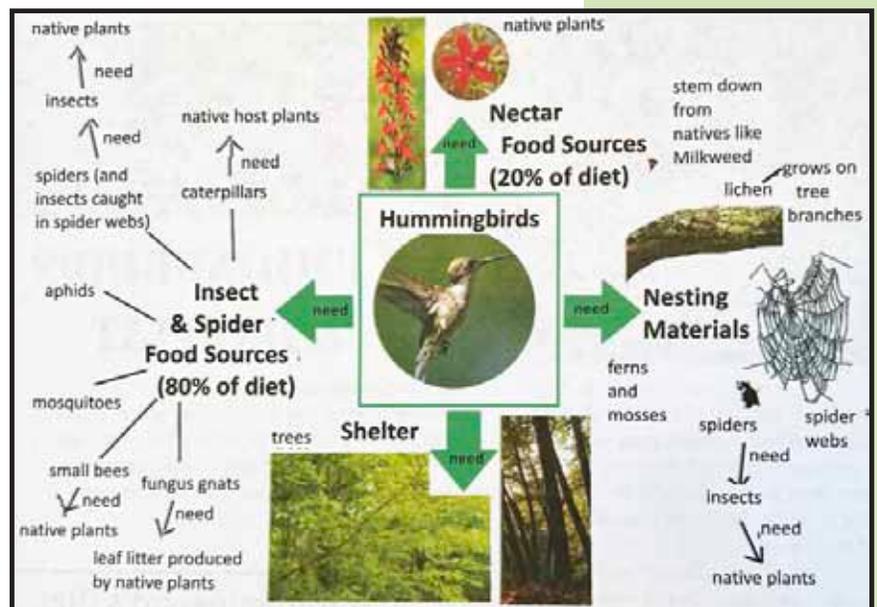
March 24, 2022 explains. In Belarus, the oldest nature Bird NGO, operating for 24 years, was closed. The government there accused them of helping the Ukrainian enemy under the guise of helping birds. Belarus and Ukraine are home to a region called Polesia, a wetlands area more than two-thirds the size of the UK, known as “the Amazon of Europe” for its extraordinary biodiversity, as well as parts of the Carpathian mountains and Danube delta, the largest river delta wetland in Europe. Adham Ashton-Butt from the British Trust for Ornithology had been working in the Belarus and Ukrainian parts of Polesia. With the war, they are out of funds and abandoned. He hates to imagine Russian tanks driving over the area they had worked so hard to preserve. The fear is also that these ecological areas may be drained, developed, and/or destroyed. The war has Romania, Slovakia and Poland working to buy emergency supplies and deliver them to the border to refugees. The war has even affected conservation areas in other parts of Europe, as funds diminished due to the necessary funds to help refugees. War is cruel to both humans and nature.

The first hummingbird arrived in my garden on April 8. It was a bit early but I was glad that there were many of our beautiful red native Wild Columbine, *Aquilegia Canadensis*, blooming. All of those little red flowers attract hummingbirds. When reading the wonderful newsletter from Hummingbird Hill Nursery, I learned that nectar is not all that feeds a hummingbird. Far from it—most of their diet is insects and spiders. According to the wonderful newsletter from Hummingbird Hill Nursery, only 20% of their food comes from nectar and 80% comes from insects. Native bees, insects, caterpillars, fungus gnats, and spiders all visit native plants and thus hummingbirds will have plenty to eat. Insects do not feed on non-natives and thus they will be of no help to feed a hummingbird. What else do hummingbirds require to thrive? They need trees to find shelter. Finally, to make their nests, they need litter from native plants, ferns, lichens, and mosses. Yes, hummingbirds are very dependent on native plants. The red nectar in a bottle surrounded by a lawn is only a small part of what they really need to thrive and survive. I recommend subscribing to their free newsletter; it is so instructive!

Lucile Kossodo



Lucile Kossodo



No Plant Walks are scheduled for May and June.

New Members

We welcome **15** new members to the John Clayton Chapter: **Suzanne Collins** of Newport News, **Allison** and **Chris Fox** of Indianapolis, IND, **Christine Garrett** of Williamsburg, **Jennifer Harrigan** of Toano, **Ann Hewitt** of Williamsburg, **Christine Llewellyn** of Williamsburg, **Renee Loustaunau** of Urbanna, **Steven Griswold** and **Carolyn Rowe** of Mathews, **Marie Robertson** of Williamsburg, **Kerin Schwartz** of Dutton, **Mary Thomas** of Gloucester, and **Elizabeth Wilkins** and **Jacques van Montfrans** of Yorktown.

Our Annual Native Plant Sale is Coming Up!

John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society's Annual Native Plant Sale will be held on **May 13** and **14, 2022** (9:00 am– 12:00 pm) at the **Williamsburg Botanical Gardens** in **Freedom Park**. There will be more than 1200 native plants and 150 species, most of which can be found in our Coastal region. There will be a plant list available, containing attributes of the plants.

The JCC VNPS wants to educate our community and to support planting of natives in gardens and public spaces. Supporting pollinators and the whole ecosystem is needed more than ever before!

Here is our sale schedule:

Friday morning, May 13th—transport plants and set up at the WBG

Friday afternoon—sales for volunteers and JCC VNPS members (1:00-2:00 pm).

Saturday, May 14th—sale is open to the public (9:00 am–1:00 pm).

Saturday afternoon—clean up.

When you come to purchase plants, you may want to bring your checkbook or cash. Bring a box, bag, or cart to carry your plants.

Williamsburg Botanical Garden (WBG)

For the first time, JCC VNPS is partnering with the WBG. Both non-profit organizations benefit from the combined effort, and share in planning, advertisement, facilities, and plant sales. James City County Parks provides the tables, help with parking, and more. For facility, guidance, and volunteer time, our chapter will give left over plants to the WBG for their honor box sales.

Judith Alberts, WBG Board Chair, contributed hours of her time for planning and hosting. We owe the WBG Board and JCC Parks a big **THANK YOU**.

Highlighting the Volunteers

Preparing and conducting the JCC VNPS Plant Sale takes an army of volunteers. Volunteers help by planting, digging, potting, and caring for plants throughout the

VNPS
Plant Sale
2022

year. We have a few leaders who purchase plants, research and write about plants, gather materials, organize volunteers, and much more.

This year, volunteers worked hard at potting parties that were held at Stonehouse School, **Joan and Jim Etchberger's** home, **Meegan Wallace's** home in Newport News, and other locations. The Etchbergers did a lion's share of plant care and organizing the Boy Scouts to help during the sale. **Cathy Flanagan** coordinated publicity, the display, and cashiers. **Adrienne Frank** coordinated plant purchase, the plant list, and volunteers.

During the sale, there is an army of plant movers, cashiers, table monitors, talliers, set up, and clean up volunteers. We could not do it without the enormous effort of dedicated volunteers. A big **THANK YOU** goes to our volunteers.

For more information, contact either Cathy Flanagan at flanagan.catherine@gmail.com or me at Adrienne-gary@cox.net. We can answer most of your questions.

Hope to see you there, to help and/or purchase native plants.

Adrienne Frank

From Betsy Washington, Northern Neck Chapter: Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*), April 2022 Plant of the Month

The April Plant of the Month, Pawpaw, *Asimina triloba*, is a handsome small tree that is as fascinating as it is curious. Pawpaw is a member of the Custard-Apple Family, the Annonaceae, a large family of tropical and subtropical species. Ranging from Florida and Texas north to New York and Southern Ontario, Pawpaw is the only member of this family to occur in north temperate forests. In Virginia, Pawpaws are common in the Coastal Plain and Piedmont in forested bottomlands, well drained floodplain forests, swamp hummocks and rich woods. They are an understory tree reaching up to 40 ft in height and tend to sucker into small colonies or "Pawpaw patches".

Pawpaws are distinctive small trees and have large, rather tropical-looking, drooping leaves that can reach 12 inches in length and up to six inches wide. In shady areas, the leaves are fanned out along the stout branches, in an arrangement that allows the tree to absorb the maximum amount of limited sunlight beneath the often-dense forest canopy. In fall the lush foliage turns a clear, showy yellow, lighting up the shady understory. Pawpaws tend to spread into colonies via root suckers, especially in rich, moist woods, so that what appears to be many individual trees is actually a single colony of genetically identical individuals. The bark is smooth gray-brown but develops small, warty raised pores (lenticels) as it ages.



Pawpaw's fruit and lush foliage (Photo: Betsy Washington)

In early to mid-April, just before the new leaves emerge, Pawpaws begin to bloom with a most distinctive flower. The small, unusual flowers are intriguing, only about 1-1/2 inches wide, hanging from the bare branches like dark maroon bells. Each flower is beautiful when inspected closely, with three broadly rounded outer petals that curve back, revealing another ring of three smaller petals that surround the stamens and pistils in the center of the flower. The petals themselves have a heavy texture with impressed veins and a rich maroon-brown color that glows when backlit by the sun. If you sniff the flowers closely, you may notice the fetid odor of car-



Pawpaw's intriguing flowers (Photo: Anne Parker)

riation that has evolved to lure their pollinators. Pawpaws belong to an ancient family of flowering plants that evolved about 85 million years ago and the dark red flowers and odor attract the carrion flies and scavenger beetles that pollinate them. Interestingly, flowers of trees in the same “patch” are genetically identical and often are not self-fertile, meaning a pollinator must carry the pollen from one colony to flowers in another colony to reliably produce fruit. This and the fact that their pollinators are not in great abundance, means that there is sometimes low fruit set.

The flowers that do manage to get fertilized produce the largest edible fruit of any tree in North America. The lumpy fruit is technically a berry and can grow up to six inches long but is more often the size of a child's fist. The green fruit often develops in clusters hidden beneath the huge leaves, typically ripening in late August through September in Virginia. It is considered a delicacy to many, who eagerly await the ripening fruit; a ripe Pawpaw has the feel of a ripe peach and a delightful fruity aroma. The fruit has a soft custardy texture inside the inedible skin and a flavor that is often compared to very ripe bananas, with hints of melon, or even pineapple, papaya, and mango. Various colloquial common names allude to the distinctive taste—Custard Apple, Wild Banana, Dog Banana, and Mandango. In fact, the name Pawpaw itself is believed to be derived from the similar “papaya”. The soft skin and flesh are easily bruised and damaged so is not suitable to commercial farming or sales, making it the perfect choice for home gardeners.

The fruit is relished by many species of wildlife as well as humans. Deer, racoons, opossums, squirrels, mice, wild turkeys and many other species eat the ripe fruit. In contrast, the crushed leaves smell a bit like asphalt and are extremely distasteful to deer and other herbivores and are rarely browsed. Interestingly, Pawpaws are the sole host for the beautiful Zebra Swallowtail Butterfly, whose caterpillars feed only on the foliage of Pawpaw, eating the tender new leaves and gaining protection from predators from the same chemical that makes the leaves so distasteful to herbivores.

Pawpaws are difficult to transplant from suckers, but small container-grown specimens are easy to grow. They prefer moist fertile soils and extra watering during droughts. Pawpaws can be trained as a single-trunk small tree and when planted in a sunny site will form a dense pyramidal small tree. Because Pawpaws typically are not self-compatible, you will need to have two or more unrelated trees (from different clones) to produce fruit. Several cultivars of Pawpaws have been selected for enhanced fruit size and taste, so you can buy a couple of different selections to help encourage successful pollination. Some eager growers have gone so far as to hang “ripe carrion” in their tree to attract pollinators. Pawpaws are delicious eaten fresh from the tree as Lewis and Clark did on their trip, and were a major component of Native American diets. They can be made into delicious pies and puddings as Native Americans and early colonists did, or even into ice cream as Pawpaw enthusiasts do today, although be aware that some people are sensitive to touching the fruit and break out into a rash.



From Out in Left Field...Surprises Spring Up!

Sometimes, the unexpected shows up in the front yard, when you least expect it. You just never know what’s going to show up, even after living in the same place for 35 years. We observe closely, keeping the non-native invasives at bay.

Then, in early April, a morel mushroom popped right up by the front doorstep. Hard not to notice, so we took a photo and kept an eye out. Over the next few days, a total of seven morels appeared, most of them near the compost pile and the cold frame. It looked like the squirrels (rabbits?) ate most of them, leaving the lower stems intact. We’re hoping for another batch next year.



Kathi’s morel

Right next to the morel, the coral honeysuckle I got at the VNPS plant sale last year is doing great! It’s on the left side of our front door, opposite a much-larger one from a previous sale. A couple of weeks ago, we created an arch to help them reach across the great divide, and they are now racing to the top.



Her coral honeysuckles

Lightnin' Bugs!

Another exciting event this spring was the appearance of interesting fireflies in mid-April. They were all way up in the treetops, from dusk until dark. We looked them up in the lightning-bug book¹, and thought they were Spring Tree-top Flashers, an early-spring species. The next day, one appeared in the front yard, on a leaf, waiting patiently to be photographed.

According to the book, it was a Spring Tree-top Flasher! They are common in tulip poplars, hickories and oaks, and often re-use the same trees for pupation. So, maybe another batch next spring.

Finally, the elderberry plant that I bought at the VNPS plant sale a few years ago is spreading out and claiming new territory. I was warned, when I adopted it, that this would happen, so I wasn't surprised. I gave a few seedlings to Freedom Park, moved some to a better spot (where they'd have a little more room and sun), and am offering them to anyone who wants them. With the same warning....

1. Faust, Lynn Frierson. *Fireflies, Glow-worms, and Lightning Bugs*, 2017.

Kathi Mestayer



That photogenic lightnin' bug



A thriving Elderberry

John Clayton Chapter Calendar

**Sat and Sun,
May 13 & 14** 9:45 am – 2:00 pm: John Clayton Chapter's **Native Plant Sale**
at Williamsburg Botanical Garden, Freedom Park, Williamsburg
(See Page 4.)

**Thursday,
May 19** 7:00 pm: Our May Zoom Meeting—Marion Lobstein on
“An Overview of the Flora of Virginia Education Modules and Using
the Flora of Virginia App”
(Details on Page 1)

There are no walks currently scheduled for May and June.

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