



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 July 21: Ellen Powell on “Oak Decline in Virginia”



Oak decline is prevalent today across Virginia's forests and landscapes. This syndrome is caused by a combination of factors, leading to decreased vigor and eventual death of older oak trees. Learn about the causes and implications of oak decline and what you can do to help the genus *Quercus* in Virginia.

Ellen Powell has been the Conservation Education Coordinator for the Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) since 2005. Prior to joining VDOF, she was a Virginia Cooperative Extension agent in eastern Virginia, working in both the 4-H and Environmental Horticulture program areas. Ellen has a Bachelor's degree in fisheries and wildlife sciences from North Carolina State University and a Master's in forest resources from The University of Georgia. She works from the VDOF agency headquarters in Charlottesville.



From the President

This year we had some excellent rain; at times, it seemed overwhelmingly wet. Then the sun began to warm everything. The result is that the garden is looking very lush. I have added some more natives to my yard such as Yellow Wild Indigo (*Baptisia tinctoria*), Purple Milkweed (*Asclepias purpurascens*), Pussytoes (*Antennaria plantaginifolia*), American Germander (*Teucrium canadense*), Winged Monkeyflower (*Mimulus alatus*), and Fringed Loosestrife (*Lysimachia ciliata*). Why did I choose to add them? The Yellow Wild Indigo I had already tried to grow last year, but alas, the rabbits ate it to the ground and it never came back. This year I have it protected by a cage impervious to rabbits. Wild Yellow Indigo is a favorite of pollinators: bees, moths, wasps, and beetles. In addition, it is the host plant of the Clouded Sulphur Butterfly and the Wild Indigo Dusky-wing Skipper. Such a popular plant is a bonus to any native garden. I chose the Purple Milkweed as it has a lovely deep pink flower more

intense than common milkweed. It is also a host to Monarch Butterflies and loved by other butterflies. Pussytoes is a great groundcover and a host of the American Painted Ladies Butterflies. I chose American Germander because deer do not like it and it is attractive to pollinators. It is a mint with lovely flowers. It is aggressive, though, so I am taking a chance on planting it in my yard. Finally, I planted Winged Monkeyflower, a good plant for moist soil which can form a carpet. Alas, the rabbit is eating it and so I put rabbit repellent on it because I am out of cages. Fringed Loosestrife has a cute yellow flower, is good in shady moist soil, and best of all, a favorite food of native bees. By now, you are wondering why I have a rabbit in the garden since I worked so hard to put up a wire netting fence so they would not come into my garden. This Spring I had workers come to my house to renovate an old bathroom, and they kept the gate wide open every day as they came in and out...maybe next year I will not have a rabbit. In plant news, I had two plants that appeared in my yard without any effort on my part, brought by a bird perhaps. One is Pale Indian Plantain (*Arnoglossum atriplicifolium*). I am happy because it is a bird favorite. They love the seeds, fruits, and nectar. The nectar also attracts bees. The second plant that suddenly appeared in my yard is Aniseroot (*Osmorhiza longistylis*). It is a pretty native with tiny white flowers. If you crush the leaves or root, they smell like anise, but I have not tried to do that yet. It is pretty and a new plant to me. This year I also grew two new native plants: Early Figwort (*Scrophularia lanceolata*) and Late Figwort (*Scrophularia marilandica*). Early Figwort and Late Figwort are so alike that you can only tell them apart when they bloom because the flowers are not alike and their blooming does not overlap. Early Figwort blooms in May, June, and July and Late Figwort blooms even longer, from July until October. They were unknown to me, and you may ask why I chose to grow such unknown native plants. According to sources, they are considered two of the best species for attracting butterflies, native bees and other insects, and birds, especially Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. The blooms drip with nectar and have compounds that make them inedible to deer. The Xerces Society says they are of special value to pollinators. In addition, they attract predatory or parasitoid insects that prey upon pest insects. I really could not resist all of that! I planted them so close it was impossible to tell them apart. I could only label them as Figwort species for the sale. I apologize for that error.

Today I read an interesting and somewhat amusing article in the *Guardian* of Wednesday, June 8, 2022. It said that lush healthy houseplants are good at helping you feel better and calm. However, if the plant is unhealthy and looking sickly, the opposite is true: you feel unhappy and low. The reason is that when they do not

look healthy, you feel bad. Its sad presence makes you feel that you mistreated it by overwatering it, underwatering it, or placing it in the wrong location. After all, plants come with instructions you need to follow. My orchid's instructions tell me to place it in indirect light and how many ice cubes to put in the pot. Failure to do this is really your fault. This makes you feel guilty and depressed. In addition, when a plant is unhealthy you feel as if you were breathing unhealthy air, even though scientists have scientifically proven that healthy plants do not really improve your air. The solution, according to a scientific study, is that it is imperative to get rid of the plant as quickly as possible because it will not recover and it will stress you out. According to the Royal Horticultural Society, it is scientifically true that for your wellbeing, you should get that plant out of your sight.

There has been one good news story about the environment. On June 9, 2022, Julia Quaglia reported that a rare female Galapagos tortoise, the “fantastic giant tortoise *Chelonoidis phantasticus*”, long thought to be extinct, had been identified. A giant tortoise is about 1.3 meters, or about 4 feet, long and weighs 250–400 kilograms, or about 550–882 pounds. Their average lifespan is 100 years. They eat grasses, fruits, and cactus pads, bathe in water, and spend an average of 16 hours a day resting. The first of these tortoises was a male discovered by the explorer Rollo Beck in 1906, who named him Lonesome George. This female had its DNA tested to prove she was a relative of Lonesome George. She was found on the arid, volcanic island of Fernandina eating in a small patch of grass in the solidified lava. Scientists named her Fernanda and think she is 50 years old. She is smaller, probably because there is a lack of vegetation on Fernandina Island, and is missing the flared shell and saddleback shape of other such tortoises. Her DNA is a match for the species and very different from other giant tortoises on Galapagos. She probably got to Fernandina by floating during extreme weather or by human intervention. Scientists hope they may find other tortoises on Fernandina, and if any are found, hope to breed Fernanda and help the species survive. “Everything that we knew about this species said it was extinct,” said Stephen Gaughran, an ecology and evolutionary biology researcher at Princeton University and the lead author of the study published in the journal *Communications Biology*, “so it's a big deal for a species that we thought was extinct for a hundred years to suddenly appear here.” Actually, scientists have found tracks of two or three other tortoises, so now researchers, although thrilled to have found Fernanda, hope for a breeding program if a few more tortoises of the same breed are still alive on the island. The thought of reviving the species is exciting!

✿ John Clayton Chapter desperately needs a new Plant Walk Chair— please consider volunteering for this important mission!

You will *not* have to conduct the walks yourself, but rather coordinate with those who know our native plants to hold walks.

Why are plant walks important to our chapter?

1. It is how we fulfill our mission to educate the public about native plants.
2. It is often how we recruit new members. After one walk in 1992, I decided to join.



3. You meet other members and get to know them.

Lucile Kossodo



✿ No Plant Walks are scheduled for July and August.

Our Annual Native Plant Sale was a Big Success!

John Clayton Chapter's Annual Native Plant Sale was held on May 13 and 14 at the Williamsburg Botanical Gardens (WBG) in Freedom Park. Friday was set up day, and in the afternoon we sold plants to members and volunteers. Saturday was the public sale, from 9 am **into** the early afternoon. The sale brought in an astounding \$12,000, provided plants not found in stores, and educated those who attended.

Weather... It was a warm and wet Friday and Saturday, but participants fared well. The busiest time for the sale was also the rainiest. On Saturday at about 10 am, buyers stood in the check-out line under the canopies during a downpour. Thank you to **Jim Etchberger** and the **Boy Scouts of Troop 103**, who brought and set up the pop-up canopies. In addition, the several volunteers kept adding mulch to the driveway in an attempt to keep us all out of the mud. One very adventurous person managed a wheelchair in the rain and mud.

Participants... Despite minimal advertising, the plant sale was full of buyers. Email notices were sent to our JCC VNPS, the Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists, and the Williamsburg Botanical Garden mailing list. The rest of the

VNPS
Plant Sale
2022

advertisement was one small sign at the Botanical Garden and plenty of word-of-mouth. There were a lot of questions asked and advice given, but the participants seemed well-informed about the role of native plants in supporting our native bees, butterflies, moths, birds, and all that comprise our local habitats and ecosystems. It was wonderful to hear knowledge shared.

The Williamsburg Botanical Garden (WBG)... The Williamsburg Botanical Garden was truly a beautiful location. It was filled with table-upon-table of native plants, the majority donated from members' gardens. This year, the Board Chair of the WBG offered the location and some services from Freedom Park. There was no direct cost for the location, tables, or parking. In exchange for offering the location and support, the plant sale team gave left-over plants to the garden to be sold in their honor box sales. We owe the WBG Board and JCC Parks big **THANK YOU**s.

Plant Numbers and Diversity... Of course, this year's sale had to be the best ever! We estimate that there were 2,000 plants, with 1,500 sold and others donated. There were approximately 150 species, most of them appropriate for our Coastal region. A list was made available prior to the sale to the 3 mailing lists of more than 2,000 potential buyers. The large selection of plants came from all of the people donating plants. Two of our members from Newport News started plants from seed and nurtured them just for this sale. We encourage **YOU** to consider growing plants from seed, so that the sale can obtain diverse plants. To all of you who donated, dug, and/or potted the many plants, **THANK YOU** so very much.

Plant Sources... The majority of plants were donated from home gardens. For the past several years, a Fish and Wildlife Biologist from Gloucester has donated trees, shrubs, and vines. The Plant Sale Committee purchased some plants from Sandy's in Henrico; most of those plants were species with no other source. We also purchased plugs from Wetlands Plants, Inc. in North Carolina. Some of those plants were successful and others not-so-much. All were well worth the investment.

Plant Prices... Each plant was hand-labeled with its name and marked with a price. To minimize work for those potting all of those plants, the majority of plants in the gallon size were \$8 each. Some of those plants were worth more, while others less. For next year, we hope to devise a simpler and more accurate pricing system. At a local nursery, one perennial plant in the same size pot was selling for \$12, as compared to our \$8, and the shrubs and trees were priced much lower in comparison to the retail market. Our sale had a few 4-ft Flowering Dogwoods, priced at \$30. For retail, the same size plant was being sold for \$120.

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 year. We have a few leaders who purchase plants, research and write about plants, gather materials, organize volunteers, and do other miscellaneous tasks.

In the fall and spring, volunteers worked hard at potting parties held at Stonehouse School, Joan and Jim Etchberger's home, Meegan Wallace's home in Newport News, and other locations. The **Etchbergers** and **Meegan Wallace** did the lion's share of plant care, planning for set-up, and organizing the Boy Scouts to help during the sale. **Cathy Flanagan** coordinated publicity, the display, and cashiers. **Adrienne Frank** coordinated plant purchases, the plant list, and managed volunteers. Other major contributors from the plant sale team included **Lucile Kossodo**, **Sue Voigt**, **Susie Yager**, and **Mike Binder**. There are so many people to thank. Approximately 40 volunteers helped with set-up Friday and during the sale on Saturday. Volunteers were from our JCC VNPS chapter, the Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists, Board members from the Botanical Garden, and the James City County Master Gardeners. A number of people represented all of these organizations.

On Friday, the plants were transported by caravans from 3 locations: Croaker, Norge, and Newport News. Fourteen vehicles moved plants, including the covered U-haul trailer that needed to make 2 trips to Newport News. All of the plants were placed on top or below the 25 tables lined up along the driveway in the Botanical Garden.

On Saturday during the sale, there were greeters, table monitors, experts to help buyers, a raffle person, talliers, cashiers, and set up and clean up volunteers. The 17 Boy Scouts of Troop 103 were an enormous help by holding and moving plants throughout the day. Lots of information was given by several long-time members of JCC VNPS. Their combined years of knowledge about native plants was an enormous help to buyers. **Mike Binder**, **Keith Navia**, and **Meegan Wallace** were our designated "experts" and **Pat Baldwin** joined us, as he has for many years.

Cashiers... For the first time, buyers were able to use their credit cards. Cathy, our head cashier, purchased a "Square" chip reader and successfully used it for the first time for this sale. The Square device had the advantage of sending a receipt to the purchaser and of keeping track of purchase amounts. It ended up being very popular with the public. Fully one third of all sales were by credit or debit. The all-volunteer cashier team worked quickly to keep the line moving—all while keeping order, reviewing checks for accuracy, and making change.

It was a huge but very rewarding undertaking! We could not do it without the enormous effort of dedicated volunteers. **A big THANK YOU goes to all of our volunteers!**

Plant Sale Co-chairs **Adrienne Frank** and **Sue Voigt**

On the next page are some photos taken by **Kay** and **Elvin Clapp**, who are Master Gardeners and great supporters of the Williamsburg Botanical Garden. A big **THANK YOU** goes out to them for not only photographs, but also their volunteer work during set-up and the sale.



Early morning set up on Saturday; Boy Scout Troup 103 helped with setting up all of the tents.



Volunteers getting “greeter” instructions from Joan Etchberger at our display



Jim and Joan Etchberger and Chuck Deffenbaugh during early morning set up



Chuck Deffenbaugh, Sue Voigt, and Jeanette Navia were talliers helping buyers to add up the cost of their plants.



Carts helped buyers move plants when it wasn't too crowded. Later, the Boy Scouts did a lot of running back and forth to the holding site.



Eric Beckhusen, who on the spot volunteered to be in charge of the raffle. He has been a vital part of potting parties, and he also helped to transport plants from Newport News to the sale site.

From Betsy Washington, Northern Neck Chapter

Plant of the Month for May: Jack-in-the-pulpit, *Arisaema triphyllum*

Jack-in-the-pulpit, *Arisaema triphyllum*, is one of our most intriguing and curious woodland wildflowers and is blooming now. I am certainly not alone in being intrigued by this fascinating wildflower, which has nearly as many colorful common names as it does flower patterns—Preacher in the pulpit, Bloody Arum, Bog Onion, Indian Turnip, Indian Cradle, and Lord and Lady. But Jack-in-the-pulpit is the Virginia Flora’s common name for it and it fits (check out the photo). Found in every county in Virginia, it ranges from Canada south to Florida and Texas. As with most plants with such a large geographic range, Jack-in-the-pulpit exhibits a great deal of variability both in size and floral characteristics. Plants range from one to 2.5 feet high but average about 12–16 inches and have one or two large, divided leaves, each with three oval leaflets that partially conceal the flowers. Like many members of the Arum family to which it belongs, they have a curious flower structure with a striped spathe or hood (popularly called the “pulpit”) that wraps around and partially encloses the green or brown club-like spadix (flower spike)—the “Jack” or “preacher”. The color of the spathe can vary dramatically from deep purple to green and is often striped with purple or white; no two flowers seem to be exactly alike. Intriguingly, small plants start out male but can spontaneously change to females the following year as the plant grows larger and become more vigorous. Research indicates the sex is determined by the amount of nutrients stored in the corm (root-storage organ) during the previous year’s growing season. If enough resources have accumulated, the female flowers will be fertile while the male will be sterile, thus preventing self-pollination. The tiny flowers are pollinated by small flies and gnats that crawl beneath the spathe and down the spadix to the tiny flowers to collect pollen. Females will produce green berries that cover the spadix and ripen into showy, lustrous red berries by late summer.

Jack-in-the-pulpit grows in moist upland woods, floodplain forests and swamp hummocks across Virginia. In gardens it prefers similar conditions, growing best in partially to fully shaded moist woodland gardens with rich soils or those amended with organic matter to aid in moisture retention. It is a wonderful plant to grow along streams and in other moist areas; it grows best with constantly moist, rich soils. Roots and foliage of Jack-in-the-pulpit contain calcium oxalate crystals that cause intense burning to the mouth and other tissues if ingested, and accordingly the plant is rarely bothered by herbivores like deer or rabbits or other pests and diseases. When grown in moist soil, the plants will produce offsets (offshoots) that separate from the main rhizome and expand into colonies. Jack-in-the-pulpit may



Arisaema triphyllum with foliage



Its fruit stalk in early fall color

also be grown from seed, but it can take up to five years to produce flowers. The boldly divided leaves add a lush look to the garden but may die back and go dormant by late summer. The May flowers are always a stand-out and the red fruit is incredibly showy in late summer and early fall.

Native Americans used the plant for medicinal purposes to treat various ailments including head and joint aches and skin diseases, and even reputedly for snakebites. They also cooked and ate the corms, leading to the common name Indian Turnip. Stories also abound about Native Americans mixing the corm with meat and leaving it for their enemies to find and eat. The burning sensation is not immediate, meaning that a great quantity could be eaten before leaving the enemy in great discomfort or even death. Because of the high toxicity rating for this plant, it is best to limit your admiration and use of this plant to the garden or woodland walks. Some woodland birds eat the ripe berries, including Wild Turkeys and Wood Thrushes.

Jack-in-the-pulpits bloom through May, and it is a delight to hike down to a nearby wooded swamp or to Cabin Swamp or the Mill Pond at Hickory Hollow NAP to admire the intriguing Jack-in-the-pulpit.

Plant of the Month for June: Yellow Wild Indigo, *Baptisia tinctoria*

One of my favorite Northern Neck native perennials, Yellow Wild Indigo, *Baptisia tinctoria*, is coming into bloom right now and its neat, compact habit fits the bill for many requests for low maintenance, small, native plants. While not technically a woody shrub, this perennial is a long-lived, densely shrubby plant that grows only two to three feet in height and width, with a neat, mounded habit, almost as if it has been sheared. In June, clusters of bright yellow pea-like flowers begin to open, blooming for a month or more. While each flower is small, only about a half inch long, these long-lasting flowers are held in four to five inch long loose racemes at the ends of the branches, and make a wonderful show, literally covering the plant. By late summer, small inflated green seedpods ripen and turn black in fall. The seeds tend to rattle around inside the puffy pods, giving rise to another common name, Rattleweed. The seedpods add texture and a touch of color to the fall garden. The gray-green foliage itself is quite attractive. Like other *Baptisias*, each leaf is divided into three rounded leaflets, much like clover, creating a lovely fine texture that contrasts with that of other garden plants. And, as you may know, this member of the Pea family, like nearly all members, forms a symbiotic relationship with special nitrogen-fixing bacteria that convert atmospheric nitrogen into a form that plants can use and enriching the surrounding soil.



Baptisia tinctoria flower detail



Baptisia seedpods

Yellow Wild Indigo is found throughout the eastern U.S. but is uncommon in a few states; however, it is common throughout Virginia, where it is found in dry open forests, barrens, or roadsides, usually in nutrient poor sandy or rocky soils. Plants develop an extensive root system and are quite tolerant of drought and poor soils but are difficult to transplant or move. This makes it a wonderful plant for dry sites with poor soils where other plants struggle. It also performs beautifully in regular garden soils and tolerates both full sun and part shade. Try Yellow Wild Indigo in a pollinator, cottage garden, or in a perennial border, where it makes an outstanding “supporting player” to any border, adding great foliage texture and long-lasting showy flowers. It is also lovely planted in groups and makes an excellent bank cover, preventing erosion with its deep extensive root system and ability to shrug off drought, poor soils, and even deer. It grows into a dense, neat mound but loosens up a bit after flowering and can be lightly clipped to maintain its dense habit if seedpods are not desired.

Yellow Wild Indigo is an outstanding pollinator plant, supporting bumblebees and hosting caterpillars of several butterfly species, including the Pearl Crescent, Wild Indigo Duskywing, Frosted Elfin, and Orange Sulfur butterflies, as well as the caterpillars of various moths and skippers.

Indigenous Americans used the plant for medicinal purposes as an antiseptic for wounds and to treat colds and other maladies; however, the plant is poisonous by itself. Native Americans and early colonists used the roots to create a blue dye, when the non-native true Indigo was unavailable. In fact, the botanical names of this plant (*Baptisia* and *tinctoria*) both mean “to dye”. Yellow Wild Indigo has also been used as a horsefly deterrent, and tied to the harnesses of horses and mules, leading to yet other common names—Horsefly weed and Shoofly!

Every year I grow more and more enchanted with this beautiful and tough native plant and plan ways to add more to my garden. Go ahead and add one to your own garden and I think you will be equally enchanted, as will the pollinators and butterflies.

Photos: Betsy Washington

John Clayton Chapter Calendar

**Thursday,
July 21** **7:00 pm: Our July Zoom Meeting—Ellen Powell on “Oak Decline
in Virginia”** (Details on Page 1)

There are no walks scheduled for July and August.

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 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