



# 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 May 19<sup>th</sup>: Bert Harris on "Native Seed Collection for Meadows and Gardens"



**Bert Harris** is the Executive Director of the Clifton Institute in Warrenton, Virginia, where he oversees a program of research on grassland restoration, declining native species, and conservation on private lands. He is a passionate land manager and he works with his team to restore native plant and animal communities on the Clifton Institute's 900-acre property. After attaining his B.S. in Ecology and Biodiversity at Sewanee: The University of

the South, Bert completed a Ph.D. in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Adelaide, Australia. He then went on to do a post-doctoral fellowship on the effects of the pet trade on Indonesian birds at Princeton University. Bert is an adjunct professor in the Department of Environmental Science at American University and in the Environmental Science and Policy Department at George Mason University.



## From the President

Only two more weeks until our Annual Native Plant Sale on Saturday, April 30 at the Williamsburg Community Building on 401 North Boundary St., Williamsburg, 23185. I hope that you have signed up to help on that day. We have over 1,000 plants to sell. I

know that I will be there to help the whole day. The plant sale committee has worked very hard potting, labelling, watering and preparing the plants to be transported and sold at our sale.

To give you an idea of the many plants that are now blooming in my garden, I have included some photographs to inspire you to landscape your garden with natives. If you like pink shades, can you guess what Photo 1 and Photo 2 are? If you like white plants, can you guess what Photo 3,

Photo 4, and Photo 5 are? If you like blue flowers, can you guess what Photo 6 and Photo 7 are? If you like yellow shades, can you guess what Photo 8 is? If you like red shades, can you guess what those in Photo 9 are? If you need to know, the answers can be found at the end of the article. No, these are not all the flowers but what is perhaps a bit less obvious. All the photos were taken on April 17 in my garden. Not all the plants photographed will be for sale on April 29, but many will. Summer flowers are great also and we will have many for sale.

**1****2****3****4**





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DEQ has just announced that Laura McKay, who is the manager of the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program, has received the 2023 Captain Ron Erchul Environmental Leadership Award. This award recognizes a Virginian who has made significant individual efforts to improve the environment in Virginia. During her more than 40-year tenure in natural resources, McKay's efforts have led to the conservation and restoration of critical wildlife habitat, increased coastal resilience, and supported oyster, eelgrass, and bay scallop restoration. The article states that "She has been a key voice on the Management Board for the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean and her leadership and dedication have brought numerous stakeholders together in a common purpose".

Growing plants is not without danger. As you can see, I had some lovely oaks that grew larger, and I put them in my garden to get ready to be planted. I still do not really know which ones I have grown from the acorns I picked up last fall. One oak has little thorns on the leaves. One has lots of visible pointy leaves and one has curvy leaves. Well, imagine my horror to find that a squirrel (?) maybe cut some down so the stem was neatly cut. Did the squirrel want to build a nest? Who knows, so I had to make cages for the ones not destroyed. This morning I planted them in the wooded area by my garage with a cage. I hope they survive. But as you probably know growing native plants is not without a big learning curve and failures. I will never see those that grow into tall trees, but I can only hope that someone will enjoy them some day. As Doug Tallamy says, "you should have planted those oaks fifteen years ago".

Here are the answers to the photos of native plants blooming now:

- Photo 1 Wild Geranium (*Geranium maculatum*)
- Photo 2 Philadelphia Fleabane (*Erigeron philadelphicus*)
- Photo 3 Arrow-wood (*Viburnum dentatum*)
- Photo 4 Wood Anemone (*Anemone quinquefolia*)
- Photo 5 Foam Flower (*Tiarella cordifolia*)
- Photo 6 Virginia Spiderwort (*Tradescantia virginiana*)
- Photo 7 Blue-eyed Grass (*Syrinchium angustifolium*)
- Photo 8 Golden-alexanders (*Zizia aurea*)
- Photo 9 Cross-vine (*Bignonia capreolata*)



Lucile Kossodo

## New Members

We welcome new members **Jennifer Viudez** and **Antonio Viudez-Mora** of Carrolton, **Sandra Cimino** and **Melany Libby** of Hampton, **Deb Moore** of Fort Monroe, **Maureen O'Brien** and **Dora Rosapepe** of Toano, **Mary Brittingham** of Nassawadox, and **Cynthia Ferentinos**, **Sheila Glennon**, **David Malmquist**, and **Tracy Shackelford**, all of Williamsburg, to the John Clayton Chapter!

## There are no plant walks scheduled for May and June.

### ✿ The John Clayton Chapter needs a new Plant Walk Coordinator—

The Plant Walk Coordinator arranges for walks with either him/her as leader or asks someone else to lead a walk. Walks can be in parks or to visit the yard of members who have interesting gardens with native plants. We had one earlier this Spring, but we need walks year round. It is a good opportunity to learn about native plants, in what landscapes they occur, and to see how they grow. Please consider becoming our Chapter's Native Plant Walk Coordinator—it's a good way to meet other members and to invite the walkers to join our membership!

### ✿ Recent Plant Walks...

#### A Wahrani Nature Trail Walk on April 2

We had a great turnout for the Plant walk at the Wahrani Nature trail In New Kent County held on April 2! It turned out to be a beautiful afternoon to hike the trail and see what kinds of interesting native plants we could find. One of the first plants you notice as you enter the woods are the large swaths of Running-cedar (*Lycopodium digitatum*) covering the ground! Another plant in abundance was the Spring Beauty (*Clayton virginica*). They were in full bloom with their white flowers and pink stripes lining the blooms! We also came across an unusual wildflower that was new to many of us. The Pennywort (*Obolaria virginica*) grows quite abundantly along the trail. This little perennial native plant can be easily overlooked as it only grows around 6" tall and has purplish green leaves. However, in the spring it comes into bloom with small dull white flowers making it more noticeable. It is always a delight to discover a new plant such as the Pennywort! Several native orchids were found, such as the Putty-root Orchid (*Aplectrum hyemale*) and the Crane-fly Orchid (*Tipularia discolor*). We ID'd them by their leaves, as they are not in bloom yet. We also identified and discussed many of the trees and shrubs we found along the way, such as Tuliptree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), Sycamore (*Platanus Occidentals*), Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*), Coralberry (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*), and Strawberry Bush (*Euonymus americanus*). We ended the walk discussing the various oaks we found, such as Northern Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*) and White Oak (*Quercus alba*). We also discussed the important role oaks play in the ecosystem, especially as a source of caterpillars for the baby birds! On the way back to the trailhead, we came across a Heartleaf Ginger (*Hexastylis virginica*) growing near the trail. The Wahrani Nature Trail is a great place to take a walk in the woods and discover many of our native forest plants.

Scott Hemler

## From Helen...

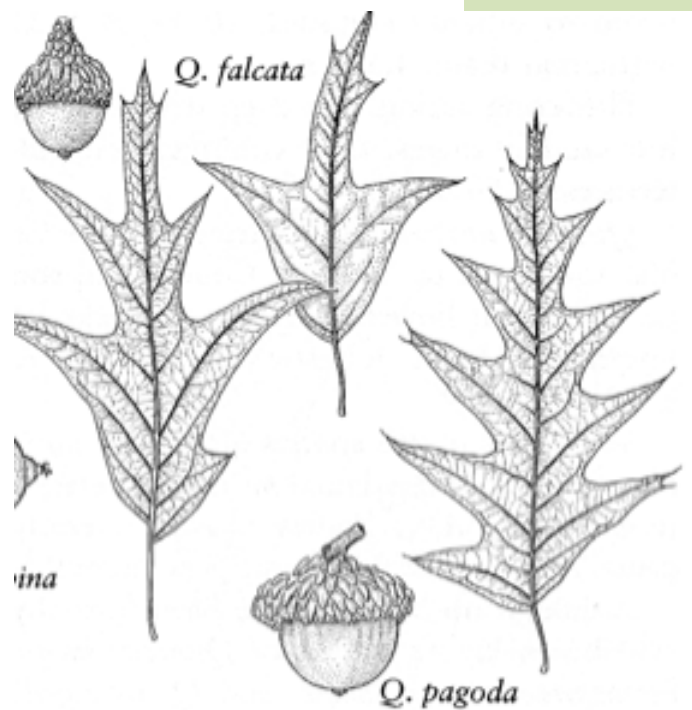
### Two Red Oaks

All winter, when we were out on a walk, Gus could be seen hunched over fallen leaves on the sidewalk. He was, and still is, trying to develop a clear vision of the difference between two species of Red Oak—*Quercus falcata* (Southern Red Oak) and *Q. pagoda* (Cherrybark Oak). These two plants were earlier considered a single species, but there are significant differences in habitat and leaf shape. *Q. falcata* grows in dry upland sites while *Q. pagoda* needs habitat with some moisture as well-drained floodplain forests and the flat, slowly draining non-floodplain sites common in the lower Coastal Plain.

*Q. pagoda* has more leaf lobes, 2–4 pairs, mostly triangular at right angles from the leaf blade. Underneath the leaves are gray and hairy as are the young twigs. The base of the leaf is mostly tapered. The leaf lobes of *Q. falcata* are fewer, 1–3 pairs, and any pubescence on the twigs or the underside of leaves is rusty-colored. The leaf base is usually curved, U-shaped. Characteristic of this species is a long terminal lobe, mostly free of additional lobes. The side lobes are usually curved, or sickle-shaped. Leaves grown in the shade usually have only 3 lobes, while the shade leaves of *Q. pagoda* usually have 5 lobes. The typical sun and shade leaves of both species show distinct differences, but an individual tree shows much variation in leaf form. Certain leaves on one tree can show some characters similar to those of the other species. Occasionally botanists have suggested that *Q. falcata* and *Q. pagoda* hybridize commonly, but Stewart Ware has said “I don’t think these two trees hybridize any more than most other oaks.” (Personal communication)

The acorns of both are too similar to be used for species identification. The bark of both trees is dark to black and fissured, with noticeably flaky ridges in *Q. pagoda*. These differences may not be obvious to the casual observer while walking through the woods, but experienced foresters, searching for valuable woods, are able to distinguish the two solely by bark. (S.A. Ware, pers. comm.).

Botanists, foresters and naturalists all know that all characters of a tree must be examined, including habitat, and leaves grown in sun and shade, before identification.



(Illustration by John Myers from *Flora of Virginia* 2012)

Gus enjoys examining all aspects of the single mature oak growing within a fence on Jamestown Island near the trail to Black Point. Here it is obvious there is much variation in leaf shape in a single isolated tree.

*Quercus falcata* was so named because the leaves grown in the sun are typically sickle-shaped (“falcate”); the common names Southern Red Oak and Spanish Oak refer to its presence in the southern U.S. states. In the scientific name *Q. pagoda* the species name reflects the pagoda-like shape of the sun leaves. This tree was given the common name Cherrybark Oak, because the bark resembles that of mature Black Cherry, *Prunus serotina*.

Helen Hamilton

## From Betsy Washington, Northern Neck Chapter

### Plant of the Month for April 2023: Carolina or Yellow Jessamine

Carolina or Yellow Jessamine, *Gelsemium sempervirens*, is a stunning evergreen vine native to the southern United States and Mexico south to Guatemala. In Virginia, Carolina Jessamine is a coastal beauty, common along the southern and central Coastal Plain north to Lancaster and Northampton Counties but rare in the adjacent outer Piedmont. This twining vine is often seen along our roadsides in late March and April in low woods and thickets festooning loblolly trees or scrambling over shrubs or fences. It grows naturally in low flatwoods, swamps, thickets, and maritime forests along the coast. No matter where it grows, it always lights up the late winter-early spring landscape with its profuse bright yellow flowers. It is especially beautiful draped through the branches of flowering Redbuds with their magenta blooms or dogwoods. Stop and get up close and you may notice the sweet fragrance wafting from the flowers.

Carolina Jessamine is certainly one of the most beautiful vines we have in the South and has the advantage of offering winter interest with its fine-textured evergreen leaves and profusion of daffodil-yellow blooms—right when we long for them most, near winter’s end and into spring. Carolina Jessamine has dark lustrous green lance-shaped leaves that are only about 1 to 3 in. in. long and less than 1” wide, arranged opposite each other along thin, wiry stems. The vines grow moderately quickly to 12 to 20’ in height and the fine textured foliage and thin stems make it perfect for growing on a small arbor or fence. It can even be grown as a groundcover on a bank with an annual cut-back to below 3” right after bloom, although the stems may mound up and twine around each other. From March to May, sweetly scented bright yellow trumpet-shaped flowers appear in the axils of the leaves either as a solitary flower or in clusters of two or three and continue to bloom for weeks. The funnel shaped flowers open





into five shallowly rounded lobes and are about 1.5” long by 1” wide. If you are lucky, it may bloom again lightly in the fall. The flowers are followed by a persistent 1” long flattened capsule that splits open to disperse its seeds.

This adaptable vine is easy to grow in a variety of soils from sandy to heavy clay and acidic to slightly alkaline but grows best in moist rich soil amended with organic matter. It flowers profusely in full sun but tolerates part-shade, where blooming may be reduced. Carolina Jessamine tolerates wind, occasional flooding and short droughts once established and has the added bonus of being moderately salt tolerant. The evergreen foliage often turns bronze or purplish during winter but recovers quickly. It needs only a light pruning to shape or train the vine to a support best done right after blooming before new buds form. Hardy in zones 6–9, this southern vine is a sure antidote to the winter blues. The evergreen foliage provides winter interest and makes an excellent screen on a trellis or fence. Wherever you choose to grow this charming vine—a small arbor, trellis, mailbox, or along a fence—the softly draping vines cascade softly down showcasing the rich yellow blooms. It certainly adds beauty, grace and fragrance to any landscape. Be aware however, that no matter how lovely, all parts of the plant are poisonous. Carolina Jessamine is the state flower of South Carolina, even featured on the South Carolina state quarter. And remarkably, it was used by the Carolina Algonquians; they used nearly every part of the plant to treat malaria and various “fevers”. They even used it as a “weapon”, making a fragrant tea for enemies who would suffer nearly instant paralysis when it was consumed.

Carolina Jessamine attracts hummingbirds, butterflies, and a variety of bees and pollinators to its sweetly scented flowers. Songbirds and small mammals feed on its seeds, adding to its wildlife value. You may want to include this lovely vine as a backdrop to a pollinator or butterfly garden or to add a vertical element to a perennial garden trained up a trellis or over an arbor. Invite this spring beauty into your garden and be charmed by its adaptability and easy-going nature and create a long-lasting spring spectacle.

The Latin name *Hepatica* and common name “Liverleaf” both refer to *Hepatica*’s purported resemblance in shape and winter color to liver. Writings from the Middle Ages, referred to as the “Doctrine of Signatures,” held that the shape or look of a plant indicated its healing properties, thus early settlers made an herbal tea with the leaves of *Hepaticas* to treat various liver ailments. Apparently, many followed this false science and fell ill and even died.

Today it is far better and safer to enjoy this precocious wildflower while hiking in rich woodlands or to grow it in our own woodland garden. *Hepaticas* prefer rich well drained soils beneath deciduous trees where they can soak up winter light. The well branched roots dislike transplanting but once established *Hepaticas* tolerate both dry and moist soils but are happiest with consistent moisture. When happy they



may seed themselves into large drifts creating an early spring spectacle. Like other members of the Buttercup family, they are unpalatable to deer—an added bonus for the garden. Plant them in a spot at the front of the border or along a path away from crowding neighbors and competition. This is the perfect way to admire their precocious blooms; blooms that will surely lift your spirits and assure you that spring is on its way. Take a walk to Cabin Swamp Hickory Hollow Natural Area Preserve in the coming weeks and look just off the trails for this lovely late winter bloomer

**Betsy Washington**

# John Clayton Chapter Calendar

Thursday, May 19 7:00–9:00 pm: Our May Zoom Meeting:  
Bert Harris on "Native Seed Collection for Meadows and Gardens "

(See Page 1.)

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  
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