



# 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 FRIDAY, July 21: Johnny Townsend on “What Do We Know? New Frontiers in Virginia Botany”

**Johnny Townsend** is currently the Senior Botanist with the Virginia Natural Heritage Program, a division of Virginia DCR. Their mission is to document, manage, and protect the most threatened species and landscapes in Virginia, as well as conduct a general biological survey of the state. As botanist he conducts field surveys for rare species of flowering plants and bryophytes (mosses, liverworts, and hornworts) with a team of other botanists and ecologists. He is originally from Charleston, South Carolina, and the Carolina Lowcountry is where he gained his deep interest in the outdoors, although it was the birds, fish, and other mobile creatures that grabbed his attention early on, not plants, which he supposes only makes sense. He came around to the plant world through the encouragement of a mentor whose enthusiasm for botany continues to amaze him. We all need people like that.



## From the President

We finally got some rain this June. It was very dry weather, so I hope you did not lose too many plants to the drought by watering. I am looking forward to getting a rain barrel arrangement soon. That should help with the expense of water usage.



This Spring has been a great one for seeing native plants. On May 13, I accompanied the Master Naturalists on a visit to Chub Sandhill Area Natural Preserve in Sussex. It is a large area of low sandhills and riparian wetlands near the Nottoway River. There I saw many plants I had not seen before. One was the awful Poison Oak (*Toxicodendron pubescens*) It is a low plant with pretty leaves like an oak. Areas of yellow flowers were Canada Frostweed (*Crocianthemum canadense*). Canada Frostweed grows in woodlands, dunes, dry clearings in the Coastal Plain. Also saw fields of Yellow Ragwort but it is the Woolly Ragwort (*Packera tormentosa*) which grows in dry mesic sandhills of the Coast-

al Plain unlike our Golden or Heartleaf Ragwort which grows in moist wet soil. The flowers are alike, the leaves are very different in that the *Packera tormentosa* has small leaves near the soil. A small white flower with many rather funny and strange names was new to me. It is called Spurge-nettle, Tread softly, Finger Rots, Bull Nettle (*Cnidoscolus stimulosus*) and also grows in sandy soils and is locally common south of the James River. The names made me glad I did not touch it. But I found no reference to why it has some of its names. Apparently, it is native to North and South America. The exciting point of our visit was coming upon a bunch of beautiful rare golden flowers that grow nowhere else in Virginia but in the Chub Sanhills and areas immediately adjacent to it. (However the Digital Atlas of Virginia states that there is a historical record from Accomack County). The name is Golden Puccoon (*Lithospermum carolinense*).



Whorled Loosestrife

On June 14 I left for a visit to the northern part of the Great Smokies National Park in Tennessee. I took part in several hikes and my list of native plants I had not seen before was greatly diminished. I was lucky to have sunny weather for all hikes due to a drought which ended the day I left. In a hike to a waterfall, I noticed a Whorled Loosestrife (*Lysmachia quadrifolia*).

It was a plant having four leaves around the stem with little beautiful yellow flowers growing from the leaves. This pattern was repeated around the stem. Shortly after, I saw a White milkweed (*Asclepias variegata*) growing in the

woods. It was pure white with a red stem and very beautiful. In Virginia this plant grows in the Coastal Plain and Piedmont, yet in Tennessee it was growing in the mountains. Perhaps this area was more like Piedmont in Virginia. Closer to the waterfall I saw two Butterfly caterpillars that looked like those of the Pipevine Swallowtail. That would be logical as this part of the Smokies was full of the Pipevine's heart-shaped leaves growing among other plants. As we approached the thundering water cascading down, we saw a Tall Milkweed (*Asclepias exaltata*) growing near the waterfall. It is a spectacular flower, like a sort of shooting star with blooms extending from the center. It grew in the mountains there as it does in Virginia. I also saw some Pipe Vine butterfly caterpillars walking on a stalk. There were many Pipe Vines on the trails that I walked. Then, on another hike



Canada Frosweed



Golden Puccoon



Tall Milkweed





Galax

in the woods there were many areas filled with Galax (*Galax urceolata*). It is found in many parts of southern Virginia as well. The leaves are very glossy green with crenated edges. The flower is very tall with blooming candles of very small white flowers. Another blooming flower I saw for the first time was Flowering Raspberry (*Rubus odoratus*). It grows in the western part of the mountains of Virginia. It has huge leaves and can grow to a height of 3 meters. Apparently, the fruit is not very juicy like



Flowering Raspberry

other berries, but the flowers are beautiful. If the Latin name is correct, they must smell delightfully good. In my visit to Cade Cove in the Smokies, I also saw this baby bear climbing a tree. A first for me as I had never seen a bear in the woods before. I did not linger to see his mother... I also saw the beautiful flowers of a Spotted Wintergreen, Striped Wintergreen (*Chimaphila maculate*). This plant grows all over Virginia, but it is not often seen. The Smokies National Park does offer many beautiful flowers to be seen by a visitor. When I returned home, I saw that my 5ft. Bog Bunchflower or Virginia Bunchflower (*Melanthium virginicum*) was blooming very successfully in an area usually rather moist. Although rare in Coastal Virginia, I managed to grow one plant last year and it returned this year with three flowering plants! My list of Native Plants seen has grown considerably. I hope you enjoyed the description of flowering plants I have described to you.



Bog Bunchflower



Lucile's photo of the baby bear

Lucile Kossodo

## New Members

We welcome new members **Angela Fox**, **Drew Gruber**, and **Savannah Allen** of Williamsburg, **Susan NacKenzie** of Toano, **Truman Gerholdt** of Yorktown, **Shawn Devlin** of Hampton, **Shannon Harris** of Mathews, **Michael Indorf** of Hartfield, and **Raquel Ott** of Gloucester, to the John Clayton Chapter!

## There are no plant walks scheduled for July and August. 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!

### From Helen... Plant Names Matter!

Common or scientific? It makes a big difference. Common names often describe a characteristic of the plant which does not help with discrimination among several species with the same look. "Coneflower" can refer to three genera of summer-blooming plants, all members of the Aster Family Asteraceae. *Ratibida columnifera* (Prairie Coneflower) has a definite cone-shaped center. But the center of the flowers of *Echinacea purpurea* (Purple Coneflower), *Rudbeckia laciniata* (Cutleaf Coneflower) and *R. fulgida* (Orange Coneflower) are all raised domes, reminiscent of cones.

"Grass" is used in the names of three plants that are not grasses at all, they are flowers, from three different families. *Sisyrinchium* species (Blue-eyed Grass) in the Iris Family Iridaceae; *Hypoxis hirsuta* (Eastern Yellow Stargrass) in the Stargrass Family Hypoxidaceae; and *Zostera marina* (Eelgrass) in the Eelgrass Family Zosteraceae. All are monocots and named for plant characteristics—the first two for the color of the small flowers and "Eelgrass" since the shape of the plant's long, ribbon-like leaves look like the shape and movement of an eel.

Members of the Geranium Family Geraniaceae have been named since the 1540s for the resemblance of their seed pods to the head and bill of a crane or a stork. The name comes from the Greek "geranos" meaning "crane." Plants of three genera are known as "geraniums"—*Pelargonium* is the common house plant, originally from South Africa and now cultivated widely. The non-native weed *Erodium cicutarium* (Common Storksbill) is distinguished by pinnately compound leaves.

Other geraniums common in Virginia have palmately lobed leaves; some are native, others introduced. *Geranium carolinianum* (Carolina Geranium) of lawns and roadsides and *G. maculatum* of woodsides (Wild Geranium) are native to Virginia and have small pink flowers.



Blue-eyed Grass





Mistflower

A common bedding plant known for its short height and fuzzy purple flowers, *Ageratum houstonianum* (Dwarf Ageratum) is native to Mexico and Central America. Native to Virginia, another “Ageratum,” *Conoclinium coelestinum*, is a tall plant, also known as Mistflower for the same fuzzy purple flowers. Both are Aster Family members.

The name “ginger” usually refers to *Zingiber officinale* (Culinary Ginger) originally from Southeast Asia, now grown for the pungent flavor of the

rhizome that is used fresh, dried, or ground. This plant is a monocot and is not closely related to two native gingers in the Birthwort Family Aristolochiaceae. *Asarum canadense* (Wild Ginger) has deciduous heart-shaped green leaves and *Hexastylis virginica* (Virginia Heartleaf) is evergreen with leaves usually mottled with silvery veins. The rhizomes of both have a ginger-like fragrance, but contain poisonous compounds, not suitable for consumption.



Wild Ginger

Several plants commonly called “cedars” exist in very different groups. Members of the small genus *Cedrus* in the family Pinaceae are, strictly speaking, the only true cedars. *Cedrus deodara* (Deodar Cedar), native to the Himalayas, is now cultivated as a landscape plant, and *C. libani* (Cedar of Lebanon), native to the Eastern Mediterranean mountains, has great historical and cultural significance.

Other plants using the name “cedar” are in very different families. Saltcedar, genus *Tamarisk*, in the Pink Family Caryophyllaceae, was brought to the U.S. for

erosion control and has become invasive. Our common *Juniperus virginiana* (Eastern Redcedar) is in the Cypress Family Cupressaceae of conifers. In the same family, *Thuja occidentalis* (American Arborvitae), is also known as Northern Whitecedar, has many cultivars and is popular as a residential landscape tree. But another “cedar” *Diphasiastrum digitatum* (formerly known as *Lycopodium digitatum* or Running-cedar) is a clubmoss, one of the oldest group of vascular plants, distantly related to ferns.

So to be sure you are buying the plant you want, use the scientific name!



*Diphasiastrum digitatum*,  
a clubmoss

**Helen Hamilton**

## From Betsy Washington, Northern Neck Chapter...

### Plant of the Month for May 2023: Virginia Sweetspire, *Itea virginica*

Sweetspire's natural habitat is swamp forests, seeps, stream banks and acidic flood-plain forests where it is common throughout the Coastal Plain. In the garden, this shrub is super adaptable and maintenance free; it tolerates occasional flooding and wet soils but once established is also surprisingly drought tolerant. It often suckers in moist soils to form dense colonies preventing erosion and stabilizing streambanks and steep slopes. Virginia Sweetspire grows in full sun where the flowers and fall color are more profuse, yet it tolerates heavy shade where it may grow taller and be more open but still manage to bloom. Use this mid-sized shrub along streams and low wet areas or to stabilize banks, helping to prevent erosion. It is also perfect for a rain garden where it can tolerate the alternating wet to dry soil with aplomb. Virginia Sweetspire is especially lovely planted in masses or used as a mid-sized ground or bank cover. It is handsome enough to use in formal gardens as a hedge or accent plant where it will add color and year-round interest to any garden. The flowers grow from new wood, so it is best pruned (if even needed) right after blooming. Any errant root suckers can be removed to create new plantings.



My first Sweetspire was dug from a root sucker on the wet banks of the Dragon Run River on our family farm many years ago and I used it as a specimen plant, to replace a declining weeping Japanese Maple in a tight spot beside a bluestone patio. It won my heart immediately with its exceptional adaptability and its fragrant masses of cascading white flowers falling onto the patio and softening the edge. In summer the leaves remained handsome dark green with occasional reddish tints. In fall its brilliant fall was a stunning sight with leaves like crimson stained glass as the low-angled western sun made them glow.



And in winter, the arching red stems and a good number of jewel-tone leaves remained colorful against the drab winter landscape adding so much life to the winter garden. On another property, I used Virginia Sweetspire in low masses to stabilize a steep bank above a lake where it was a standout in every season. Here in the Northern Neck, it accents my coastal property along either side of a long garden walk to the water adding year-round structure, seasonal color all while attracting loads of birds and butterflies to my pollinator garden. I can't imagine gardening without this beautiful and adaptable shrub!



**Plant of the Month for June 2023: Royal Fern, *Osmunda spectabilis***

Royal Fern, *Osmunda spectabilis*, is one of our most imposing native ferns and is distinctive in every way. Growing 5 or even 6' tall in wet soils and with a light textured, elegant habit it is nothing short of spectacular! Everything about the Royal fern is notable from the tightly coiled, wine-red fiddleheads (called croziers) that emerge in late spring to its statuesque height to its two different types of fronds (dimorphic). Royal ferns are members of the genus *Osmunda*, one of the most ancient group of ferns sometimes referred to as “living fossils”. They evolved over 200 – 300 million years ago with reproductive structures born on separate parts of fronds. The green sterile or leafy fronds are bipinnate with widely spaced, oblong leaflets or pinna with smooth edges that sometimes look more like a legume than a fern. The fertile fronds bear densely contracted, reproductive structures at the tip of their blade that have no chlorophyll. Instead the reproductive tissue consists of rounded spore-producing structures (sporangia) that grow at the top of the fronds, like a “crown” giving rise to the common name, Royal Fern. These clusters are thought to resemble clusters of “flowers” leading to another common name, Flower Fern. The reproductive parts are at first bluish green then gradually change to tan as the spores are ready to be released. The fertile fronds wither away in early summer after the spores have been released. The fronds emerge in late April or May in our area, as tightly coiled fiddleheads that are briefly a vivid wine red covered in rusty hairs but soon turn green and nearly smooth. In fall, Royal Ferns turn brilliant yellow gold illuminating the fall garden or woodlands. Royal ferns grow in a large vase shaped clump from a somewhat erect creeping rhizome that often forms a coarse mound or hummock above ground at the base, elevating the crown of the plant above the wet soil. In fact, *Osmunda* fiber used to pot orchids comes from the fibrous roots of Royal ferns. Royal Ferns are exceptionally long-lived, and the rhizomes grow very slowly; it may take a couple of decades for them to expand into colonies.



Royal Ferns are found in every county in Virginia in a variety of wet to damp soils that are saturated or seasonally flooded including both forested and open swamps, and seasonally flooded and tidal wetlands and rich, moist woods. They are quite adaptable to a variety of soils from nutrient-poor acidic peats to calcium or base-rich soils as long as they are consistently moist.

Royal Ferns make their best growth in full sun in wet soils. In these conditions they obtain their most spectacular growth and height. Add some drama to your shade garden by planting Royal Ferns along the edges of a pond or stream or even wet or moist

woods, a shady, humus-rich border, bog garden, or even a large container and stand back and enjoy their fine, lush texture and spectacular size. Royal fern will grow in consistently moist, rich soils with plenty of organic matter especially in shade with a little supplemental watering in dry spells. They are resistant to deer, rabbits, pests, heavy shade, and seasonally flooded soils, and make an extremely long-lived and elegant addition to any garden. If you are lucky enough to have this statuesque fern growing naturally on your property, get out and admire it from its first emergence in spring to its unique early summer “flowers” to its stunning yellow-gold fall color and revel in the fact that this plant is truly a “living fossil” that has been around since the time of the dinosaurs and yet continues to provide spectacular beauty and elegance fit for royalty!

**Betsy Washington**

## **Notes from Left Field:**

### **Native Persimmons Up for Adoption!**

The most exciting thing I have to report is that our persimmon seeds (gathered from a pile of raccoon scat) germinated and seem to be doing okay.

That said, we do not have room in our yard for them. If you, or someone you know, would like to adopt one or more, please let me know at [kschachinger@gmail.com](mailto:kschachinger@gmail.com) or text at 757-784-7395 (for a slightly quicker reply).

Persimmon seedlings, recently transplanted into deeper pots, after reading that they have long tap roots.



## **West Virginia Wildflower Pilgrimage May 11-14, 2023**

This year was the 61st annual W.Va. Wildflower Pilgrimage! We’ve been to it before (but not 61 times). It’s the work of the West Virginia Garden Club and the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources. The headquarters was at Blackwater Falls State Park near Dolly Sods Wilderness. Dolly Sods has 17,000+ acres and elevations from 2,500 to 4,700 feet, with access to the Allegheny Front. And that’s only part of the whole area that the Wildflower Pilgrimage covered.

The way it works is that you register, and pick which “Tours” you want to go on. The distance from Blackwater Falls to the tour sites was anywhere from 25 to 140 miles round-trip, and up to 4500 feet above sea level. Each tour covers a particular area(s) and a focus of interest, like vernal pools, birds, ephemerals, wildflowers, etc., and the leaders are experts in that focus area. So, you can pick where you want to go and what you want to learn about.



**DAY ONE**

We picked the “Wildflowers, Breeding Birds and Vernal Pools” tour. In a vernal pool, we discovered a pair of salamanders in flagrante.

And here are a couple of the interesting plants.



Wood bettony (*Pedicularis canadensis*)



One member of the salamander couple



Ramp (*Allium tricoccum*), which I tasted at the request of the tour leader.

**DAY TWO**

The next day was a tour of the Fernow Experimental Forest, 3,640 acres of Appalachian forest. Like day one, not many birds, but some cool plants:



White Trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*)



Creeping Phlox (*Phlox stolonifera*), in the hand of our tour leader.



False Solomon's Seal (*Maianthemum racemosum*)

It was an exciting visit to the high country of West Virginia, where we go often to hike around. But this was special; every single thing you found was immediately identified by the tour leaders. No need to look anything up, except to confirm, before I wrote this, by checking the Flora of Virginia (<https://floraofvirginia.org>). We'll be keeping our eyes out for next year's registration.

For more info about this year's Pilgrimage, and photos, the Facebook page is here:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/241296625986654/>



Yellow Fairybell (*Prosartes lanuginosa*), which our tour leader called “Yellow Hairy Fairybell.”

**Kathi Mestayer**

## John Clayton Chapter Calendar

**Friday, July 21 7:00–9:00 pm: Our July Zoom Meeting:**  
**Johnny Townsend on “Conserving Virginia’s Biodiversity through Inventory, Protection, and Stewardship”**

(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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