

Zebra Swallowtail  
Butterfly weed  
(*Asclepias tuberosa*)

photo: CF

# Claytonia

John Clayton Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society



September-October 2025

Happy Halloween!

[vnps.org/johnclayton](http://vnps.org/johnclayton)

From the President:

The Joy of Speakers!

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John Clayton Chapter  
VNPS  
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In this article I aim to highlight some of the things that stood out for me from one of the wonderful panel of experts we have had the opportunity to learn from so far this year. Remember that you can find all of the John Clayton recorded videos at this link:

<http://vimeo.com/showcase/8054025>

We started the New Year off with a lively presentation by Jordan Metzgar, Curator of the Virginia Tech Massey Herbarium. He began with some terms. Pteridology is the study of ferns and comes from the Greek pterido meaning feather or wing. As we know, ferns are unique to most plants as they don't have seeds, fruit, or flowers, but rather sori, sporangia, and spores. Jordan showed, in dramatic fashion, a video clip-taken in real time of sporangia cracking in half, and, like a catapult they shoot the small as dust spores powerfully into the air to start the life cycle anew.

The life cycle of a fern is, of course, clearly different from most plants. The big leafy part of the fern is called a sporophyte. It makes the sporangia that catapult the spores into the wind. When they land somewhere and germinate, they are called gametophytes. *Gametophytes* then make the *gametes*, that make the sperm and eggs. Once fertilized, the gametes develop into *sporophytes*. To demonstrate these various phases, Jordan held up a tray of soil containing robust green gametes that will develop into sporophytes. In another tray were fertilized leafy sporophytes that could be planted. In the mountains of Southwest VA, Jordan said they have found ferns that have lost the leafy sporophyte and can now reproduce asexually. Kind of amazing.

Ever since I learned that I could go online to the British Museum of Natural History and find a large collection of John Clayton's herbarium specimens free to download, I always like to see what specimens are available relevant to what I am working on.



Osmunda sp.



Christmas fern



Netted chain fern



Sensitive fern

While searching the Clayton portal for more fern specimens, I found that many of the listed entries did not contain the corresponding image of the original specimen. On further reading I came across an explanation. In 1990, the Clayton specimens were separated into their own collection within the British Museum of Natural History for purposes of dedicated study. Some images are nearly 300 years old and represent the work of pioneering botanists such as Carl Linnaeus and Frederick Gronovius. You might recall that Clayton sent his collected plants to Gronovius in Holland, but rarely received any correspondence from him, and the *Floria Virginica* was published without Clayton's knowledge. It is generally felt that Clayton didn't receive adequate recognition at the time.

Back to the lecture. Jordan had some fun and interesting tales to tell about ferns. One was that during the Edwardian period in England there was a "Pteridomania" or "Fern Fever" It started with the invention of the Wardian case which was one of the first glass terrariums which gave ferns a more favorable environment away from the polluted industrial air at the time. It also made shipping much more successful, as prior to the Wardian case, a majority of specimens did not survive the trip. For the wealthy, fern fever expanded to elegant landscapes under glass, fern motifs on wallpaper, and a variety of other arts and crafts. Unfortunately the craze expanded to "fern hunting" resulting in the extinction of some species.

Jordan also shared with us some hilarious tales going around during Shakespearean times. It being Halloween this month, I'll include some of Jordan's folklore. It was rumored in those early days that since no seeds could be found on the ferns, they must be invisible. So, people got the strange idea that at midnight on St. John's Eve, they would stack 12 pewter plates underneath a fern, and it was thought the seeds would trickle down through the plates and you could collect the (invisible?!) seeds on the 11th



plate. Some even believed that certain types of ferns were particularly powerful. It was said that the tiny moonwort fern (*Botrychium lunaria*) could make you invisible! A line from King Henry IV had a thief saying that he could walk about unseen to commit his robbery because he would be protected by the power of the fern seeds. The other, in droll disbelief, said it was far more likely that it being *night* was what concealed him. (paraphrased)

Jordan is an excellent speaker and if he weren't so far (Virginia Tech) I would recommend we take him up on the various workshops he could make available for a group of us to attend. However, since he did such a good job providing video and close ups of his living specimens at different stages maybe there is a way he could provide a modified zoom workshop for us. By the way, Emilia has done a great job recruiting speakers, so I recommend we put it on our agenda for the new year to see if this could be arranged.

### Q&A and Jordan's Book Recommendations

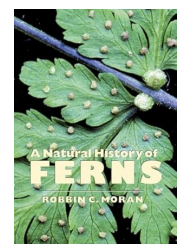
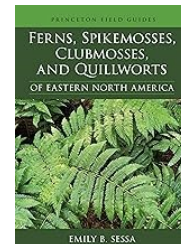
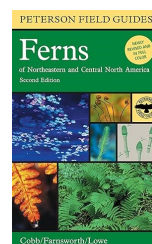
1) Hay Scented fern is deer resistant but its long creeping rhizomes takes over so it is not a solution for stilt grass.

2) Ostrich fern fiddleheads are edible. They have sterile leaves around the outside, and smaller brown fertile fronds in the middle specialized to make spores.

3) Cinnamon fern is dimorphic-it produces separate fertile fronds for photosynthesis and cinnamon colored fronds for fertilization.

4) Royal fern is hemi-dimorphic (fronds have specialized spore-bearing pinnae at the tips of the frond, and the lower part of the same frond is leafy and photosynthetic,

5) We can find resurrection ferns at Dragon Run and Walking fern at Wahrani (thanks Adrienne)





Many of you know that our annual native plant sale would be impossible without the dedication and hard work of a special couple, members and supporters of our chapter, Joan and Jimmy Etchberger. From hosting potting parties where we prepare plants for the sale, caring for the plants over winter and early spring, to transporting and setting up plants on the day of the sale, leading Boy Scout support, tallying orders and helping customers find plants, Joan and Jimmy are an inseparable part of the success of the plant sale.



Recently we talked to them to find out more about what inspires and motivates them to volunteer significant time and effort to our chapter.

Joan and Jimmy have always been interested in flower gardening and watching how wildlife responds to different plants. Cynthia Long, one of the first members of the John Clayton chapter, introduced them to native plants and the Native Plant society. Like many gardeners, Joan discovered the beauty of flowers at an early age. She tells us that once she was old enough to pick flowers for her mom and place them on the kitchen table, she “was hooked on flowers. A walk in the woods in the summertime always included large bouquets for Mom.”

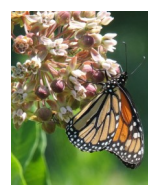
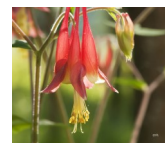
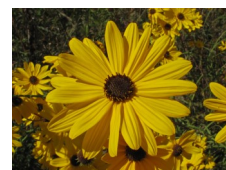
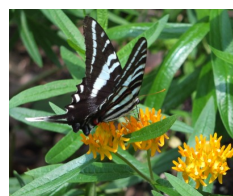
Now Joan and Jimmy have well-established large native plant gardens at their home. Their 3 acres of gardens and trees provide shelter, water, and food for wildlife and pollinators. They firmly believe that native plants need to be preserved and protected as much as possible but, among their natives, they have incorporated some non-native plants that have value to wildlife. People visiting their gardens have told them that they “have found harmony between natives and non-natives.” There’s something blooming in their gardens year-round, providing shelter and food for pollinators, birds and other animals.

Joan shares, “There is nothing better than watching bees perform aerial acrobatics while foraging for food; or, while smelling a flower, a hummingbird buzzes next to your head; or, while sitting at the table, you watch goldfinches eating petals from the green-headed coneflower outside your window.”

And, she adds that, “One of the joys of natives is that you don’t have to plant many of one plant variety as it can spread and in a short time, you will have a large grouping of each plant. When a native plant likes its spot, it will show you how much it likes it!”

A true gardener at heart, Joan finds it almost impossible to dig out a plant and toss it. Many of the extra plants the couple digs out are donated to the annual plant sale while others go to the end of their driveway accompanied by a large sign saying, “FREE PLANTS”, as well a picture of the plant, the name and growing conditions. That sign really gets attention. Their neighbors love it and end up enjoying their natives, along with learning the value of natives in their own gardens.

When we asked them about their favorite plants, Jim didn’t hesitate - the swamp sunflower (*Helianthus angustifolius*). It is a stately plant and is one of the last to bloom at the end of summer into early fall.



Each year they measure the tallest one and so far, the winner is one just under 17 feet. Even people they don’t know stop by just to ask what the yellow flower in bloom is.

Joan keeps changing her favorite plant as she finds them all so beautiful. Depending on which one is blooming and how many bees are playing in it, that would be her favorite at the time.



It is not surprising that Joan and Jimmy love to be in nature, enjoying biking, camping, hiking and driving the Blue Ridge Parkway. Jimmy has been in Boy Scouts for 58 years, 48 as a Scout Leader and one of the highlights for scouts is working at the annual plant sale. Scouts learn to appreciate plants and animals through their camping programs and summer camps. It is not surprising that both he and Joan are inspired by people that commit and follow through with their commitment; that encourage others, and are willing and patient to teach and share their experience and knowledge.

For Jimmy, Mr. David Nunn who was Scoutmaster of Troop 103 for over 30 years, and handed him his Assistant Scoutmaster Badge, was one of the mentors that guided his Scouting commitments today. For Joan, such person of inspiration is Cynthia Long who gave her the first native plants she started from seeds in old soup cans. With her guidance, Joan now enjoys the challenge of growing plants from seeds and admits that she got her love for natives from Cynthia’s enthusiasm and passion for natives.

True to their mentors, Joan and Jimmy give generously their time and commitment and believe that the best plants in the garden are those that are shared. Thank you, Joan and Jimmy, for your continued support and inspiration.



**W**e welcome gratefully Cynthia Ferentinos as our new Event Coordinator who has been assisting with projects related to the Plant Sale for several years now. As a member of the John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society, Cynthia has volunteered with the spring sales and preparatory potting

parties. At the plant sales, she enjoys talking with people who are interested in learning about native plants and which ones are more likely to thrive in their yards. During these conversations, she seeks to understand why people are motivated to try native plants so she can guide them to achieve their goals, whether that is to attract birds, butterflies, or bees, to enjoy the plants' beauty, to better conserve natural resources or other reasons.

Cynthia is a certified Virginia Master Naturalist (VMN) with the Historic Rivers Chapter (HRC), where she co-chairs the Education and Outreach committee with Marie Robertson. As part of this role, she organizes and conducts educational programs for children and adults, matches speakers to incoming requests, and represents the chapter at information tables during events. She assists Marie with Nature Club at the Clara Baker Byrd Elementary School and has recently started volunteering at the Williamsburg Botanical Garden.

**S**he volunteers as the program coordinator of the Williamsburg Regional Library's Seed Exchange, leading a team of volunteers in packaging seeds and maintaining houseplant cuttings in the propagation station for free distribution to the community. Last winter she expanded the Seed Exchange to include seeds from native plants, in addition to vegetables, herbs, and other flowers. Cynthia invites plant and wildlife experts from the VNPS and VMN to speak at library programs to coordinate with Seed Exchange activities. For example, in January, she organized a "winter sowing" program for kids to teach

them to grow native plants from seed by using plastic jugs as mini greenhouses.

### **Claytonia: What led you to the Virginia Native Plant Society?**

Cynthia: I spent most of my career in an office working on a computer. Houseplants covered my windowsill, my bookcases and any available floor space, but I longed for more time in my flower and vegetable gardens. And although I had some native plants in my landscaping, I was frustrated by the difficulty in finding them for sale. While researching sources of native plants on the internet, I came across VNPS plant sales and the VMN program. One of the first volunteer opportunities that caught my eye during my master naturalist training was at a native plant nursery. I became a regular volunteer and came home every week dirty, sweaty and exhausted...and very happy about all that I was learning and doing. As I heard more about non-native invasive plants, I became more involved in efforts to remove these from local parks.

### **Claytonia What kind of garden space inspires you?**

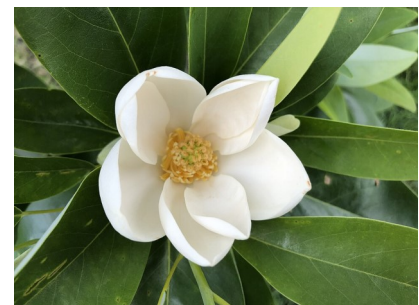
Cynthia: One that gently fills the senses. This time of year, I love the music of bees humming at goldenrod and obedient plants; the fluttering of hummingbird and butterfly wings as they visit the cardinal flowers, and in the spring, the fragrance of Sweetbay magnolia blooms.



**Obedient plant  
& Eastern Tiger  
Swallowtails**

Photo courtesy of  
E. Godwin

**Sweetbay  
magnolia**

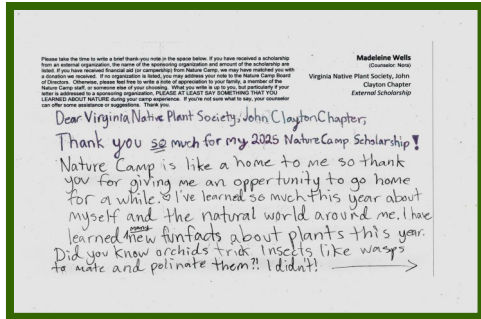


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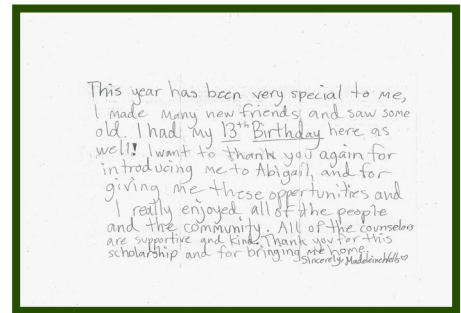


# Letters from Nature Camp!

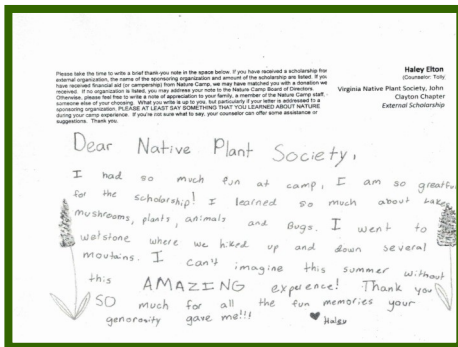
## Front Madeline



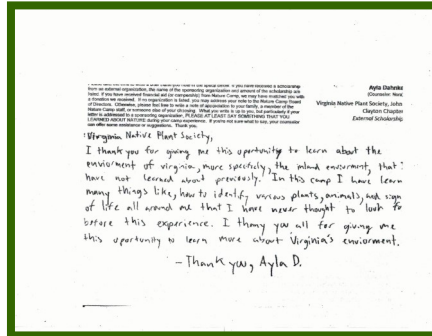
## Back Madeline



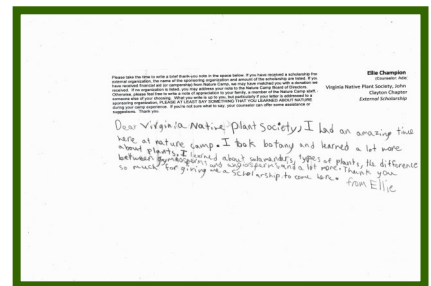
## Haley



## Ayala



## Ellie



## Botany, by Ellie Champion

What are plants? What are the types of plants? Plants are an organism that produce their own food through photosynthesis. Plants' leaves are green because of the chlorophyll in them.

What is the timeline of plants? First there was algae which over time started to come onto the land and start to adapt which became bryophytes.

Bryophytes include moss, liverworts, and hornworts. Bryophytes are short and grow in big clusters in lots of environments. They are fuzzy and live on rock. Then there are lycophytes, which are vascular and are similar to ferns.

Next there are ferns which are vascular and have spores. They have a rhizome. The rhizome is like an underground fern and connects multiple ferns.

Then there are gymnosperms, or not protected seeds. Finally there are angiosperms, or protected seeds. Angiosperms have fruit or flowers and are the most diverse.

All plants are diverse, amazing, and very unique.

## Another Take on Mycology, Haley Elton

We have had so much fun and we can all say we have learned so much from Willow and Nick. We have gone on mushroom hikes, done spore prints, cyanotyping, and even inoculation of shiitake mushrooms. We loved asking questions—our favorites are “Can I eat this one, I know it is edible. please!!” and is this a destroying angel?” We have all come into class with an appreciation for mushrooms and and come out with a love for this fungus.



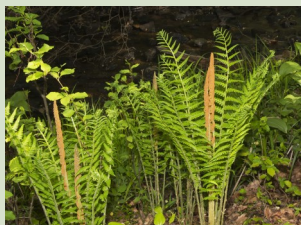
## Join Us on Zoom!

Zoom lectures allow for a greater choice of speakers as well as member convenience. The meetings consist of live video presentations followed by an interactive Q&A

Our presenters are experts from a wide variety of relevant fields. All of the presentations are recorded, and the videos can be viewed at the link below:

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/8054025>

In keeping with the theme of this newsletter, some photos from a chapter member



Cinnamon Fern Seig



Broad Beech Fern Seig



Rattlesnake Fern Seig

## Coming soon: New Event! Saturday October 25



1:30-3:30

Visit information tables staffed by experts on native plants, wildlife, and gardening. Located in the Stryker Center 412 N. Boundary St

1:00-2:30

Drop off plants to be shared with others. Donations of seeds for the WRL Seed Exchange are also welcome! (Located at the green space between WRL and the Stryker Center)

2:00-2:45

Attend an interesting and educational presentation by Master Gardener Judy Kinshaw Ellis regarding how to grow beautiful pollinator friendly native plants (even within communities with HOA restrictions) (Located in Room 127 of the Stryker Center)

3:00PM

Pick up a free plant and maybe more! We encourage everyone to participate, even those without any experience growing plants.

Please come and help us with preparation for our Spring sale!



Sunday, Nov 2  
Sunday, Nov 9  
1:00-3:00 pm

100 Woodland Rd  
Williamsburg VA 23188  
(Joan & Jim Etchberger)

### Donations needed:

Native plants  
Organic potting soil  
One gallon nursery pots

\*If you have a light weight table that you don't mind having soil or plants on it we could certainly use it when we are potting.

Please contact Janet Lundin if you can come.  
[jeclundin@gmail.com](mailto:jeclundin@gmail.com)



## Welcome New Members 2025!

|                     |              |
|---------------------|--------------|
| Susan Armentrout    | Saluda       |
| Erica Chigos-White  | Yorktown     |
| Michelle Davis      | Williamsburg |
| Mary White          | Williamsburg |
| Rod White           | Williamsburg |
| Stephen Mankowski   | Williamsburg |
| LaVonne Bonney      | Williamsburg |
| Patrice Hobbs       | Gloucester   |
| Susan Wolfe         | Williamsburg |
| Izabela Cieszynski  | Newport News |
| David West          | Newport News |
| Dan Hausman         | Toano        |
| Rene Kauder         | Newport News |
| Katherine Barnett   | Newport News |
| Linda Carey         | Williamsburg |
| Suzanne Brown       | Newport News |
| Elizabeth Vassileva | Williamsburg |