



# Claytonia

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Newsletter of the John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

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September–October 2010

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## Plant Rescue

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## September 23 meeting at Yorktown Public Library: Love games that insects play



While Dr. Douglas Tallamy, author of *Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants*, will be talking about his research in November (see note on page 5), Helen Hamilton will present her gardening with wildlife experiences at our September meeting. Many of us do not make what is an obvious connection between feeding our native birds and planting native plants. The piece in the middle is insects; many more insects feed on native plants than on non-native plants, which means if we don't pay attention to what is growing in our gardens, birds will not have sufficient food!

This talk provides practical information about developing a garden requiring little maintenance, while supporting a variety of wildlife, and some fascinating little-known facts about lifestyles of many native insects: Insects with chastity belts? The origin of the aphrodisiac Spanish fly? Ants that eat their mate while mating, and the ultimate multi-tasking beetles that mate while eating! Join us for an entertaining look at many of the critters that live beneath our feet, behind the leaves of shrubs, and underneath the bark of trees.

Helen Hamilton taught biology in local high schools and worked as a plant technician for the National Park Service. Currently she is president and treasurer of the John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society, is creating plant books for local parks and does publicity for the Williamsburg Botanical Garden.

**Join us at 7 pm at the Yorktown Public Library at the intersection of Battle Rd. and Route 17 in Yorktown.**



## From the President

We are all saddened by the unexpected death of our long-time friend and chapter member Ada Lou Turner. Well-remembered for hosting plant potting parties at her lovely home and for her vibrant, sunny personality, Ada Lou was an important cog in our plant sale "machine". Our condolences to her husband Ken, and to her family.

August seems to stand still, in terms of plant life, waiting for the fall burst of color with asters and goldenrods and grasses, and hopefully, many visiting butterflies. It's too hot and humid to garden or to plant walk, which is why our list of events is slim. Maybe it's a time to enjoy our labors over the spring and summer, and to admire the black-eyed and brown-eyed susans which the goldfinches love. But autumn is not far away, and time for another round of gardening and plant-watching, as the leaves change color and the blossoms fade to seeds and fruits, reminding us to save the abundant seeds produced each year for replanting next year, and for donations to the Bobwhite meadow (See note by Cynthia Long). We hope you will join us for our September meeting, where we will learn some strategies for encouraging native plants to bloom where we plant them. **Helen Hamilton**

## New members

We welcome Carol Bartram from Yorktown; Terri, Mike, Shelby and Bruce Cuthriell from Smithfield; Lisa Schiole from Hampton; Tracy Shackelford from Williamsburg; and Deborah Waller from Norfolk.

## July 15th's Chapter meeting: the Ellipse Garden's calcareous ravine

Our speakers, Donna Ware and Ralph Will, partnered to describe their work establishing the calcareous ravine for mountain disjuncts in Freedom Park's Ellipse Garden.



Photos: Zach Loesch

Donna's part of the program: to present a possible explanation of why the disjunct species are present in our ravines.

A group of species known as "mountain/coastal plain disjuncts" have their primary range in the mountains and western Piedmont and a secondary range in deep ravines here in the coastal plain of Virginia. Most of these species are not restricted to calcium-rich soils in the mountains, but in the coastal plain they are. Here, they grow in deep ravines where fossil-bearing layers of the Yorktown Formation have been exposed and weathered into calcium-rich soil. These shell layers were deposited about 3 to 4½ million years ago when shallow seas covered what is now the coastal plain. Much later, these beds of fossil shells (Yorktown Formation) were exposed when ravines were formed after the last glaciation (Wisconsinian). During a certain stage of the retreat of the glacier, a flora similar to that which grows in the Blue Ridge today inhabited all of what is now Virginia due to the cold climate. However, as the climate continued warming, mountain plants living on the upland in the coastal plain were wiped out by drought and heat and competition with species invading from the south, but those mountain plants growing on high-calcium soils in deep coastal ravines survived. Stewart Ware believes that mountain plants growing in the ravines may have had a competitive advantage on high-calcium soils compared with invading southern species.

John Clayton may have been the first person to document the mountain/coastal plain disjunct distribution

pattern in Virginia [e.g. he noted that leatherwood (*Dirca palustris*) grows both "by rivers near mountains: and in Middlesex Co."]. This phenomenon was later noted by E.J. and Eileen Grimes of William and Mary (1920s), by M. L. Fernald of Harvard (1930s/40s), and by Dr. A.M. Harvill, Jr. of Longwood College ('60s). Donna began studying the distribution of these species in the 1980s and found that the Grove Creek watershed in James City County harbors more mountain disjuncts (32) than any other site studied in Virginia. In 2000, Leah McDonald, a graduate student at William and Mary, drew up a master list of disjunct species.

Today, all but a few coastal plain counties have had at least one in-depth floristic study. By using the *Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora*, Donna tallied the number of mountain disjuncts known from each county in the coastal plain: James City Co., 57; Surry Co., 41; York Co., 28; 18 other counties, a mean of 11.6 species; 9 remaining counties with few ravines or less study, 6 or fewer species. Dr. Jerre Johnson has suggested that the greater presence of these mountain disjuncts in James City, Surry, and York counties might possibly be explained by the distribution of the shoals created by the effects of the meteor or comet that struck the Chesapeake Bay about 35 million years ago (Chesapeake Bay Impact Structure)".



Samples of calcareous soil used in the ravine were passed around at the meeting. One sample contained a tiny but identifiable oyster shell, although the larger fragments in this photograph look as though they might be coral. Photo: Phillip Merritt

Ralph described the effort and techniques the team used to build a calcareous ravine. Because of the Ellipse Garden's relatively high water table, it could not be dug into the site, but had to be built above ground, and so required a stone wall laid to contain it. The site of the ravine was cleared and stripped of all topsoil. A base of subsoil was built up to produce the desired contour of the ravine. This was approximately 3 feet high at its edges. Enter geologist Jerre Johnson, who built an enclosing loose stone wall as others fed him the materials. Six inches of calcareous soil from a local ravine, amounting to about 60 cubic feet (10 wheel-barrow loads), was placed over a layer of shells to complete the ravine. The finished installation, about 25 feet long and 15 feet wide, is oriented to provide a north-facing slope preferred by mountain disjuncts and, thanks to water lines recently installed in the Garden, has an irrigation system of soaker hoses. Companion plants

such as columbine, hepatica, and bloodroot, which would be found with mountain disjuncts have been planted in niches in the wall as well.

All of the plants collected for this display were rescued by Ralph and Carolyn Will. Thank you to Donna, Carolyn, Ralph and Jerre for all their work! **Louise Menges**

Phillip Merritt has an article with photos about this project on his blog at [www.howitgrows.com](http://www.howitgrows.com)—look for **Calcareous Ravine Garden** in the righthand column under **Tidewater Landscapes**.

### Sad news



Our chapter lost a dear friend, Ada Lou Turner, who died July 28, 2010. It was the day the Monarch butterflies came to our garden. They will forever remind us of her gentle loving heart, and her great love of our native plants. A large bouquet of wildflowers from our members

graced the table at her memorial service reception.

A few days later, her husband Ken gave me a huge collection of seeds she was saving, all in marked envelopes with notes and dates and pertinent information. The wildflower seeds will be added to our collection for the bobwhite habitat at New Quarter Park in York County.

In addition to native plants, she had a wonderful vegetable garden; many of the seeds were from that garden, collected even from vegetables she had purchased at Fresh Market or the Farmers Market.

The morning I was sorting the seeds, JCC's barefoot prince, Lee Bristow, was helping us in our garden. I felt like Ada Lou was with us, too, as we opened each envelope. One of them was filled with a collection of bird feathers. Lee was so enchanted by them he took them home with him. He also recycled the vegetable seeds for the W&M vegetable garden project. I'm sure Ada Lou is pleased that her seeds will be planted for such a good cause. She practiced healthy eating, and included lots of native American foods in her diet. Many of us shared from a large basket of Jerusalem artichoke tubers that she brought on a field trip. I hope you are lucky enough to have some of her plants in your garden.

We could always count on Ada Lou to host a potting party, drive to a meeting, attend a conference, and enthusiastically share our passion for native plants. We are all blessed to have such a vibrant and living legacy from our wildflower friend. She will be sadly missed. **Cynthia Long**

**A note:** Our chapter has received some monetary donations from friends of Ada Lou Turner in her memory.

### Cynthia's Corner

**Please save seeds for the New Quarter Park Quail Habitat** and bring them to a meeting to pass along to Cynthia.

**Free to a good home:** plastic pots, all sizes from really huge to itty bitty! Call Cynthia at 259-9559 or come by 105 Bowstring Drive, Williamsburg.



### August's flowers of the month

#### Soldier Mallow

Soldier Mallow [*Hibiscus laevis* (*H. militaris*)] is also known as Halberd-leaved Rose-mallow, referring to the shape of the leaves—the lower leaves are usually 3-lobed and spear-shaped. Both the stem and undersurface of the leaves are smooth. The leaves are alternate on the stem, and flowers appear from where the leaf attaches to the stem, blooming from the bottom to the top. The large, six-inch flowers are pale pink or white with a purple center. Five overlapping petals open by day and close tightly at night. Characteristic of all members of this family, the stamens are united into a column with arises from the center of the flower.



Very easy to grow in sun or part shade, this perennial plant requires wet soil, but can grow in any soil type from sand to loam to clay to acid-based or limy.

Soldier Mallow produces abundant seed heads, and will aggressively colonize an area, with a shrub-like growth habit. The canes can be cut to the ground after blooming, and this perennial plant will reappear vigorously next season. Grows in marshes and shallow water, on or near the coastal plain, from southern Pennsylvania to Florida and Texas, and north in the interior to Ontario and Minnesota. Found in a few eastern counties in Virginia, including James City and New Kent. Blooms August through September.

The beautiful blossoms attract butterflies. Other members of the mallow family produce a sap that, when whipped with sugar, was the origin of our marshmallow candy.

### Whorled Rosinweed

Whorled Rosinweed (*Silphium trifoliatum*) is an imposing meadow plant, producing sunflower-like flowers well into the fall. Its lance-shaped dark green leaves, purple stems, and vibrant yellow flowers provide an excellent color contrast. Whorled Rosinweed grows 3–7 feet tall on smooth stems. The middle leaves are in whorls of 3 or 4 with



Photo: Helen Hamilton

short stalks; other leaves sometimes occur in pairs, or alternate on the stem. Sunflowers (*Helianthus spp.*) have mostly alternate leaves. Flowers are up to 2 inches wide with 15–20 rays.

Very tough and adaptable, preferring rich, well-drained soils, this plant is easy to grow in the home garden, in partial to full shade. Whorled Rosinweed spreads freely and fills in nicely around other shade perennials; it is drought tolerant once established.

A native in eastern U.S.

and most counties of Virginia, Whorled Rosinweed is found in open woods, prairies, and disturbed open places. Blooms July–September.

The name of the genus *Silphium* comes from the Ancient Greek word for a North African plant whose identity has been lost; its gum or juice was prized by the ancients as a medicine and a condiment. **Helen Hamilton**

### Alien alert!

The highly invasive Asian stiltgrass *Microstegium vimineum* seems to be everywhere, growing along roadsides, in parks, and on homeowner's properties. Birds and the wind have distributed seeds far from the ditches and edges of woods where you see growing populations each year. This harmless-looking grass, not more than a foot tall, but straggly, is a very nasty invasive. It furnishes no nutritive value to wildlife and rapidly outcompetes all natives. Deer won't eat it; does that tell us something? Like Kudzu, it has heavily infested national parks, roadsides, and homeowners' properties.



Stiltgrass is an annual. In the fall, each plant releases up to 1,000 seeds which remain viable for many years in the soil. The only control is to destroy the plant before seedset. Handpulling is the best method, as the roots are shallow and it comes up easily. The non-invasive native look-alike called deer-tongue grass is well-anchored in the soil—if you have to tug on the plant it's probably harmless. On our plant walks at New Quarter Park, participants have been encouraged to pull a sackfull of stiltgrass while walking. The local Master Naturalists have started a weed-pulling project at this park, targeting stiltgrass and beefsteak plant (*Perilla frutescens*), another nasty invasive.



Jan Newton does her part during a plant walk at New Quarter Park.

**Please pull this plant wherever you see it, or mow before it sets seed.** In the fall it releases millions of seeds which remain viable for **many years** in the soil. So, it must be pulled or mowed for 3–5 years before exhausting one seed drop. On large properties mowing is effective if done before the seeds appear. The National Park Service has approved the use of the herbicide Fusion on this invasive.

*Text and photos: Helen Hamilton*

## Botanical Art Workshop with Linda Miller set for Sept. 21–23



*Hydrangea*, a watercolor by Linda Miller

Botanical artist and John Clayton Chapter member Linda Miller will lead a workshop at The Elizabethan Gardens in Manteo, NC on September 21 thru 23, working with flora from the Garden's greenhouse and grounds. Students will learn basic drawing skills, observation, and watercolor techniques to create a botanical painting. Beginners through advanced, using watercolor, graphite and colored pencil are welcome. A two day workshop is offered for \$75.00 per student, and a three day workshop is \$115.00.

Contact Linda at 757/259-7332 or at [millerlcmiller@yahoo.com](mailto:millerlcmiller@yahoo.com) to learn more and to sign up. You may also visit her website at <http://lindacmiller.blogspot.com/> for more complete details.

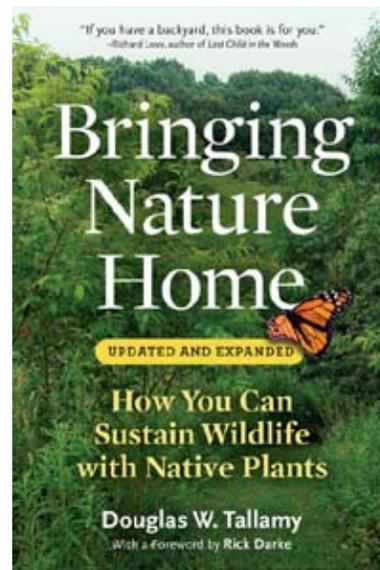
## Doug Tallamy to speak at Meadowdale Library on November 1

This was passed on by Carol Hammer, Northern Neck Chapter:

Doug Tallamy, chair of the department of entomology and wildlife ecology at the University of Delaware, will present his talk, *Bringing Nature Home: How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens*, on November 1 at the Meadowdale Public Library in Chesterfield County. Here is the foreword by Rick Darke from Doug's book:

As development and subsequent habitat destruction accelerate, there are increasing pressures on wildlife populations. But there is an important and simple step toward reversing this alarming trend: Everyone with access to a patch of earth can make a significant contribution toward sustaining biodiversity. There is an unbreakable link between native plant species and native wildlife—native insects cannot, or will not, eat alien plants. When native plants disappear, the insects disappear, impoverishing the food source for birds and other animals. In many

parts of the world, habitat destruction has been so extensive that local wildlife is in crisis and may be headed toward extinction. *Bringing Nature Home* has sparked a national conversation about the link between healthy local ecosystems and human well-being, and the new paperback edition—with an expanded resource section and updated photos—will help broaden the movement. By acting on Douglas Tallamy's practical recommendations, everyone can make a difference.



This talk is for everyone, including suburban and urban residents, educators, planners, volunteers, Master Gardeners, and Master Naturalists.

Call 804-751-4401 to reserve your seats now—we expect a full house! This talk is free of charge, but reservations are required.

### Two times to choose from:

- ✿ November 1st, **2:00–3:30 pm**, Meadowdale Library (Chesterfield County Public Library System)  
4301 Meadowdale Blvd., Richmond, VA 23234
- ✿ November 1st, **7:00–8:30 pm**, Meadowdale Library (Chesterfield County Public Library System)  
4301 Meadowdale Blvd., Richmond, VA 23234

## Plant walks planned for September and October



Woolgrass (*Scirpus cyperinus*)  
Photo: Phillip Merritt

### Saturday, September 11: Fall-blooming plants and grasses

Helen Hamilton will lead a walk through the Freedom Park area and the Ellipse Garden, discussing native plants which do well in our over-heated or over-watered environment. Especially suited for newcomers to the area who want to know what to grow in home gardens.

Register with Helen Hamilton at 564-4494 or email Helen at [helen44@earthlink.net](mailto:helen44@earthlink.net). Meet at the Freedom Park parking lot at 10 am.

### Saturday, September 18: Jan's Habitat Garden

Jan Newton will lead a native plant walk at Stonehouse Elementary School's Habitat garden located at 3651 Rochambeau Drive in Williamsburg. The Habitat contains over 80 species of Virginia native small trees, shrubs, perennials and ferns, and features plants that attract birds and butterflies. Expect to see New York ironweed, scarlet hibiscus, cardinal flower, Joe-pye weed, cup plant, sweet goldenrod, obedient plant, and more. Wheelchair accessible. Free and open to the public. Meet at 9 am.

Please register at (757)566-3646 or [jnewton110@cox.net](mailto:jnewton110@cox.net).



Monarch butterfly on cup plant (*Silphium perfoliatum*) in the Habitat Garden.  
Photo: Jan Newton

### Saturday, October 23: Fall leaves in the 'Burg

Join Phillip Merritt for a look at fall leaves in downtown Williamsburg. Meet on the Scotland Street side of the Williamsburg Public Library at 10:00 on Saturday, October 23rd. Expect to see the national champion water elm (*Planera aquatica*) and the poisonous Kentucky Coffee-tree (*Gymnocladus dioica*).



Phillip took this photo of the champion water elm behind the College's Wren Building early this year. (Remember snow?)

### Editor's Note

If you would like to read more about our Chapter's trip this past June to Joseph Pines Preserve in Sussex County, look in the September issue of the VNPS Bulletin, where you'll find an article submitted by member Terri Cuthrell. Thank you Terri, for a most informative and fascinating description of the preserve and the efforts underway in the restoration of this longleaf pine habitat.

**Louise Menges**

## Membership Form for John Clayton Chapter, VNPS

(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 |     |

### 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

**Calendar** (Check our website, too.) We will continue to email members for whom we have addresses news of walks not scheduled in time for a newsletter issue.

**Saturday, September 11** **10 am: Fall-blooming plants and grasses.** Helen Hamilton will lead a walk through the Freedom Park area and the Ellipse Garden. (See Page 6.)  
*Register with Helen Hamilton 757/564-4494, [helen44@earthlink.net](mailto:helen44@earthlink.net).  
Meet at the Freedom Park parking lot.*

**Saturday, September 11** **12:30-2:30 pm: A drawing workshop for children 10 and above,** conducted by Botanical Artist and Virginia Master Naturalist Linda Miller at the Ellipse Garden in Freedom Park. All supplies will be provided; the program is free of charge, but limited to 15 students, and advance reservations are required. *Contact Barb Dunbar, 757/880-8875, [twotac@cox.net](mailto:twotac@cox.net).*

**Saturday, September 18** **9 am: Habitat Garden at Stonehouse Elementary School.** Jan Newton will lead a walk through the garden, which is located at 3651 Rochambeau Drive in Williamsburg. (See Page 6.) *Please register at 757/566-3646 or [jnewton110@cox.net](mailto:jnewton110@cox.net).*

**Thursday, September 23** **7–9 pm: John Clayton Chapter meeting at Yorktown Public Library.** Helen Hamilton will talk about gardening with wildlife in mind and the connection between native plants and the native birds we wish to protect—insects! (See Page 1.) The Library is located at the intersection of Battle Rd. and Route 17 in Yorktown.

**Note:** This meeting is on the **4th** Thursday, not the usual **3rd** Thursday of the month!

**Saturday, October 23** **10 am: Fall leaves in Williamsburg,** led by Phillip Merritt. Meet at the Williamsburg Public Library's Scotland Street side at 10 am. (See Page 6.)

## Events farther afield...

**Tuesday, September 21–  
Thursday, September 23**     **Botanical Art Workshop led by Linda Miller** at the Elizabethan Gardens, Manteo, NC  
(See article on Page 5.)

**Friday, October 1**     **10:30 am–3 pm: VNPS State field trip to the New Kent Forestry Center** near Providence Forge, led by Donna Ware. (\$10 donation) Please register with the VNPS Office at 400 Blandy Farm Lane #2, Boyce, VA 22620, [vnpsofc@shentl.net](mailto:vnpsofc@shentl.net), or phone 549-837-1600.  
(More details in September VNPS *Bulletin*)

**Saturday, October 2**     **10:30 am–3 pm: VNPS State field trip to Savage Neck Dunes Natural Area Preserve** on Virginia's Eastern Shore, led by Dot Field. (\$10 donation)  
Please register with the VNPS Office at 400 Blandy Farm Lane #2, Boyce, VA 22620, [vnpsofc@shentl.net](mailto:vnpsofc@shentl.net), or phone 549-837-1600.  
(More details in September VNPS *Bulletin*)