



Photo: Emilia Godwin

Claytonia



John Clayton Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society

Great Blue Lobelia

Lobelia siphilitica

Late-blooming perennial in the Bellflower family, it inhabits moist to wet habitats. Its showy blue tubular flowers are a magnet for long-tongued butterflies, bumblebees, other bees and hummingbirds. The flowers bloom for weeks in a row and the plant is a staple in many native plant gardens, producing many small seeds.

Sep-Oct 2026

Welcome Fall!

vnps.org/johnclayton



Join Us on a Quest to Find Poisonous Mushrooms (Part 2 of Presentation about the Claudius Project)

Oct 18, 10 am, Freedom Park, Williamsburg
(Oct 25 – alternative date in case of insufficient rainfall)

Kevin Howe, Retired Ecologist & Marine Biologist, Master Naturalist

RSVP to Emilia at jccvnps2@gmail.com

“**Claudius Project**”: With a recent increase in mushroom poisoning, University of Virginia Health and Virginia Master Naturalists formed a team to research, write and produce a guide to Poisonous Mushrooms in Virginia. This two-year project, called the “Claudius Project”, recently completed the 127-page guide which contains descriptions and color photographs of the most significant poisonous mushrooms found in Virginia. This publication is now available online and may be downloaded at no cost.

<https://med.virginia.edu/brpc/the-learning-center/the-claudius-project/>.

Kevin grew up in California and did his undergraduate work at University of California, Berkeley, followed by graduate schools at California State Sonoma (M.S.) and Oregon State University (Ph.D.) focusing on Ichthyology (the study of fish) and Aquatic Ecology.

Thereafter, he taught at Willamette University, University of Southern Mississippi, Oregon State University and University of Washington. Teaching included ichthyology, conservation biology, vertebrate zoology, field biology, aquatic ecology. At various times, he also worked for The Nature Conservancy, US EPA, and the Smithsonian Institution. He retired in 2015.

Kevin’s research interests focused primarily on aquatic biology ranging from ecology of desert spring ecosystems to the community ecology and distribution of fishes in the Eastern Pacific, Gulf of Alaska, Bering and Arctic Seas to population modeling of salmon populations in freshwater streams to natural history museum exhibit design and the learning environment therein.



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Botanist, Botanical Consultant, Community Volunteer, and More – Meet One of the Founding Members of John Clayton Chapter

You may remember that we published the first part of the profile of Donna Ware in the previous issue of this newsletter. We will conclude our conversation with her here.

Claytonia: What kind of garden space inspires you?

Donna: For most of my life, I have let the plants do all the work and primarily have enjoyed them *in situ* instead of gardening myself. More recently, however, serving as a steward/volunteer at the Williamsburg Botanical Garden is giving me the chance to learn gardening techniques from others.

Claytonia: Do you have a favorite plant, or one that stands out in your mind?

Donna: I have many “favorite plants”, but a certain winter annual with two-lipped blue (lower two petals) and white (upper two petals) especially comes to mind today – blue-eyed Mary, *Collinsia verna*. It grows in rich ravines in the Ozarks (where I first saw it) but has a broad range that includes a few counties in southwestern Virginia. My fascination with it was cemented when I visited a friend and former William & Mary graduate student, Margi Dykens, then working at the San Diego Natural History Museum, and saw *Collinsia heterophylla*, known as Chinese Houses or Purple Pagodas, on a field trip to chaparral habitat. [Margi’s Master’s Degree research was a floristic study of Mathews County, VA.]



Claytonia: What activities fill your spare time?

Donna: Somewhere along the way my interest in competitive race-walking faded but I continue to revere time spent “regular walking” in my neighborhood and along trails. Three years ago, the amount of time I spent birdwatching skyrocketed when barred owls raised in the woods behind our house adopted our deck railing and bird bath as part of their natural habitat. Reading remains a favorite way to spend my spare time, especially books about WWII in Europe (my father’s tank battalion [746th] landed on Omaha Beach on D-day; he never talked about his experiences in the war). I’m also fascinated by real life survival stories, such as *Endurance: Shackleton’s Incredible Voyage* by Alfred Lansing. Another reading related focus is learning written Spanish well enough to read *short* novels. I began auditing Spanish classes when I was in my 40s and have been frustratingly unsuccessful in my quest to speak Spanish.

Claytonia: In conclusion, is there anything else you’d like to share with our members?

Donna: Because I have no siblings and we have no children, I’m facing one of the biggest challenges of my life – parting with that small farm in MO that I inherited *via* three generations of women owners before me, where I learned the joys of wandering and botanizing. Initially consisting of 23 acres, it was bisected by a six acre swath of I-44 when I was in college and is now two parcels of about 8 acres each. My goal is for it to remain farm land or to succeed to native woodland and/or become natural parkland, but especially for it not to be subdivided or subjected to asphalted parking lot(s) or an onslaught of invasive plants that lurk nearby (especially Amur honeysuckle, Bradford pear, and Japanese honeysuckle). Today, it is a sort of an “oasis” of open land in the midst of residential areas and is cultivated by a farmer who receives the hay in return for keeping the fields mowed.

Thank you for your continuous work on behalf of native plants, Donna!



Halloween is just around the corner. In anticipation of the day, I thought I'd offer some holiday-related facts.

From the Virginia Farm Bureau: September 24, 2026:

"Pumpkins Weather Tough Growing Season -Are Prime for Picking!"

According to growers, the word for this season is "challenging" due to an early drought, a late July downpour, and storms that blew in causing disease and fungus. But there is good news. Despite the setbacks, the crops are still robust and there will be plenty of supply for Halloween.

For Virginia, Halloween is the market. Virginia ranks in the top ten (#8) states for pumpkin production. Some 400 farmers cultivate 4,700 acres in Virginia and generate nearly \$17 million in cash receipts. Pumpkins grow well in areas that are less than 72 degrees at night, and they gain an advantage with the higher elevation.

Some pumpkin history:

While Pumpkins (*Cucurbita pepo*) are not listed in the Flora of Virginia, they are noted as introduced in the Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora. It is interesting that when the English arrived in 1607, they learned about the Powhatan cultivated pumpkins and called them "pompions" or "macocks" (various spellings). Pumpkins were an important part of their system of agriculture which was known as the "Three Sisters" (corn, beans, and squash). Though pumpkins were established long before the Powhatan, they likely originated in the warmer southern climate of Mexico in the Tamaulipas mountains. The word "calabasas" applies to the earliest cultivated squashes that were as small as tennis balls. Indigenous people toasted the seeds, and all parts of the plant were used, including the fruit, stem, and flowers. Amazingly, fragments and seeds of *Cucurbita pepo* have been found in caves in Mexico (Oaxaca) that date between 7,000-10,000 years old. Humans came along just in time. The mammalian herbivores were working to deplete the pumpkin supply! Some fun cultural events:

Cullipher Farm, Virginia Beach. (772 Princess Anne Rd)

They have a 10-acre corn maze and an expansive pick-your-own pumpkin area.

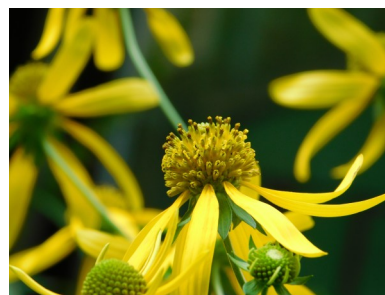
Patawomeck Indian Tribe explicitly hosts an annual community **Patawomeck Halloween Festival** in Fredericksburg and is open to all (638 Kings Highway).

Rappahannock Indian Tribe usually has a celebration but, this year, it is canceled due to construction on site.

Surry County & Isle of Wight: College Run Farms and local spots around Smithfield and Franklin provide fields and farm stands across the James River.

Peninsula: Pumpkin Ville (7691 Richmond Road, Toano) and Holly Fork Farm (4901 Holly Fork Rd, Barhamsville) serve the Williamsburg and New Kent Area.

Welcome New Members!



Green-headed Coneflower/ *Rudbeckia laciniata*



Joanmarie DelVecchio	Williamsburg
Kalle Jahn	Williamsburg
Dawn Lambert	Williamsburg
Debra Sims	Deltaville

Celebrating the Life of Cynthia Long

Founding Member of John Clayton Chapter

by Joan Etchburger

In loving memory of a beautiful soul who touched so many lives.

Cynthia Long was an active, long-time member and supporter of the Native Plant Society. In 1984, she helped charter the John Clayton Chapter and was instrumental in establishing the organization.

Cynthia was well-known as the “Seed Queen” and anyone could attest that if you visited her home, you would leave with native plant seedlings that she proudly grew from seed. During the winter months and early spring, wherever she could find a space inside the house, she would set up grow lights and seed-starter trays; you would think you were in a greenhouse due to the earthy scent in the air along with it being warm and humid.



Cynthia standing behind a large patch of butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) in the author's garden and behind her is common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) in full bloom

Cynthia was not one to throw things out and was notorious for using empty soup cans and plastic and foam cups to place her giveaway seedlings to anyone she could. She was an educator and reached out to the community to share her enthusiasm and passion for native plants and showed how important natives are to the environment, to pollinators, and how gardening is therapeutic for the soul.

One of my fond memories of her is when Cynthia decided that she did not want her husband, Bob, cutting grass anymore, so she decided to put in a perennial native garden in their backyard. In early spring, she spread many types of seeds in the backyard and WOW, it grew and grew and grew. I believe her words were, “Perhaps I was a bit overzealous with my seeds.” Indeed, it was a great jungle! Bob then reminded her that she had thrown the seeds on the abandoned drainfield. They laughed about this for many years.

Cynthia had many passions beyond native plants. She loved all nature, literature, the arts, and music. She will be remembered for her kindness, her pleasant charm, her quick wit, and her mischievous smile. We miss our garden walks with Cynthia, but we know, *“those we love don't go away, they walk beside us every day. Unseen, unheard, but always near. Still loved, still missed, and very dear.”* (Author unknown)



Chapter Members Remember Cynthia Long



Cynthia, sitting in her favorite spot beside her fishpond with her daffodils, April 2015

"One thing I loved about Cynthia is that when she came to a bird club meeting, she often brought potted native plants to give away. She was always promoting natives.

I would often visit Cynthia and Bob for Bird Club business or stop by her house (at her insistence) after a Bird Walk at New Quarter Park. She would give me a tour of her native plant garden and treat me to lemonade or coffee and cookies. I loved sitting in her garden and listening to her share her experiences growing up in Kansas."

Shirley Devan

Photo on the right: Bob and Cynthia (R) with Molly Nealer (in the middle) at New Quarter Park, September 30, 2017, at the 40th Bird Club birthday picnic.

"I first knew Cynthia at Colonial Williamsburg where she was an excellent escort sharing her knowledge of the buildings and gardens. Our friendship continued when we became members of the John Clayton Chapter. Then one spring we traveled to England to tour gardens. Best of all we became gardening neighbors in Queens Lake. "

Libbey Oliver



Cynthia (middle, holding on to her hat) on a Bird Club Walk at New Quarter Park. Bob Long was President of the Williamsburg Bird Club 2006-2007 and Cynthia always referred to herself as the "First Lady of the Bird Club"



Aquatic Macroinvertebrates, A Zoom Presentation

Amanda Whispell, Ph.D.

Thursday, October 27, 7 PM

This Zoom presentation explores the remarkable diversity of aquatic macroinvertebrates found in streams and waterways throughout Virginia and demonstrates how these organisms can be used to evaluate water quality. Participants will learn to identify common aquatic insects and other macroinvertebrates, understand their pollution tolerance, and explore the biological metrics scientists use to assess stream health. Through engaging examples and real-world applications, the lecture highlights the important role these organisms play as indicators of freshwater ecosystem health and provides an introduction to stream biomonitoring techniques.

Amanda Whispell is an entomologist, science educator, and scientific illustrator with expertise in insect biology, ecology, and conservation. She earned her Ph.D. in Entomology from Rutgers University, where her research focused on the evolution of mating behavior and color in damselflies. Passionate about making science accessible, Amanda develops educational programs, gives engaging lectures, and produces scientific illustrations that connect people with the natural world. Her work spans research, environmental education, pollinator conservation, and community engagement, inspiring curiosity and stewardship through science-based learning.



Join Us for the Following Fall Events

COMMUNITY CONSERVATION DAY

Join York River Steward, Virginia Cooperative Extension and Middlesex County Public Library and other community organizations to learn about conservation and recreation efforts on the Middle Peninsula and how you can get involved!

FOR: MATHEWS AND MIDDLESEX COUNTY RESIDENTS

WHEN: OCTOBER 24, 2026

TIME: 9 AM - 2 PM

WHERE: DELTAVILLE LIBRARY
(35 LOVERS LANE, DELATVILLE)

WHO TO MEET:



- ♦ **Community Conservation Day, Oct. 24**
9 am – 2 pm, Deltaville Library, Matthews County; read more and register – details on the left

- ♦ **James City County Regional Library Plant Exchange, Oct. 25, 1:30 pm,**
(read more about it on p. 7)

- ♦ **Sustainable Landscaping Festival**
Nov. 7, 10 am - 3 pm, Huntington Park, Newport News – details on the right

Visit www.vnps.org/johnclayton for more information.

NEWPORT NEWS 1ST ANNUAL
ROOTED TOGETHER
Sustainable Landscaping Festival

Explore sustainable gardening techniques for coastal Virginia that attract pollinators, enhance wildlife habitat, and help mitigate stormwater.

November 7th, 2026 at Huntington Park
10am-3pm
FREE Admission

Vendors

- Native Nurseries
- Informative Tables
- Displays
- Free Tree Giveaway (for NN residents)
- Food Trucks
- and much more

Speaker Series

- Preparing Your Site for Gardening Success
- Integrated Pest Management
- Is My Tree Dangerous? Learning how to spot decline in your trees

belong play thrive
rooted together

Fall Events, Cont.

Second Annual Williamsburg Regional Library Fall Plant Share Sunday, October 25, 1:30 pm at the James City County Library, 7770 Croaker Rd, Williamsburg

Join us to learn more about native and non-native plants, visit information tables where you can talk with other plant enthusiasts, and pick up free native plants and seeds. Plants (neatly potted and labeled) can be dropped off from 1-2:30 pm at the donation table in the parking lot. Tracy Matthew Melton, president of the Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists, will discuss "Replacing Non-Native Plants-How You Can Help Preserve Nature and Wildlife." There will be plant-related information tables; plant experts will be available to offer advice and answer questions; at the end, participants can pick up a free plant to take home (approx. 3:15 pm). For more information: <https://libcal.wrl.org/event/16296540>



Blue mistflower, *Conoclinium coelestinum*



Cynthia Ferentinos, chf2virginia@gmail.com

American beautyberry
Callicarpa americana



Panicled aster
Symphryotrichum lanceolatum

Potting Parties on the Horizon

Fall is in the air and for us it means potting parties! Come and help us prepare for the 2027 Native Plant Sale. We are starting to gather plants now and need people to help us pot them up so that they can overwinter and get ready for the plant sale next spring. Please join us on the following dates:

Tuesday, October 20
Tuesday, October 27

Sunday, November 1
Sunday, November 8

All potting parties start at 1 pm and will be held at
The Etchbergers' back yard
100 Woodland Road, Williamsburg, VA 23188

Please Bring

A hand trowel, gloves, and clothes you don't mind getting dirty.

If you have Virginia native plants to donate.

Leftover 1-gallon pots will be much appreciated

Bags of organic potting soil.

If you can help, please reply to Janet Lundin
(jeclundin@gmail.com)

For questions, please contact:

Janet Lundin

Email: jeclundin@gmail.com

Phone: 804-815-1193

or

Adrienne Frank

Adrienne-gary@cox.net



Thank you for your
help and for supporting
native plants!

Nature Camp Scholarships Update

Thanks to chapter members' support, we grant scholarships to school-age children from our area to attend Nature Camp in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Rockbridge County, Vesuvius, Virginia. In 2026, we selected three students: Maggie Dabney, Eleanor Patterson, and Flavia Meldrum. All three had enjoyable learning experiences and helped with Plant Sale. Here's what they say:



Maggie on a Sunday hike, half-way up McClung mountain

"I want to say thank you again to the John Clayton Chapter and its members for helping to make my summer at Nature Camp possible. This summer at camp, we received notebooks to document our experiences. Through notes, sketches, observations, collages, and much more, we created personal records of our summer. My notebook has since become one of the most meaningful parts of my time at camp. It taught me to slow down and pay closer attention to the world around me, and I have continued to use it, even after returning home to a busy life."

Maggie Dabney



Eleanor Patterson Helping a Customer at Plant Sale.

"While at camp this summer I had a lot of fun. Counselors brought lots of knowledge to the classes and other things like photography and painting. I took the Eco Arts class. Together my class painted, wrote poetry, and we went to South river one of the last days. I took several pictures the day my class had a photography lesson. One of them is of the bridge where you come into camp. I turned it into a watercolor painting."



Flavia Meldrum attended camp for the first time this year. Mushrooms were her special interest. She thinks that receiving the scholarship shows others that she is "serious about nature and doing important things."

"Thank you so much for the scholarship! I had a wonderful time at Nature Camp this summer and can't wait to go back next year." One of her favorite activities was experiencing sliding down a natural water slide known as Table Rock.

Join Us on Zoom!

Zoom lectures allow for a greater choice of speakers and more convenience. Check out the presentation schedule on the website under the Events tab. The presentations are always recorded and the videos can be viewed at the link below:

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



Ghost Pipes (*Monotropa uniflora*)

Wildflower of the Year 2026



**John Clayton Chapter
VNPS
PO Box 1128
Williamsburg VA
23187**

A Guide to Trees Growing on the Colonial Parkway

New Book by Elizabeth L. McCoy, Member, John Clayton Chapter

The book covers over 80 taxa of local trees, shrubs, vines, and herbaceous perennials found growing along the Colonial Parkway and in Williamsburg. While all aren't native plants and some are invasive, all plants are clearly marked. The book explains why there is a mix of plants in our area and defines what makes native and indigenous plants different from introduced plant species. There is a discussion of why the invasive plants documented in the book are both prolific and problematic. Most of the species in the book have photo illustrations.

Elizabeth McCoy is a life-long gardener who has planted gardens and admired trees throughout Virginia. After finishing her degree at Virginia Commonwealth University, she spent her professional career as an educator in Virginia before retiring from the classroom in 2009.

The author is a former James City County/Williamsburg *Master Gardener and Tree Steward*, and a former Williamsburg Botanical Garden *Garden Steward*. She is a member of the John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society, of the Hardy Fern Foundation, of the Arbor Day Foundation, and of the James River Association. She participates in the JRA's River Hero Homes program and the National Wildlife Federation's Certified Wildlife Habitat program.

Elizabeth worked with the Williamsburg Botanical Garden Board and other Master Gardener volunteers to renovate the Iris Border and together with other Garden Stewards and Master Gardeners cultivated multiple areas throughout the garden. She worked with the Master Gardener Communications Team from 2020 through early 2026, writing articles for and updating their website.

Her 2020 Tree Steward Project, completed in collaboration with a team of other Tree Steward interns, produced a *Plants Map* webpage detailing over 150 woody taxa in the garden, and led to the creation of the Williamsburg Botanical Garden and Freedom Park Arboretum in 2021.

Elizabeth has been exploring the Colonial Parkway with her husband since 2006, often stopping to photograph beautiful views, interesting animals, and to capture the changing seasons reflected in the landscape.

Contact the author at ELMcCoysBooks@gmail.com or elizabeth-l-mccoy-books.com

Other Books by Elizabeth McCoy:

How to Grow a Greener Thumb- The Art and Science of Tending a Garden 2026
Growing A Greener Thumb- A Way of Gardening 2026
Tree Tales- Planting Hope, Nurturing Change, and Growing a Better Tomorrow (coming soon)

