



# Claytonia

Newsletter of the John Clayton Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society

[www.claytonvnps.org](http://www.claytonvnps.org)

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## Our next meeting on May 26: "Endangered and Threatened Plant Species of Virginia"



Swamp pink  
(*Helonias bullata*)

Our speaker, **Bruce Hill**, is a retired cell biologist who spent his career on the East coast of the U.S. He served as Dean of the Faculty and Academic Vice President at Mount Vernon College until it was acquired by George Washington University. Before becoming an administrator, he taught cell biology, genetics, anatomy and physiology, general biology, and organic chemistry at the college level, and early in his career he did research

in cell and molecular biology at Carnegie Mellon University. He holds B.S. and M.S. degrees from George Washington University; his Ph.D. is from the University of New Hampshire and is in cell biology of protozoans.

Dr. Hill has always been interested in natural history. He and his wife Claire retired to Virginia in 2006 and reside in Williamsburg. This presentation is a result of his beginning efforts to become familiar with the flora and fauna of Tidewater Virginia.

The meeting begins at **6:45 pm** at the Yorktown Public Library at the intersection of Battle Road and Route 17 in Yorktown.

## From the President: We are on display!



Our chapter is getting many calls to set up a display at public events. Just this month, chapter members are staffing tables at the Christopher Newport Gardening Symposium Saturday, April 16, at the Earth Day celebration in Newport News Park on Sunday April 17, and at the Williamsburg Farmers Market Saturday April 23.

We had a successful event at Homestead Gardens on Rochambeau Road Saturday, April 2—the owners told us we brought in far more customers than ever before! This nursery is responding to customers' requests for native plants—signs were placed throughout the area identifying native wildflowers, trees and shrubs.

Chapter members are meeting speaking engagements as well. Jan Newton gave a stunning talk to the James City/Williamsburg Master Gar-

deners and is repeating her performance for a Road Scholar (formerly Elderhostel) group on Saturday, April 23. Phillip is speaking to a Ford's Colony group on April 18.

Doug Tallamy has presented several talks this spring in our area, including a presentation at the Colonial Williamsburg Gardening Symposium where Denise Greene also talked about cultivating native plants.

All these events promote our interest in conserving native plants and creating backyard habitats. It's wonderful that native plants are now "in" among some members of the nursery trade and home gardeners. But there are lots more folks who need our help, especially as they move from other areas into coastal Virginia. Please call us if you need a speaker for a garden club or other public event!

**Helen Hamilton**

## New members

We welcome four new members—Sandra Johnson, David Murphy and David Tetrault, all of Williamsburg, and Lance Gardner of Aylett.

## Our March meeting: "Highlights from John Clayton Field Trips"

March 17th's meeting was perhaps a little bittersweet. We had only recently learned that our speaker and field trip co-chair, **Phillip Merritt**, will soon be relocating to Florida, and we will be saying goodbye to an invaluable member, wonderful photographer and good friend. In appreciation, John Clayton Chapter will pay for Phillip's initial membership in the Florida Native Plant Society, and at the meeting Helen presented him with a copy of *Attracting Native Pollinators: The Xerces Society Guide*, published in 2011.

Phillip treated us to a slide presentation he had put together, selecting about 130 from the perhaps thousands of plant photos he must have taken over the last few years on chapter field trips and from excursions on his own or with other nature photographers.

We also heard reports from Shannon Atkinson and Austin Beaulieu, 2010 Nature Camp scholarship recipients, on their experiences at Nature Camp last year. **Louise Menges**



Photo: Jan Newton

Phillip and Helen pose for a photo after his presentation.



Photo: Jan Newton

Shannon and Austin

## We peer at scantily clad trees on Feb. 26

On this chilly Saturday morning, **Stewart Ware** led a very well attended Nude Tree Walk (nude trees, not humans, with the exception of Lee Bristow's bare feet) at Wellspring United Methodist Church on Longhill Road.

His purpose was to show us how to



identify distinguishing characteristics of native deciduous trees without the benefit of their familiar leaves, using location and appearance of leaf scars and terminal buds, as well as their bark and growth habit.

We walked with Stewart around the periphery of the church's parking lot as he gave us up close and personal looks at the identifying features of tulip poplar, mockernut hickory, American beech, white and red oaks, dogwood, sweet gum, sycamore, persimmon, sourwood and red maple.



Photo: Jan Newton

Can you identify the twig in this photo from its leaf scars and terminal bud?

common in our area: loblolly (*Pinus taeda*); Virginia, or scrub (*Pinus virginiana*); and shortleaf (*Pinus echinata*). Stewart also pointed out male and female eastern red cedars (*Juniperus virginiana*) and the mature and juvenile forms of red cedar's foliage, as well as southern wax myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*), which is often mistakenly referred to as bayberry (*Myrica pennsylvanica*). He gave an amusing account of an unappreciated (and so probably unwelcome) correction he made after a Colonial Williamsburg interpreter identified some wax myrtle bushes as the source of scented wax for bayberry candles.

But I think all the participants on **our** walk appreciated Stewart's knowledge and the engaging way in which he shared it with us—it's easy to see why so many of us show up for his tree walks each year, and why he has always been such a popular lecturer at William and Mary!

**Louise Menges**



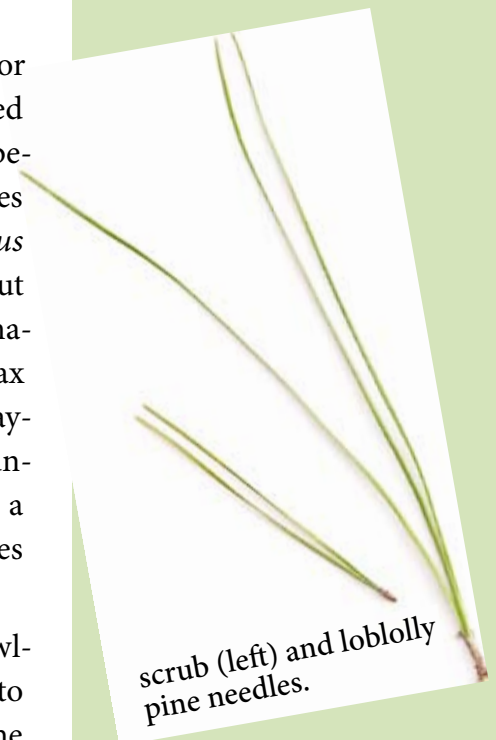
Photo: Phillip Merritt

Stewart Ware is surrounded by "field trippers". That's Lee Bristow on the far left. (Brrr...more power to you, Lee!)



Photo: Jan Newton

Stewart grasps a sapling's twig as he explains how to use its features in identification.



scrub (left) and loblolly pine needles.



## A successful wildflower rescue at Freedom Park on February 19

The warm temperatures during the latter part of February not only brought up the plants, but also encouraged the construction types to fire up their bulldozers. When that happens, the Williamsburg Wildflower Rescue Team leaps into action and calls out our volunteers. On Saturday, February 19th, 11 members of the team worked at Freedom Park in James City County where ground (along with a lot of other things) is being broken for a new Interpretive Center.

The site had been surveyed last fall when large numbers of Crane-fly Orchids were located. The rescue team dug up 165 native plants of 3 species—105 Crane-fly Orchids (*Tipularia discolor*), 45 Christmas Ferns (*Polystichum acrosticoides*), and 15 Partridge-berries (*Mitchella repens*). These plants were all replanted and watered-in at a safe location along the hiking/biking trails. We hope that the public will enjoy seeing these plants even if they don't realize that they would have been destroyed except for the efforts of the rescue team.

The volunteers working at Freedom Park included Lucile Kosodo, Adrienne Frank, Gary Driscoll, Joli Huelskamp, Christina Woodson, Jan Newton, Susan Voigt, Cortney Langley, Donna Ware, Ralph and Carolyn Will. Thank you all for your enthusiasm and physical labor—a job well done.

The Williamsburg Wildflower Rescue Team is a diverse group. Most of our volunteers are John Clayton members, but we also notify the Master Naturalists of all our rescues—and we get really great response from that program. In addition, we often have volunteers who are environmentally aware, but are not members of any organization. We are very thankful for everyone's hard work.

If you are interested in any phase of rescue work (including plant surveys), please contact Carolyn Will at 565-0306 or [c.will@juno.com](mailto:c.will@juno.com).

**Carolyn Will**

## Clayton Chapter gets the word out!

Helen Hamilton, Shirley Gellis and Louise Menges are pictured at our booth during the Horticultural Extravanza at York County's Tabb High School on March 12; also on hand were Pat Baldwin and Jan Newton.



Photo: Helen Hamilton

Ralph Will collects rescued Christmas ferns for replanting along trails in Freedom Park.



Photo: Jan Newton

Our chapter manned a display table in the afternoon and gave out information on native plants during Homestead Garden Center's spring native plant event and sale on April 2. In this photo are Cynthia Long, Helen Hamilton, Lucile Kossodo and Kendra Swann.



*Photo: Jan Newton*



Here are Jan Newton and Sherry Brubaker in front of our display for the Earth Day Celebration at Newport News Park on April 17.

Jan Newton, Shaune Reams and Mary Turnbull are ready for visitors to our booth at the Farmers Market on April 23.



*Photo: Helen Hamilton*

## Members worked hard to prepare for our April 30 Plant Sale...



*Photo: Helen Hamilton*

Pictured here are volunteers who turned out to pot at Mary Turnbull's home in Williamsburg on April 2. From left; Gary Driscoll, Louise Menges, Jan Lockwood, Jan Newton, Martha Smith, Marilyn Johnson, Phyllis Putnam, Adrienne Frank, Lucile Kossodo, Jolie Huelskamp and our hostess, Mary Turnbull.



*Photo: Helen Hamilton*

Jolie Huelskamp, Edie Bradbury and Jan Newton were among those pottin' 'em up at Stonehouse Elementary's Habitat Garden on March 26.

Helen must not have been at the party on April 3 at Charlotte Boudreau's house or at Hayes and Joyce Williams' on April 7, because we have no photos from those efforts. As Hayes explained when asked about pictures, "I was too busy digging plants to pot to think about it." 'Nuff said.

**Louise Menges**



## ...and it was an unqualified success!



Treasurer Judith Kator is kept busy!

We had a *great* Plant Sale—we netted somewhere near \$5000 after sales taxes and expenses, surpassing our historic best in 2002!

Many, many thanks to all who worked so long and so hard to bring it about! And especially a *massive* thanks to our two plant sale co-chairs, Joan and Lucile—no way would it have happened without Joan, Lucile and all the dedicated native plant workers!

**Helen Hamilton**



Lucile, Joan and a satisfied customer pose for a photo.



Who *were* those masked women?

Photos: Helen Hamilton

## A wildflower walk on Friends of Dragon Run's Revere Tract on April 23

Five wildflower enthusiasts joined Friends of Dragon Run President Mark Chittenden and Mary Berg for a walk on trails laid out by Friends of Dragon Run through its recently acquired Revere Tract.



Our group starts down the trail: Phyllis Putnam, Mark Chittenden, Mary Berg, Frances Knight, Edie Bradbury and Gus Hall.

We began our walk on a trail, eventually abandoning it to walk through the woods; a good move, as it turned out, because we saw many, many interesting plants as we threaded our way around trees and hopped across small streams.

A complete list isn't compiled yet, but among the native plants spotted were drifts of bluets (*Houstonia caerulea*), many delicate *Claytonia virginica* (spring beauty), wild yam (*Dioscorea villosa*), pinxter-flower [*Rhododendron periclymenoides* (*nudiflorum*)], blue toadflax (*Nuttallanthus canadensis*), dwarf dandelion (*Krigia virginica*), numerous ferns, blueberries or relatives, and running cedar (*Lycopodium clavatum* L.). White and blue violets were in bloom everywhere, obviously of several different species, but difficult for us to identify with certainty. We were especially excited to see a number of blooming specimens of two orchids—pink lady's slipper (*Cypripedium acaule*) and showy orchis (*Orchis spectabilis*). All in all, a very enjoyable adventure! (But ask me about our drive home.)

Louise Menges

## April's Wildflower of the Month:



Photo: Phillip Merritt

### Sweetleaf or Horsesugar

Sweetleaf (*Symplocos tinctoria*) is an unusually attractive shrub or small tree in the spring, with clusters of small, fragrant, cream-colored flowers—the numerous stamens make the blooms particularly showy. The flowers have both male and female parts, but the tree is not self-fertile. Requiring cross-pollination, the flowers are fragrant and have nectar glands, and appear closely spaced on the branches of last season's growth, before the leaves emerge.

Sweetleaf forms a short trunk bearing an open crown of spreading branches. The leaves are long, over 5 inches, narrow, and somewhat leathery with a yellow midvein.

While the leaves appear evergreen, they may be weakly so, or deciduous, depending upon the climate where the tree grows.

This plant is native chiefly on the Coastal Plain from Delaware and Virginia to Florida and eastern Texas, north in the Mississippi Valley to Arkansas and Tennessee and inland to the mountains of the Carolinas. Scattered in the understory of woods, sweetleaf prefers moist sandy soils, streambanks and bottomlands; it is easily cultivated.



From top: *Claytonia virginica*; a 5-petaled bluet; a violet; pink lady's slipper; showy orchis.

Photos: Louise Menges

The common names Sweetleaf and Horsesugar refer to the leaves, which are commonly eaten by livestock. The sweetness seems variable from plant to plant, and is often reminiscent of green apples. Sweet or not, the taste is distinctive and is useful when distinguishing this tree from other similar species.

This tree is also sometimes referred to as Yellowwood; the name and the Latin species name allude to a yellow dye once obtained from the bark and leaves. The bark, like others with bitter aromatic properties, was used by early settlers as a tonic.

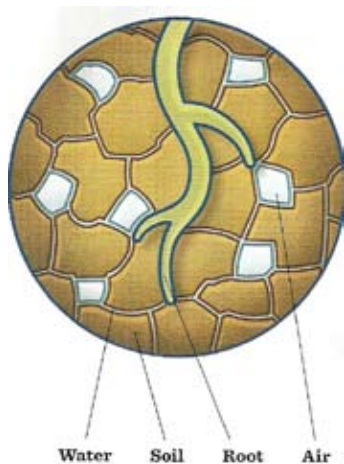
**Helen Hamilton**

## Does compost feed the soil?

(from *Organic Gardening* Vol. 57.2)

The nutrients added by compost to fertilize the soil are minor compared with other benefits. The fertility content of compost is extremely variable, and usually quite low. The percentages of nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) are similar to the 2-1-2 NPK fertilizers sold at a garden center.

A conventional farmer adds 150 pounds per acre of a 2-1-2 NPK fertilizer to produce field corn, whereas an organic farmer adds **10 to 20 tons** (not even enough to cover the ground!) of compost per acre to achieve similar NPK results in the first year. But the organic farmer gets a whole lot more from the extra mass of compost that isn't found in a thin dusting of synthetic fertilizers.



In compost, *carbon*, *microbes*, and *fungi* are abundant, and work together to create vitality and resilience in organic garden soil. The *carbon* is food for *microbes* and *fungi* living in the soil and compost. The *microbes* process the nitrogen found in the complex molecules of food scraps and garden wastes, and they do it slowly, over a long period of time. After digestion by *microbes*, the nitrogen is in inorganic form, which dissolves in the soil water and is readily available for

uptake by plants, slowly, throughout their growing cycle.

Generally, plants take up all the inorganic nitrogen available while growing, but a burst of chemical fertilizer sometimes provides more nitrogen than the plants can use. And the unused nitrogen washes down through the soil of the root zone into the groundwater, often causing pollution problems.



Also, *carbon* material in compost and soil acts like a sponge, wicking up moisture and any unused dissolved nitrogen and keeping it in the root zone where plants can continue to take it in between rainfalls. As such, compost helps shield crops from drought and nutrient stress longer and more successfully than done by synthetic fertilizers.

The thread-like hyphae of *fungi* bind together soil particles, preventing erosion from rainfalls. These aggregates keep essential carbon and minerals in place and accessible to plant roots, also creating spaces between the particles which help hold air and water near the roots, as well.

Therefore, compost is the ultimate recycling machine, returning materials to the ground that produced them. It is a “whole-foods diet” for the soil!

### Cultivars and the food web

In response to a series of VNPS emails on the subject of a Tech/Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association (VNLA) initiative on developing native plant cultivars, I wrote to Doug Tallamy, author of *Bringing Nature Home* and professor at University of Delaware. The proposed criteria for consideration of cultivars were/are:

1. They should be plants that are not restricted to growing in narrow environmental conditions or geographic areas
2. They should be plants that “present” well, so they catch the eye of the consumer
3. They should not be too “tricky” to grow
4. They should grow well in containers
5. They will be grown for gardening, not for restoration projects in the wild.

I posed the following question to Dr. Tallamy in an email:

“I have suggested that the plant’s function in an ecosystem/food web should be added as a criterion. In addition, is there any way to make an educated guess about what cultivars would be most beneficial? I note in your book that you mention avoiding making berries bigger (so that birds can still eat them), but wonder if anything else is worth considering. - Kathi”

Here’s his reply, *verbatim*:

“Good questions. Most often we play with flower color or shape when developing a cultivar. That typically messes up our pollinators, but may not impact leaf feeders at all. Changing leaf color (green to purple, or variegated, for example) will certainly change the leaf chemistry, which is a no no from the food web perspective. Breeders

should remember that the primary benefit native plants have over non-natives is their contribution to food webs. So don't mess with that. I can tell you that every place I go people are asking how to get more straight species into the market. They don't want cultivars!"

So, there it is. Some guidance and principles (flower shape, leaf color/chemistry) that will impact cultivars' ability to function in the food web. In summary, I have to ask why the criteria proposed for the project include "5. They will be grown for gardening, not for restoration projects in the wild." Are these mutually exclusive? Not in my yard.

**Kathi Mestayer**

## What's going on at the Williamsburg Botanical Garden?

*(All events are held in the Ellipse Garden at Freedom Park from 10 to 11:30 am.)*

May 21: **Art in the Garden with Linda Miller**

June 4: **Growing antique roses**

July 16: **Butterflies—educational, planting milkweed and tagging**

Aug. 20: **Butterflies—educational, planting milkweed and tagging**

Sept. 17: **Butterflies—educational, planting milkweed and tagging**

Oct. 15: **Red Emperor tulip planting in Therapy  
Garden with Barb Dunbar**

Nov. 19: **Snakes program!**

For more information contact 220-3575 or go to  
[www.williamsburgbotanicalgarden.org](http://www.williamsburgbotanicalgarden.org).

## Our new Flickr site is up and running!

With some help from Phillip Merritt, Helen Hamilton has taken on the task of setting up a new Flickr site for John Clayton members' photos, and it will eventually replace the one Phillip created and has maintained and populated with photographs since 2006. Phillip will retain the claytonsnatives name after he moves, and we hope to be able to transfer the photos to our new site.

At the moment both sites are accessible;  
our old site at [www.flickr.com/photos/claytonsnatives](http://www.flickr.com/photos/claytonsnatives),  
and the new one at [www.flickr.com/photos/claytonvnps](http://www.flickr.com/photos/claytonvnps).

Take a look!



*Photo: Helen Hamilton*

Rue anemone (*Thalictrum thalictroides*), on our new Flickr site.

## Jan's photo is published

Jan Newton's photograph of blue vervain (*Verbena hastata*) was included in a Louisiana State University Agricultural Center's publication titled "Louisiana Honey Plants" written by Entomology Professor Emeritus Dale Pollet. Dr. Pollet found the picture on the Habitats and Education/Stonehouse Elementary Habitat portion of our website, and cited Jan and our chapter in his publication.



## Calendar

### Friday, May 20

**4 pm: John McFarlane**, Director of Gardens and Grounds at William and Mary, will lead a tour of the landscape around the new School of Education.

To register, email [vnpsfieldtrips@gmail.com](mailto:vnpsfieldtrips@gmail.com) or call 259-0386.

### Thursday, May 26

**6:45–8:45 pm: John Clayton Chapter meeting at Yorktown Public Library:** Bruce Hill presents "Endangered and Threatened Species of Virginia". (See Page 1.)

*The Library is located at the intersection of Battle Rd. and Rt. 17 in Yorktown.*

Check our website at [www.claytonvnps.org](http://www.claytonvnps.org) for additional walks and events which may not have made this newsletter issue!



## 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  
400 Blandy Farm Lane, Unit 2  
Boyce, VA 22610