

# New River News

February 2026

New River Chapter, VNPS

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## Programs for 2026

Our meeting location for this spring semester will be the Blacksburg Community Center (BCC), **725 Patrick Henry Drive**, in the **Social Room**. If you have never been to the BCC, just enter through the front door, and ask someone at the desk where the Social Room is. There is a Zoom option for attending almost all of our meetings.

### **February 10. Nathan Brown: Landscaping with Native Plants.**

Nathan is a Virginia Tech graduate in Landscape Architecture. He is a native of SW Virginia and started his own company, Barrington Landscape Architecture. His firm designed and installed the linear planting in front of the Blacksburg branch library on Draper Road.

### **March 10. Claire Krotoski: Foraging for Plant Knowledge.**

Claire worked with Jordan Metzgar to write “The Budding Forager’s Guide to Edible Plants in SW Virginia.” Our Chapter helped fund the publication of this guide. Claire is now an Invasive Species Technician with the Virginia Department of Forestry.

### **April 14. Emma Jensen and Dylan Vines: Demonstration Native Meadow in Blacksburg's Heritage Park**

Emma runs Live, Work, Eat, Grow--the town's community gardens and adjacent programs, including the Native Plant Propagation Center at Hale Garden.

Dylan Vines works as the Parks and Natural Lands Coordinator for the Town of Blacksburg where he addresses the natural resource management and environmental stewardship of the town's parks and natural areas.

## May ??? Member Share Meeting

We cancelled our December meeting of 2025 because of bad weather. So we are scheduling our May meeting as a makeup. It will NOT be on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of May. And it will NOT be at 7 pm in the evening. The Board will choose a date and time later.

This program will be in two parts. First we will meet in our usual room at the Blacksburg Community Center to share our presentations, in person and by Zoom. Then we will carpool from there to Carol Schobel's house (Harding Avenue) for a fun social get together, bringing the usual finger foods.

## Spring Field Trips

Brenda Graff

We have four possibilities for field trips which haven't been confirmed yet. Bob Boehringer invites us to his neighborhood in Indian Run (just north of Blacksburg) when the shooting stars (*Primula meadia*) are in bloom. Sometimes there are hundreds of flowers there. They are listed in the Flora as "infrequent in the mountains" so they are a treat to see.

Phil Dalton said he will lead a walk at Meadows of Dan, which is on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Someone from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation will lead us on a walk at the Sweet Springs Natural Area Preserve which is in Montgomery County near Shawsville.

Rosemarie Sawdon will talk to the owner of Den Hill Farm and Fungi to see if we can have a tour of his farm in 2026. He gave a talk to our chapter in September 2025.

We hope to find leaders for visits to other areas such as the ones listed below:

Wildwood Park

Potts Valley Rail Trail

Cascades National Recreation Area

Fenwick Mines

New River Trail State Park  
Pandapas Pond  
Glen Alton day use area  
Mountain Lake  
Appalachian trail

If you wish to lead our Chapter on a field trip this spring, contact Brenda Graff at [graff\\_brenda@hotmail.com](mailto:graff_brenda@hotmail.com).

### **Outreach Events**

Brenda Graff

The mission of the Virginia Native Plant Society, as stated in its bylaws, is “Promoting the conservation of Virginia’s native plants and habitats.” One way to pursue this mission is through education. The New River Chapter has several different educational projects. One of them is having a table at local events where our members explain to the public how to promote native plants in Virginia, such as how to create a native pollinator garden, how to get rid of invasive plants, and various other topics. They also display posters and give out handouts.

Both the Chapter members and the public learn from each other. If you would like to help at one of the outreach events listed below, contact Brenda Graff at [graff.brenda@hotmail.com](mailto:graff.brenda@hotmail.com). Or just attend one or more of the events. Details of these events will be published in our monthly list of events on our list serve, which Brenda will be glad to add you to if you are not already on it.

#### **List of Outreach Events for 2026**

- April** SEEDS spring festival in Blacksburg
- May 9** master gardener plant sale
- May 16** Our chapter native plant sale in Blacksburg
- June 27** National Forest Appreciation Day at Pandapas Pond
- July** Montgomery-Floyd library garden tour
- August** Heritage Day, Montgomery Museum in Christiansburg
- October** Hokie Bugfest at Virginia Tech

## **Membership Report**

Rosemarie Sawdon

As of December 2025, we had 135 members in our Chapter. Two people joined this January. The New River Chapter has members in the following counties--Montgomery, Floyd, Roanoke, Wythe, Pulaski, Carroll, and Washington—as well as the cities of Galax, Radford, and Bristol.

### **Report from our Chapter Grants Committee**

Rosemarie Sawdon

Our grants committee, consisting of Rosemarie Sawdon and Beth Umberger, is asking for one or two members to join since we lost a member who moved out of state. This position does not require a big time commitment. Every year we receive requests for grants centered around planting natives, as well as invasive plant removal and how human choices impact the natural world. An educational component and public access are the basic criteria. The committee members decide what requests fit into the criteria. Please contact Rosemarie Sawdon [sawdon@msn.com](mailto:sawdon@msn.com) if you are interested in joining the committee. The following is a list of grants in 2025.

#### **BLACKSBURG HIGH SCHOOL**

Students at Blacksburg High School are working to transform two acres of school grounds into thriving native plant habitats and outdoor learning spaces on the school's campus. This project includes the creation of a one-acre Monarch waystation test plot, while another acre will be reclaimed from invasive species and reforested using native trees and shrubs donated by the Virginias Department of Forestry.

Students have begun invasive species removal on the site and have established a plant nursery on campus to care for plants that will be installed in the fall. Teachers are incorporating the project into their curriculum, offering hands-on opportunities for students to connect with ecology, conservation and culture. Interpretive signage, volunteer workdays, and future infrastructure such as trails and an outdoor classroom will help sustain and expand the project's impact.

## **HERITAGE PARK PROJECT**

Live, Work, Eat, Grow and the Town of Blacksburg are transforming a 20-by-100 foot section of land, adjacent to the Heritage Park parking lot off of Meadowbrook Drive, into a native plant demonstration meadow. This project aims to showcase the beauty and ecological value of native grassland habitats. The site will feature educational signage identifying native grasses and forbs, highlighting the importance of pollinator friendly low maintenance landscapes. Over the course of a year, the project will involve careful site preparation, including invasive species removal, solarization with a landscape tarp and soil enhancement—followed by native grass seeding and the planting of nursery grown forbs. The meadow will be maintained by the Parks and Natural Lands Coordinator and provides another opportunity for community volunteers.

## **Publication: THE BUDDING FORAGER'S GUIDE TO EDIBLE PLANTS IN SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA**

### **Edited and researched by:**

Jordan Metzgar, Claire Krotoski, and Aurora Wood (VT Massey Herbarium)

“Combating plant blindness through foraging outreach”

## **CHRISTIANSBURG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

### **Student Conservation Club Small Garden Area**

The program increases knowledge in sustainable horticulture and sustainable landscaping management. It will teach students about natural resource conservation to include invasive plant removal, planting natives, and soil and water quality.

Additionally, students will observe the life cycles in nature and interact with local insects, birds, and wildlife that are impacted by human choices. Our students created this plan and intend to create a safe space for their peers to use when feeling upset or overwhelmed. They are thinking of the social impact

of horticulture and how it can be used to support our economically challenged families in the community.

They hope to provide fresh food for families in need and possibly run a small fresh food stand in the future, so that they can pass on the fruits of their labor. The program aims to increase the awareness of the benefits of home food production and increase food access of locally grown foods. They will build personal habits of food production and share their knowledge with our community.

### **Hayfields State Park, a New Park in Highland County**

Mary Rhoades

Virginia's newest state park opened in October. It covers 1,034 acres, and ranges in elevation from 1800 to 2400 feet. Right now there are 4 miles of easy to moderate hiking trails. Habitats range from wooded mountain land to open pastures. The property was once farmland, so it includes some structures also. The Bullpasture River, known for several threatened and endangered species, runs through the park. The park is open limited hours, and they are subject to change, so be sure and call before you make a trip there. The phone number for the park is: 540/396-4489.

In seeking information about interesting or unusual plants that might occur there, I received a letter from Norm and Sara Bell who are Master Naturalists with the Alleghany Highlands Chapter. They mentioned four plants of interest. The shale barren rock cress (*Boechnera serotina*) is listed in the Flora as "rare in Ridge and Valley Province." Small whorled pogonia (*Isotria medeoloides*) is listed as "rare throughout." White alumroot (*Heuchera alba*) is "restricted to and frequent in a small area of the mountains." And it is only found in three counties: Augusta, Highlands, and Rockingham. Last is Shriver's frilly orchid (*Platanthera shriveri*), which is "rare in the mountains; found only in Highland County."

Sara and Norm mentioned a possible field trip with NPS members from our Chapter joining NPS members from their Chapter, which is Shenandoah. So if someone is interested in organizing a trip, let's hear from you.

## List of Ferns at Falls Ridge Preserve

Jordan Metzgar

Found on field trip of Oct. 11, 2025. For the Blue Ridge Wildflower Society

### Equisetaceae

Scouring rush horsetail (*Equisetum praealtum* aka *E. hyemale*)

Field horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*)

### Ophioglossaceae

Rattlesnake fern (*Botrypus virginianus*)

### Cystopteridaceae

Bulblet bladder fern (*Cystopteris bulbifera*)

### Athyriaceae

Silvery spleenwort (*Deparia acrostichoides*)

### Pteridaceae

Northern maidenhair (*Adiantum pedatum*)

Purple cliff-brake (*Pellaea atropurpurea*)

### Aspleniaceae

Walking fern (*Asplenium rhizophyllum*)

Wall rue (*Asplenium ruta-muraria*)

Ebony spleenwort (*Asplenium platyneuron*)

### Dryopteridaceae

Glandular wood fern (*Dryopteris intermedia*)

Marginal wood fern (*Dryopteris marginalis*)

Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*)