

VNPS Piedmont Chapter WILDFLOWER of the WEEK

WILDFLOWER #15 answer: **EVENING PRIMROSE** (*Oenothera biennis*)

Timing, slow and fast, matters a great deal to the evening primrose. The plant is a biennial, taking two years to complete its life cycle. During the first year it is only a rosette of leaves, gathering nourishment. In the second year, the flower stalk arises. Closed in the morning, opening swiftly at evening, each flower on the tall stalk withers by the following noon. It depends on vespertine pollinators--those who become active at twilight.

An old joke says that botanists count "one, two, many": annual, biennial, perennial. An even shorter set tells whether a plant makes seeds once (monocarpic) or more than once (polycarpic) in its life. Evening primrose is a monocarp.

Ultraviolet nectar guides invisible to the unaided human eye guide moths, bees, and butterflies to evening primrose nectar. When pollinators' wings vibrate petals, the flowers concentrate more nectar. But not just any bee can pollinate this plant; the pollen is in a sticky mass, called a pollinarium (plural: pollinaria) that sticks to the insect's proboscis and is then deposited on the stigma of another flower. In addition to providing abundant nectar, the plant is host to larvae of the primrose moth and the white-lined sphinx moth.

WILDFLOWER #16

Clues: Tallest of its family, this woodland native can grow 6 feet high. Spreading umbels of flowers droop downward like pink-white fireworks. But the long, narrow seedpods do an about-face, pointing upward.

