

## VNPS Piedmont Chapter WILDFLOWER of the WEEK

### WILDFLOWER #19 Answer: PURPLETOP (*Tridens flavus*)

Sometimes we do not think of grasses as flowering plants, since their flowers are seldom colorful or showy. Purpletop, though, has a distinctive purple flower. Up to six feet tall, it shimmers above the rest of the grasses in a field.

The purple color comes from an oily chemical. In fact, you can recognize purpletop with your eyes shut, by sliding your fingers over the seedhead. The oil will rub off in your hand (or on your nice white pants). This gives rise to another name, greasegrass.

Purpletop is a bunchgrass— it grows not evenly but in clumps. Thus it hides ground-nesting meadow birds like bobwhite quail. Many birds and mammals eat its copious seeds. It is host to the larvae of several butterflies and moths, among them the common wood nymph, Zabulon skipper, crossline skipper (which likes purpletop best), and little glasswing (which uses purpletop only).

This perennial is a native alternative to tall fescue. It does well on roadsides, tolerating salt and air pollution. It survives on dry, shallow, and infertile soils. A warm-season grass, it glows from August to November. Who could ask for more?

### WILDFLOWER #20

**Clues:** A drift of white flowers climbs at the edge of the woods. Toothed leaflets in threes and silvery plumes can help you name this member of the Buttercup family.



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