

The Piedmont Chapter
of the Virginia Native Plant Society
and
Sky Meadows State Park

PLANTS IN PAIRS

Flagged walk on parts of the Corporal Morgan and Hadow Trails

September 4-13, 2020

Length is 0.3 miles/ 0.6 miles round trip

Welcome to Sky Meadows State Park, and thanks for choosing to take a walk to look at plants. As the name suggests, we will be highlighting plants that are a little bit alike, and show you how to tell the difference. We will also mention a few of the park's common plants you can see. In addition to a numbered pin flag, there may be markers tied onto some of the plants, since they might be slightly off the trail.

To begin the trail, turn right after entering the park and look for the large picnic shelter on the left. Take the next right after the "Do Not Enter" sign on your right to enter the picnic loop and go about 2/3 of the way around the loop. Parking is available just after the trail sign. The park trails are posted and a VNPS sign will mark the beginning. Follow the Corporal Morgan Trail and then turn left onto the Hadow Trail.

You will finish the flagged hike at a bench beside Gap Run. While the flagged trail is short, you should feel free to continue hiking after the flags run out.

If you have questions or comments about the hike, please send them to piedmontvnps@gmail.com. This is our first flagged walk and we would love to get your feedback.

Flags #1A and 1B



Persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*) is seen here in a grove. A similar tree that will be flagged later, Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*), is usually also seen in a grove, called a Pawpaw patch. Within a grove the trees may be identical genetically and attached to each other by roots.

Both trees have edible fruits and the park's small mammals love them too.

The Persimmon is orange when ripe and can be astringent when less than fully ripe. The Pawpaw is green and darkens a little when ripe, with a more tropical taste. Look for Pawpaw at a flag marked 1B just shortly ahead.

Flag #2

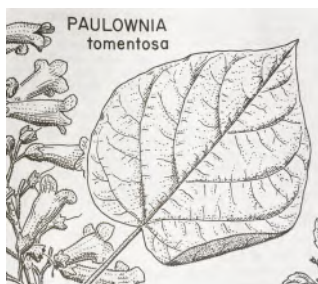


We are at a stream crossing, and here we will see two plants that are sharp, so be cautious when touching them. Rice cutgrass (*Leersia oryzoides*) is a grass that grows in wet areas. Run your hand gently along the stem. When you come to other grass plants that are not in wet areas, compare the feel of the leaves.

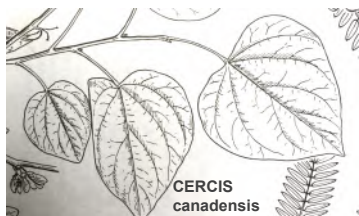
The Hawthorn tree (*Crataegus* sp.) just behind it has inch long thorns. Other trees in the area are thornless. Both of these are methods plants use to defend themselves.



Flags #3A and 3B



A young Princess tree (*Paulownia tomentosa*) can be seen here. The large heart shaped leaves are especially noticeable at this stage. This tree is from Asia and has escaped cultivation, and is considered an invasive plant. As this brochure was in preparation, the park staff treated these trees, so they may not look very good and the leaves may no longer be clearly visible.



The native Redbud tree (*Cercis canadensis*) also has heart shaped leaves, but they are much smaller. Look for it at a later flag marked #3B (between flags 9 and 10).

Flag #4



The two trees we are highlighting here are a little off to the left of the path. Look for streamers marking them. Both of these trees have compound leaves, meaning the tissue of a single leaf is divided into leaflets.

Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*) is a native tree with edible nuts in thick green husks. It has fewer leaflets than the other.

Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) has large clumps of winged seeds. Each leaflet has a 'toe' near its base.

If you can get close enough to these trees, they each have a unique smell, and they are very distinct.



Flag #5



Here are two of our native Tulip-trees (*Liriodendron tulipifera*). The one on the left is a very old specimen, while the one on the right is probably younger, but still very large.

The leaves are shaped like the outline of a tulip, and in spring there are large yellow and orange flowers.

Compare the bark and the condition of these trees. One has certainly seen more storms than the other.

Flag #6



Here are two vines to compare. One is a grape (*Vitis* sp.). It has leaves with lobes, tendrils, and a few ripening grapes. Its bark peels in strips and is used by nesting birds.

The other is an invasive species, Oriental Bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*). The smooth vine twines tightly on trees and often kills them or pulls them down with its weight. The berries ripen into very colorful orange fruits that contrast with a yellow capsule.



Flag #7

At this flag we will look at two woody vines – and you really need to know the difference!



Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) has 5 leaflets like the fingers on your hand (left). If present, its berries are blue.

Poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*) has its own rhyme – leaves of three, let it be (right). It has small, white berries. This is the plant that usually gives people an itchy rash.



Berries of both species are good food sources for birds.

Flag #8



Mostly, people don't like thistles, but butterflies, bees and other insects do! Besides being sharp to the touch, thistles can spread too much. Many of the thistles that invade fields and roadsides are not native, and grow aggressively.

This Field Thistle (*Cirsium discolor*) is one of our native species, and it is also sharp. It provides food for pollinators, seeds for insects and birds, and fluff for nesting.

Gently turn over a leaf to see the matted white hairs on the underside that distinguish this thistle from the others.

Flag #9



Crownbeard (*Verbesina occidentalis*) is one of the most common plants in the park and blooms golden in late summer.

Upland ironweed (*Vernonia glauca*) is the purple-flowering plant nearby.

These are two of the more than 350 Aster family species in Virginia. They are distinguished by a head of flowers in a leafy cup. These groups of flowers are one-stop shopping for pollinators.



Flag #10

This is the last flag, at a nice resting spot overlooking Gap Run. Just before you arrive at the bench, notice the two very large white oak trees (*Quercus alba*) along the run. They probably mark an old fence line. Overlapping bark and round leaf lobes are distinguishing characters.

Just past the bench is a Beech tree (*Fagus grandifolia*) with low branches where you can see some ripening beech nuts.