

VNPS Piedmont Chapter WILDFLOWER of the WEEK

WILDFLOWER #20 Answer: VIRGIN'S BOWER (*Clematis virginiana*)

Virgin's Bower draws its suggestive common name from the veil of pale flowers, draping a leafy shelter. Quite an opposite name is Devil's Darning Needles, for the stiff, curved petioles that bind neighboring stems together.

These petioles give the plant an unusual way of climbing. They are sensitive to touch. When they find a thin stem, they coil around it, thicken, and lignify (become woody) for strength. This explains why you find Virgin's bower on forest edges, where shrubs and smaller trees with thin stems abound.

Virgin's Bower is polygamo-dioecious—most plants are all-female or all-male, but now and then a perfect flower (both female and male) shows up. The tiny achenes that compose the fruiting heads have long plumelike hairs that carry them through the air.

The genus *Clematis* is highly diverse, with about 300 species worldwide, mostly in temperate regions. Its family, the Buttercups (Ranunculaceae), appeared early in the evolution of flowering plants. *Clematis* has remained recognizable as a genus, though with changing species, for millions of years.

The invasive, nonnative *Clematis terniflora* is widely sold for landscaping. It, too, has leaflets in threes, but the leaf edges are smooth, not toothed like the native.

The Cherokee used Virgin's Bower as part of an infusion to induce dreaming. It is toxic, so do not try this; Virgin's Bower is dreamy enough as is!

WILDFLOWER #21

Clues: Find this member of the Bellflower family where the ground is damp. Thick spires of violet-blue flowers arrest your eye.



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