

VNPS Piedmont Chapter WILDFLOWER of the WEEK

WILDFLOWER #25 FLOWERING SPURGE (*Euphorbia corollata*)

The genus *Euphorbia* is wildly successful, with over 2000 species, including poinsettia and crown of thorns. Adapted to arid conditions, plants in this genus have a special kind of photosynthesis, called CAMô Crassulacean acid metabolism. The plant keeps its stomates closed during the day, so it does not lose water. It opens them at night to absorb carbon dioxide and finish the photosynthetic process.

The genus is named for Euphorbos, a Greek physician who married the daughter of Antony and Cleopatra. The common name derives from the same Latin root as ôpurge,ö and Euphorbos prescribed spurge as an emetic. The whole plant is, however, poisonous even in minute doses, and a possible carcinogen. The latex in the veins is very caustic, making the plant toxic to most mammals.

Corollata means ôlike a crown.ö What appear to be small crown-shaped flowers with five petals are each made of several flowers surrounded by petaloid bracts. The whole structure is called a cyathium. Each female (pistillate) flower within the cyathium is surrounded by male (staminate) flowers.

Though lacking fragrance and low in nectar, the flowers do attract pollinators, including bees, wasps, flies, and butterflies. Wild turkeys, mourning doves, bobwhite quail, and horned larks eat the seeds.

WILDFLOWER #26

Clues: Find this member of the Mint family, with its tiny bluish flower, in rocky and disturbed habitats. Recognize it mostly by its sharp aroma.

