

## VNPS Piedmont Chapter WILDFLOWER of the WEEK

### WILDFLOWER #32 answer: SEEDBOX (*Ludwigia alternifolia*)

This delicate species lives only in wetlands, in full sun and acid soils. Like many others in the evening primrose family (Onagraceae), the flowers open a few hours after sunrise and drop their petals by nightfall. The unique cubic fruits, with a small hole at the top, contain up to 2000 dry seeds that rattle when you shake the fruit.

The genus is named for Christian G. Ludwig (1709-1773), an explorer, botanist, and professor at Leipzig who corresponded with Linnaeus. There are 15 species of *Ludwigia* in Virginia, but most of them are on the Coastal Plain and/or are rare. Alternate-leaved seedbox, however, is common in the Piedmont.

Seedbox's primary pollinators are bees, especially honeybees, bumblebees, and carpenter bees, but its most fascinating insect relationship is with a tiny seed beetle, *Acanthoscelides alboscuteallatus*. This beetle lives only on this species of seedbox. The adult beetle feeds on nectar and pollen in the flower; then the female lays eggs outside the ovary. When they hatch, the larvae bore into the ovary and feed on the tiny seeds. The larvae form cocoons inside the capsule, which eventually splits. Although parasitic wasps might attack the pupae, many survive the winter. They wait for flowering, and the cycle starts again.

Deer, and probably other herbivores, eat the leaves. The fruits feed mice, voles, and birds such as white-throated sparrows.

### WILDFLOWER #33

**Clues:** This widespread low tree or tall shrub in the Cashew family comes into its own in the fall.

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