

## VNPS Piedmont Chapter WILDFLOWER of the WEEK

### WILDFLOWER #43 answer: HAWTHORN (*Crataegus spp.*)

Hawthorn refuses to be pigeon-holed, with 200 to 1000 species. On some forms, thorns are straight, on others curved; on some the scalloped leaves are three-lobed, on others entire. These complications arise in part because hawthorns hybridize and can become *polyploid* (with chromosomes in multiples, not pairs) or *aneuploid* (with an extra or missing chromosome). Sometimes they make seeds by *apomixis* (without fertilization).

This rose family member has long delighted wild animals and humans. The genus supports many Lepidoptera, including 25 species of moths. The leaves host larvae of butterflies such as Gray Hairstreak (*Strymon melinus*), Red-spotted Purple (*Limenitis arthemis astyanax*), and Viceroy (*Limenitis archippus*). In winter, thrushes, cedar waxwings, turkeys, and other birds depend on the fruit, dispersing the seeds. American woodcocks and small mammals shelter amid the thorns. The fruits are popular with humans too, from tejocotes candy in Mexico to sansachun liquor in South Korea to mayhaw jelly in New England. The creamy pollen yields hawthorn honey.

Ancient Celts said hawthorn heals a broken heart, and this is not mere poetry. Clinical research indicates that hawthorn extract can help treat chronic heart failure, although it might interact negatively with prescribed medications. (Research has not confirmed that hawthorn kills vampires, as Serbian lore recounts.)

In England, dense hawthorn hedges divide once-shared fields. In fact, *ōhawö* derives from an Old English word for hedge. In spring, country lanes and old field edges are snow-white with five-petaled hawthorn flowers, which girls might go *ōmayingö* to gather.

### WILDFLOWER #44

**Clues:** A solitary striped and öpleatedö leaf catches your eye.



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