

## VNPS Piedmont Chapter WILDFLOWER of the WEEK

### WILDFLOWER #60 answer: YELLOW STARGRASS (*Hypoxis hirsuta*)

You could write a Russian novel about the complex ins and outs of the Lily family. Yellow stargrass, once counted a lily, is (for now) a member of the Hypoxidaceae, or African potato family. (Most of its relatives are in southern Africa.) *Hypoxis* means—depending whom you ask—slightly acidic, or having a sharp bottom to the ovary. *Hirsuta* indisputably means hairy, and a great many parts of this plant have soft hairs.

Yellow stargrass is small but successful. The linear leaves in their rosette resemble blades of grass, but they can get up to 12 inches high. The flowers, in a loose umbel of two to six, keep blooming for weeks. Though they are only ½ to 1 inch wide, they repay the attentions of carpenter bees, mason bees, and halictid bees, and the pollen feeds beetles and flies.

Because grasslands often burn, *Hypoxis* has developed two ways of spreading. The elliptical capsule splits to shake out glossy seeds with distinctive rows of tiny “warts”. Seeds are stimulated somehow by fire; it seems that smoke breaks their dormancy. Meanwhile, the hard little corm, quite fire-tolerant, also reproduces, sometimes forming colonies.

Drugs based on a sterol from corms of *Hypoxis* species have been shown to inhibit cells involved in prostate cancer and AIDS.

### WILDFLOWER #61

**Clues:** This littlest member of the bellflowers might grace your yard in early summer.



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