

VNPS Piedmont Chapter WILDFLOWER of the WEEK

WILDFLOWER #100 answer: BEAKED HAZELNUT (*Corylus cornuta*)

Beaked hazelnut doesn't stand out in winter, but as spring nears, the stubby, dense male catkins—ropes of male flowers—elongate and thicken. Developing yellow stamens, they dangle and dance in the wind, dispersing pollen. Meanwhile, tiny female flowers open on gray-brown twigs. Only their magenta stigmas and styles splay out of sheltering bracts.

Even if it lands in February, pollen bides its time; flowers are not fertilized till May, and do not bear fruit till summer. The fruits give the plant its common and scientific names. *Corylus*, from the Greek for helmet, refers to the fruit's hard, hairy husk, made of two stiff leaves. The husk extends well beyond the enclosed nut, making it *cornuta*, or "horned." American hazelnuts, by contrast, have a short ruffly husk.

You can eat wild hazelnuts like commercial hazelnuts, but they are smaller. They are rich in protein and fat. Bears, beavers, and foxes and strong-beaked birds like turkeys and woodpeckers feast on them; squirrels and jays disperse them. Feeding on the soft, doubly serrate leaves are over 100 species of butterfly and moth. Among them are the caterpillars of giant silkworm moths such as *Cecropia* and *Polyphemus*.

Seeds that escape eating have to freeze in order to germinate; this process, called stratification, keeps them from germinating in the fall, when tender seedlings might not survive winter.

First Nations used fire to make this shrub resprout with multiple stems from the root crown. The multi-stemmed, long-haired, flexible shoots became baby carriers, fish traps, baskets, and arrows.

WILDFLOWER #101

Clues: This ancient spore-bearing plant is full of silica.

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