VNPS Piedmont Chapter
WILDFLOWER of the WEEK

WILDFLOWER #103 answer: CUT-LEAF TOOTHWORT (*Cardamine concatenata*)

What does this native have to do with teeth? Deeply cut in three lobes, the basal leaves and whorled stem leaves are coarsely toothed. But a better answer lies in the rhizomes—shallow, spreading horizontal stems. Oblong, knobby, and jointed, they are chained together (*catena* means "chain" in Latin). Leaf scars on these rhizomes form toothlike projections. The rhizomes develop mycorrhizae as they senesce, an unusual pattern.

The white, fleshy pointy tubers also are reminiscent of a pulled tooth. No wonder the genus used to be Dentaria.

Toothwort is indeed toothsome. It is no help for toothaches, as was once supposed, but the tubers are crunchy and peppery, earning the name pepperwort. Passenger pigeons ate them, and so did First Nations and European settlers.

Mourning cloak butterflies, spring azures, bee flies, and bees both long-tongued and short-tongued draw nectar from the fragrant, droopy flowers. Short-tongued bees take pollen too. Often the four petals do not open all the way, so the blossom is shaped like a bell. At the base of each petal, a spot reflects ultraviolet light to guide pollinators to the feast.

The leaves feed larvae of the Falcate orangetip, West Virginia white and Mustard white butterflies, specialists on members of the mustard family, the Brassicaceae. Unfortunately, sometimes they choose the invasive garlic mustard, which is poisonous to larvae.

Only the seeds are not eaten. Early in spring, they line up in a slim narrow-beaked fruit called a silique, which turns brown and splits to eject them. The seeds need warm followed by cold to germinate, so they wait for the following spring. Then it is do or die—they last only a year in the soil.

WILDFLOWER #104

Clues: Clustered in rich limestone woods, this native plant is named for a president.