

The Leaflet

Starting Native Plants Indoors text and photo by Karen Hendershot

SPRING 2024

Who among us doesn't gaze at our dormant land in the dark of winter and envision glorious blooms as temperatures warm? At the January 21 Piedmont Chapter's Winter Speaker Series, Kim Strader shared the joy of beginning the growing season by planting native seeds indoors.

Seed Selection

- First, make sure your land can provide the soil type and environment the plant enjoys in the wild.
- Use local ecotypes (seeds grown in this area), especially for large restoration projects. The same species grown elsewhere may have different bloom times or other characteristics not suitable for local fauna.
- For wild harvesting, take seeds from along roadsides or where you have permission of the landowner. Many public parks forbid harvesting except by scientists.
- Never take seeds of threatened species, which require unique growing conditions, nor even a common species where you see only a few specimens of the plant. Taking seeds damages its chances for reproduction and deprives local fauna.
- Use paper to collect seeds that are ripe and dry. Tie cloth bags around fruits not quite ripe, so that they can fall into the bag.
- For small-seeded plants, use a sieve to separate the seed from the chaff. For fleshy fruit, remove the flesh or the elaiosome (nutritious attachment to some seeds that attracts ants to help in dispersal). Both can inhibit germination.
- While some dry seeds can last up to a decade, others require special treatment. Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*) seeds, for instance, must be kept moist to germinate.



Preparation for planting. Kim recommended the website of Prairie Moon Nursery (www.prairiemoon.com) for guidance on how to treat specific seeds.

- Seeds with hard shells, such as Wild Senna (*Senna* spp.), are prepared for germination in the wild by going through an animal's gut. Scarifying the seed by rubbing it to slightly scratch the shell (as with medium sandpaper), and then boiling it in water achieves a similar result.
- Certain seeds need to be stratified, or subjected to a period of cold, during which they should be kept damp with a paper towel or coffee filter. Some, such as Dutchman's Breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*), need alternate periods of cold and warm. Keep an eye on refrigerated seeds, in case they germinate early.

Planting:

Use a seed starting mix, not heavier potting soil. Because starting mix is hydrophobic (resists water), Kim recommends stirring it in a large container to dampen it before putting it in your pots. Anything with drainage holes (such as berry containers) will work for planting. Do not add fertilizer at this stage: the seed contains all it needs to start growing.

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The Virginia Native Plant Society (VNPS), founded as the Virginia Wildflower Society in 1982, is a non-profit organization of people who share an interest in Virginia's wild plants and habitats and a concern for their protection.

The Piedmont Chapter is a sub-group of VNPS in the northern point of Virginia east of the Blue Ridge Mountains. It includes Loudoun, Fauquier, Culpeper, Rappahannock, Warren, Clarke, and Frederick counties.

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The Leaflet can be seen online in color at www.vnps.org/piedmont

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Starting Native Plants Indoors (continued)

- Some seeds need light to germinate. Just press them gently onto the soil and water with a squirt bottle.
- Most plants germinate best at a temperature around 70°F, which can be achieved with use of a heating mat. Pots that are too cold, too wet, or not sterilized properly can lead to damping-off of the plants.
- Cool LED lights placed over the plants help prevent them from becoming stringy and won't burn them. Mimic actual daylight, up to 14 hours.
- Seeds usually germinate in seven to ten days but may take a month. New plants should be transplanted to a bigger container at the second set of true leaves. A fertilizer solution diluted to about one-quarter of its normal strength should be provided when the plant has its fourth or fifth set of leaves. Pat the plant lightly or blow on it to help develop a strong stem.
- Harden off plants by placing them in a shaded area for a few hours each day once temperatures reach around 50°F. Mothers' Day, safely free of frost in this area, is a great time to put them in the ground.
- Finally, remember that seeds germinate at different times in the wild, assuring conditions are right for at least some to grow. Keep notes on your experience for even better gardening next year!

December 9 Walk at Blandy Farm text and photos by Sally Anderson

Our walk took place on a seasonably cool and sunny day. Jack Monstead, assistant curator for the Native Plant Trail, took us on the loop trail that includes woodland, grassland, and wetland. We looked at several of the tall grasses, noting the color of the drying stems and the shape of the seed heads as tips for identification. Jack also pointed out plants of interest such as *Eryngium yuccifolium* (Rattlesnake Master) and *Lespedeza capitata* (Round Headed Bush Clover).

Besides identification, Jack described management techniques he has tried and which ones succeeded.

A favorite for me is the use of rubber mats to control *Iris pseudacorus*, an invasive yellow iris from Asia. The plants were cut near the ground and rubber covers left on them for seven to nine months. Without the use of harmful chemicals or the exhausting task of digging out the rhizomes, the plants along the boardwalk were killed and the area was beginning to fill with wetland native plants.



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December 9 Walk at Blandy Farm (continued)

Another spot that got a lot of attention was a two-year old bed along a sunny stone wall. A great variety of sun-loving natives were grown from seed and plants by the Wednesday morning Native Plant Trail volunteers. Many of these plants had already flowered in this short span of time, though only a few blooms remained by December. The seed heads and vegetation, such as *Sorghastrum nutans* (Indian Grass) still held interest. The *Solidago rigida* (Stiff Goldenrod) caught my eye.

We thank Blandy for the trail and their dedication to native plants and Jack for his expertise as our host.



Sorghastrum nutans (Indian Grass)

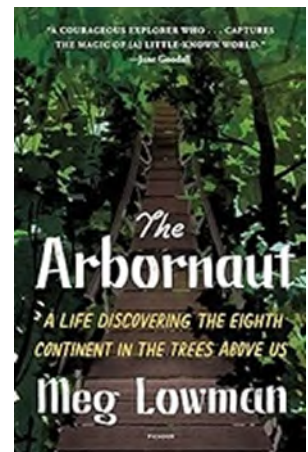


Solidago rigida (Stiff Goldenrod)

Book Review by Sally Anderson

The Arbornaut: A Life Discovering the Eighth Continent in the Trees Above Us
by Meg Lowman

This is an account of a scientist who seemed destined to study trees and the natural world from an early age. She became a pioneer of canopy research, first in tropical forests and later in many forests around the world. Devising climbing techniques and developing canopy walkways, she has introduced people of all ages and abilities to treetops. Measurements and observations from the windy and sunny canopy were very different from those in the shady understory, revising life histories and revealing species new to science. She also recounts the challenges of women in science in the 20th century. As a side note, her career was launched at age 12 at the Burgundy Wildlife Camp, a summer school run by John and Lee Trott, former board members of the VNPS Piedmont Chapter.





Where Do I Start with Poop? by Laurie Denker MacNaughton; photos by Mary Keith Ruffner

I love poop. Well, not *poop*. I love the creatures who left the poop, and I love the thrill of knowing a wild animal passed this way just hours ago. I also love seeing what those wild animals have been hunting, eating, and—inadvertently—planting.

The Piedmont Chapter had a walk December 9 at Cool Spring Campus looking for seeds and poop.

Because much of plant matter is indigestible, chunks of what an animal eats is excreted in poop. If the animal has eaten seeds, the seedcoats often have been scored during chewing, or scarified in the gut. Both processes weaken the seedcoat so the plant embryo can emerge. Not only is the seed ready to germinate once the appropriate season arrives, but it has been deposited with a readymade source of fertilizer.

Here are some places I start the identification process:

- **Where am I?** If I am hiking in the Blue Ridge, I am not likely to see Seal poop. If I am visiting the Chesapeake, I am probably not seeing Pine Marten poop.
- **What season is it?** Animal traffic changes with the seasons, as will the contents of the poop.
- **What size is the poop?** To create scale, I like to carry pennies with me for use in photos.
- **What shape is the poop?** Poop shape is surprisingly characteristic.
- **What is the composition of the poop?** If you find poop containing large amounts of fur, it is poop left by a predator, not by a deer, for example.



Lisa Klepp looking
for seeds in poop



Using a phone to ID poop

When you are trying to identify your finds, there are many good field guides. Phone apps are also getting quite accurate. Incidentally, some of my “best” poop finds were first discovered by my dog, and I have started paying close attention to what he finds fascinating.

By way of quick note: animal poop is germey and can transmit disease. Even if you are as much a fan as I am, do not *ever* touch animal poop with bare hands.

As you walk along your favorite paths, keep an eye out for the intriguing and instructive world of poop. And, if you know someone who calls animal control every time they find poop in their yard, please remind them of the delicately balanced lifecycle of plant germination, and the interactions between native plants and animals.



Registration notices for walks will be sent out three weeks before the event.

Tuesday	Mar 5	2-4pm	Piedmont Chapter Business Meeting
Clarke County. Blandy Experimental Farm Library, 400 Blandy Lane, Boyce. All Chapter members are welcome to join the Chapter Board at these Meetings.			
Saturday	Mar 9	1pm	Riverside Preserve Walk
Fauquier County. Walk through the early spring woodlands along the Rappahannock near Marshall.			
Sunday	Mar 30	1pm	G. Richard Thompson WMA Invasive Removal
Fauquier County. We will look for early signs of spring while we pull Garlic Mustard, led by Sally Anderson. Bring gloves and drinking water.			
Tuesday	Apr 2	2-4pm	Piedmont Chapter Business Meeting
Clarke County. Blandy Experimental Farm Library, 400 Blandy Lane, Boyce. All Chapter members are welcome to join the Chapter Board at these Meetings.			
Saturday	Apr 6	10am	Royal Shenandoah Greenway Walk
Warren County. Master Naturalist Richard Stromberg will lead a walk to see Bluebells and other spring flowers along the Shenandoah River in Front Royal.			
Friday	Apr 12	1pm	Weston WMA Walk
Loudoun County. Discover Virginia Bluebells and other wildflowers blooming along Turkey Run near Casanova.			
Sunday	Apr 14	10am-noon	Calmes Neck Bluebell Walk
Clarke County. VNPS members and Calmes Neck residents only. See early spring wildflowers along the Shenandoah River. Walk is moderate and a walking stick is recommended. Bring lunch, water, and insect repellent.			
Friday	Apr 26	5:30pm	G. Richard Thompson WMA Trillium Walk
Fauquier County. Master Naturalist Sally Anderson will lead this evening walk to see millions of Trilliums and other spring flowers.			
Tuesday	May 7	2-4pm	Piedmont Chapter Business Meeting
Clarke County. Sky Meadows Picnic Area. All Chapter members are welcome to join the Chapter Board at these Meetings.			
Saturday & Sunday May 11 & 12			9am-4:30pm
State Arboretum Garden Fair			
Clarke County. Several native plant vendors and lots of information available. Another opportunity to help us by sitting at a Piedmont Chapter booth (includes free admission), contact piedmontvnps@gmail.com . See https://blandy.virginia.edu/garden-fair for more information.			
Saturday & Sunday May 11 & 12			Wildflower Weekend at Shenandoah National Park
Appreciate the diversity of wildflowers growing in the Blue Ridge. More than 1,300 species of plants thrive in Shenandoah National Park, a haven for native woodland wildflowers. Information at https://www.nps.gov/shen/planyourvisit/wildflower_weekend.htm .			
Tuesday	Jun 4	2-4pm	Piedmont Chapter Business Meeting
Clarke County. Blandy Experimental Farm Library, 400 Blandy Lane, Boyce. All Chapter members are welcome to join the Chapter Board at these Meetings.			
Saturday	June 8	1pm	Elizabeth Furnace Walk
Shenandoah County. Walk the Pig Iron Trail to see how iron was smelted 200 years ago while seeing masses of Mountain Laurel blooming.			



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Curlyheads (Clematis ochroleuca)

Hair on Plants part 3 (continued from the Fall and Winter, 2023, issues of *The Leaflet*)

by Richard Stromberg

In addition to the terms botanists use to describe a hairy surface (listed in the Fall 2023 issue) and individual hairs (Winter 2023), they use the following terms to describe **tufted hairs** (hairs arranged in a dense cluster):

Barbate—Bearded or tufted with long, stiff hairs

Barbellate—With short, stiff hairs or barbs

Barbellulate—With very tiny short, stiff hairs or barbs

Bearded—Bearing one or more tufts of long hairs

Caespitose—Growing in dense tufts

Coma—A tuft of hairs, especially at the tip of a seed

Comose—Having a tuft of hairs; with a coma

Crinite—With tufts of long, soft hairs

Cristate—With a terminal tuft or crest

Cristulate—With a small terminal tuft or crest

Floccose—Having loose, soft, tangled, wool-like tufts of hair

Flocculent & Flocculose—Having very fine loose, soft, tangled, wool-like tufts of hair

Floccus—A tuft of wooly, tangled hairs

Glossypine—Flocculent; cottony

Penicil—A brush-like tuft of short hairs

Penicillate—With a tuft of short hairs at the end, like a brush