

VNPS Piedmont Chapter WILDFLOWER of the WEEK

WILDFLOWER #14 answer: AMERICAN MOUNTAIN-ASH (*Sorbus americana*)

The name *Sorbus* comes from an Indo-European word for red-brown, probably referring to the fruits. *Sorbus americana* was named by the 18th century botanist Humphrey Marshall, father of American dendrology, who wrote the first book on North American trees and shrubs.

In Virginia, mountain-ash is a relict of northern species that flourished here in the last glacial period, twelve thousand years ago. As the climate warmed, the tree migrated upslope by seed distribution. Now it clings to the colder mountain heights.

Despite the name, mountain-ash is not an ash. The compound leaves are alternate, and the leaflets are toothed. (Ash leaves are opposite and the leaflets smooth-edged.) Our mountain-ash is a cousin of the Eurasian rowan tree (*Sorbus acuparia*). Norse tales say that the first woman was made from rowan. British folklore promises that rowan will save you from witchcraft.

Our mountain-ash has a different enchantment. In the Fall, its foliage glows purple-red, and its vivid fruit offers a feast for small mammals and a host of birds, such as ruffed grouse, red-headed woodpeckers, thrushes, waxwings, orioles, and jays. Up north, moose, fishers, martens, and snowshoe hares browse on the foliage, red twigs, and bark.

WILDFLOWER #15

Clues: This fragrant member of the Onograceae family shines best at sunset. Notice the two-lobed petals and the stigma's big yellow X.

