

POTOWMACK NEWS

Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

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Black Walnut

By Margaret Chatham



BLACK WALNUT, *JUGLANS NIGRA*. ALL PHOTOS IN THIS ISSUE BY MARGARET CHATHAM

A squirrel buried a Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*) in your yard but never returned to dig it up and eat it. Now it's sprouting. What should you do about it? The answer depends a great deal on exactly where that squirrel put it. Black Walnuts become large trees, and if they have a neighbor to trade pollen with on the wind (as a squirrel-planted walnut generally does), they will eventually be dropping car-denting nuts from 50 or more feet in the air. On the other hand, if you have the space and sun, and all goes well, you could be harvesting those pricey nuts in 10 years.

Like the hickories David Haskell describes in his chapter on "Xylem" in his book *The Forest Unseen*, Black Walnuts leaf out late in the spring, grow quickly during the summer, and drop their leaves early in the fall. Their leaves are large, up to 30 inches long, divided into 9-23 leaflets. They are considered to have an odd number of leaflets, even though the terminal leaflet is often missing. Each leaflet is lance-shaped with a pointed tip, serrate edges, and a rounded base, the two sides of which may be offset. They have a woody-fruity fragrance, quite unlike the burnt-peanut smell of Tree-of-Heaven, **Ailanthus altissima*, with which the long compound leaves might

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Upcoming

Fall Colors Walk at Dyke Marsh

Saturday, Oct 30, 2-5 pm

Join Alan Ford & Margaret Chatham in a leisurely exploration of what's bright along the Haul Road at Dyke Marsh. Limit 20; register by emailing info@fodm.org with "Fall Colors Walk" in the subject line. Meet at Haul Road entrance.

Potowmack Chapter Annual Meeting

Sunday, Nov 14, 1:30 pm

1:30 pm: Social Time
 2:00 pm: Annual Business Meeting: election of officers, discussion & vote on 2022 budget
 2:30 pm: Program by Max Ferlauto: "My Year of Playing with Litter: exploring the Effects of Leaf Litter Removal on Insect Communities"

Max Ferlauto, formerly a VNPS-sponsored intern at both Green Spring Gardens & Huntley Meadows Parks, now a 3rd year PhD student in UM's Entomology Dept., lets us in on preliminary results of his dissertation research.

Zoom Meeting. See <https://vnps.org/potowmack/events/> for registration connection closer to the date

Charles Smith: The Healing Power of Nature

Thursday, Jan 13, 7:30 pm

Tentatively planned for in-person in the Horticulture Center at Green Spring Gardens Park.

All events are free and open to the public. Walks require preregistration. For email notices of upcoming events, subscribe to <https://vnps.groups.io/g/potowmack>. Or send a blank email to potowmack+subscribe@vnps.groups.io

Manage your VNPS Membership Online

1. Go to <https://vnps.org/myaccount>
2. Enter your VNPS member username. This is usually your email address.
3. If you don't know or have forgotten your password, click on "Forgot Password?"
4. Once logged in, you can manage your account and preferences by clicking on "What would you like to do?" in the upper right-hand corner.
5. Select "Update My Profile Information."
6. To request a paper newsletter, at the bottom of your Profile Information, set "Electronic Distribution" to "No."
7. Update any other profile information, then click "Submit."

So Many Websites, So Little Time...

There's still time to plant this fall! Woody plants especially like to be in the ground over the winter to get a good start in the spring.

Winter is a good time to take a step back and plan for the future of your yard. What plant community belongs there? You may want to spend some time with Glenn Tobin's website on the Natural Ecological Communities of Northern Virginia (see novanaturalcommunity.com) or Earth Sangha's Native Plant Compendium (see earthsangha.org) to help you figure it out. Not that there is only one right answer. Then take another look at the [Plant Northern Virginia Natives Guide](#) (see plantnovanatives.org) or the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's [Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat and Conservation Landscaping](#) (see fws.gov). The PNN guide is in the process of revision, and FWS says its guide was last updated in 2020: did they make any changes that are important to you?

Or maybe you'd rather just visit special places via the web or plan a visit in person. Some ideas and enticements can be found through the Old Growth Forest Network (see oldgrowthforest.net), where all the listed forests are open to the public. Then there are all those lovely Virginia Natural Area Preserves (see <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/natural-area-preserves/>). You can download a guide to Nature Conservancy Properties that are open to the public at <https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/virginia/stories-in-virginia/va-preserve-guidelines/>. Or how about Virginia's State Parks? See <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/> and click on "find a park."

Have I left out your favorite native plant website? Flora of Virginia app — and the guides to using it at vnps.org? Visiting or revisiting past talks for VNPS now archived there? Virginia Master Naturalists "High Five from Nature" series? Capitalnaturalist.blogspot.com? Plenty of occupation for long, cold nights and wintry days.



SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO: WITCHHAZEL (HAMAMELIS VIRGINIANA) AS SEEN ON 12/31/2014

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Submissions to *Potowmack News* may be sent to The Editor at vnps.pot@gmail.com

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Fall Grasses

Timing is critical in identifying grasses. Here are some that show up later in the season, all photos taken on 9/19/21 at Irvine Nature Center, MD. Answers on page 6.

- 1 *Andropogon gerardii*, Big Bluestem
- 2 **Arthraxon hispidus*, Small Carpetgrass
- 3 *Elymus glaberrimus*, Southern Wild Rye
- 4 *Panicum capillare*, Witchgrass
- 5 *Scirpus cyperinus*, Woolgrass
- 6 **Setaria faberi*, Nodding Bristlegrass
- 7 **Setaria pumila*, Yellow Foxtail
- 8 *Sorghastrum nutans*, Indian Grass
- 9 **Sorghum halepense*, Johnson Grass



BLACK WALNUTS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

be confused. Other distinguishing features are the smooth edges and flat base of *Ailanthus* leaflets, often with a notch like a smaller version of Christmas fern's "boot."

Black Walnut bark is dark and furrowed. Its dark wood is famously used for fine furniture and gun stocks.

The nutmeat of the Black Walnut hides inside a hard, corrugated shell inside a thick round husk that starts out yellowy-green, but eventually turns black and rots away. The husk has long been used as a yellow-brown fabric dye. Nancy Ross Hugo, in her book *Seeing Trees*, reports that the nuts themselves are supposed to taste better if the husks are removed while still green (daring them to stain your fingers) and then the nuts are allowed to dry for at least a couple of weeks before cracking.

On the downside, everybody knows that Black Walnut trees are not good for gardens. They produce chemicals called juglones from roots, leaves, and especially nut husks that can poison other plants. The chemical remains in the soil long after the source is gone. While it is true that tomatoes won't grow under walnuts, plenty of our native plants are perfectly happy there, from Spring Beauties (*Claytonia virginica*), Jack-in-the-Pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*) and Virginia Bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*), native grasses like Bottlebrush (*Elymus hystrix*), River Oats (*Chasmanthium latifolium*), and Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) to Cardinal Flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), Mistflower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*), White Wood Aster (*Eurybia divaricata*), and Goldenrods (*Solidago spp.*) One list of Black Walnut-compatible plants may be found at <https://nativeplantherald.prairienursery.com/2016/06/planting-under-black-walnut-trees/>.

So, that squirrel-planted Black Walnut: does it stay and grow, or do you nip it in the bud? With its deep taproot, moving it to a better spot is not an easy option. A couple of other considerations: deer don't usually bother Black Walnuts, and they may host 137 different species of moth and butterfly caterpillars, including Hickory Horned Devils and Luna, Polyphemus, and Cecropia Moths. A gardener's life is full of such decisions.



Above, Black Walnut tree at Green Spring Gardens Park in August; below, some of the plants growing happily beneath it: Cardinal Flower, White Wood Aster, and some unidentified evergreen (Asian) azaleas and hellebores.



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Word of the Month: Abscission



The breaking or falling away of a leaf or other plant part due to the breakdown of connecting cells. This is the process involved in deciduous trees' autumnal leaf fall.

BLACK WALNUT (JUGLANS NIGRA) LEAF SCARS LEFT AFTER ABSCISSION. PHOTOS BY MARGARET CHATHAM.

Answers to quiz on page 4: 1-C; 2-I; 3-B; 4-H; 5-D not a grass at all, but does count as a graminoid; 6-A; 7-F; 8-G; 9-E.