

LATE SUMMER

# POTOWMACK NEWS

*Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society*

VOLUME 40, No. 4, SEPT-OCT, 2022

## *Nyssa sylvatica* – the water nymph of the forest

By Jim McGlone, Virginia Department of Forestry



BLACK GUM (NYSSA SYLVATICA) FALL COLOR. ALL PHOTOS IN THIS ARTICLE BY JIM MCGLONE.

I am often asked what my favorite tree is. I know many trees and they all have their attractions for me, but I think the Black Gum, *Nyssa sylvatica*, is my favorite native tree.

My first encounter with a Black Gum was in my boyhood back yard. The tree was easily over three feet in diameter and stood at the bottom of a small drainage. It had a large wound at the base that my dad patched with concrete, which I now know was a bad idea. It first caught my attention when it fell. We were planning a cook out and were delayed by a summer afternoon storm. I was standing at the back door waiting for the storm to pass and watched as the tree started to lean, then gather momentum and finally crash to the ground with an earth-shaking thud.

One of the first things I learned about this tree is that it does not split. I tried, and spent more time getting the axe head out of the wood than driving it in. I have since learned this quality makes it a favorite of bowl turners and useful for tough applications like the heads of mauls and wheel hubs.

The more I learned about this tree the more I grew to like it. It is found in all but the driest forests of the eastern US, from Lake Okeechobee to southern Maine and west to the prairies and plains, but it is never the dominant species. It is a survivor, growing suppressed in the shade of other trees for 200 years or more, waiting for the opportunity to reach the top of the forest canopy. Unlike other

## Upcoming

**Sara Tangren:**

### Invader Detective

Thursday, Sept 8, 7:00-8:30 pm

Coordinator at National Capital PRISM speaks on citizen science: using iNaturalist to save the world.

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

**Maraea Harris:**

### The What, When, & How of Pruning Native Shrubs & Small Trees

Thursday, Oct 13, 7:30-9 pm

Maraea Harris, VCE Master Gardener for 8 years, certified VNLA horticulturalist and ISA certified arborist, owns Metro Gardenworks and spends her days pruning and maintaining sustainable landscapes in the Northern Virginia area.

Submit your pruning questions and photos for the speaker by Oct 3 to [zette71@vt.edu](mailto:zette71@vt.edu)

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

### Potowmack Chapter Annual Meeting in person at Green Spring Gardens' Horticulture Center

Sunday, Nov 13, 1:30 pm

1:30 pm: Social Time

2:00 pm: Annual Business Meeting: election of officers, discussion & vote on 2023 budget

2:30 pm: Program by **Jim McGlone**: "Significant Trees of the Eastern Forest" — Have you ever wondered why trees grow where they do and not other places? In this talk, Jim will sketch out the answer to this question and highlight it with significant trees of each space. Along the way he will point out not only their importance in the forest, but their potential in your home landscape.

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](mailto:potowmack+subscribe@vnps.groups.io)

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## 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."

## Changes on the Chapter Board of Directors

Potowmack Chapter Secretary Patrick Siren resigned in July, but we have a volunteer to fill that vacancy at the next Board meeting on Sept 1: Jen Brown, a long time member of VNPS and recently retired, who is looking forward to using some of her new found spare time by volunteering with Potowmack Chapter. A native of Fairfax County, she also volunteers with Shenandoah National Park's invasive plant management program. She enjoys hiking in Fairfax County's many natural areas and keeping a field sketch book.

Suzette Risacher, a new member of our chapter, introduced herself to the board and offered her assistance as a volunteer. Suzette is a native Arlingtonian, mother of 3, and has a Wildlife Certified Yard that her neighbors have learned to love. She graduated from Virginia Tech in May of 2022 with a Masters in Natural Resources and is excited to lend her expertise to the chapter in any and every way that she can. *Voila!* our new Programs Chair.

## Potowmack Chapter Budgets: 2022 & 2023

Income is up at our native plant sales, and expenses are down with fewer room rentals for meetings this year, so the 2022 budget has been revised. You can look at it & get a sneak peek at the 2023 budget that tries to find good use for our extra cash on our website at <https://vnps.org/potowmack/download/21316/> or from the Chapter page, click on About, then Board of Directors, then Budget. — They will also be printed in the next newsletter, in preparation for our annual meeting on Nov 13.

## Fall Native Plant Sales

VNPS-Potowmack will sell its native plants from our propagation beds behind the new fence behind the Horticulture Center at Green Spring Gardens Park three more times this year: First Wednesday sales Sept 7 & Oct 5 from 10 till 1 or so and at the big bash: Green Spring's Family Fall Festival and Plant Sale, Saturday, Sept 17, from 9 am till 3 pm. Yes, Sept 17 is also the day of the VNPS State Annual Meeting, leaving some of us lamenting our inability to be two places at once. For the First Wednesday sales, we can only take cash or check; the day of the Family Fall Festival, we can take credit cards as well — and there will be others selling plants at Green spring that day, some of them native.

The Northern Alexandria Native Plant Sale will be Saturday, Sept 24 from 9 am till 2 pm in the parking lot of the Church of St. Clement, 1701 N Quaker Lane, Alexandria. This sale brings in a number of different regional native plant growers with different specialties, so you can find a range of plants from sedges and ferns to orchids, wildflowers and trees.

Earth Sangha has no big sale day planned, but you can still look for a Sunday appointment time to wander around their nursery, or order plants for pick-up at [earthsangha.org](http://earthsangha.org).

And that's not all: see [plantnovanatives.org](http://plantnovanatives.org) for more sales and native plant nurseries.

## Potowmack Chapter Board Officers

### President

Alan Ford 703-732-5291

### Vice President

Mark Murphy

### Secretary

Vacant

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Scott Knudsen

### Committee Chairs

#### Botany

Nelson DeBarros

#### Conservation

Rod Simmons

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David Gorsline

#### Newsletter

Margaret Chatham

#### Programs

Suzette Risacher

#### Propagation/Plant Sales

Laura Beaty

#### Site Registry

Rod Simmons

#### Technology

Mark Murphy

#### Members-at-Large

Judy Dority

Margaret Fisher

Donna Murphy

Marty Nielson

#### Vacant:

#### Education

#### Publications

#### Publicity

#### Social Media

#### Walks

Submissions to *Potowmack News* may be sent to The Editor at [vnps.pot@gmail.com](mailto:vnps.pot@gmail.com)

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NYSSA SYLVATICA CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1  
shade-tolerant trees, it is also fire tolerant.

The wood of Black Gum has interlocked grain, which is why it doesn't split, but this also gives it a tendency to warp when cut into boards. Because of this it was usually left to stand in forests and often used as "witness" trees by surveyors. Today it is sometimes used for veneer.

Its highest value is as a wildlife plant and ornamental. While it is not highly rated for caterpillar production, the dark purple fruit is one of the earliest to ripen, highly nutritious and an important food source for migratory birds. The tree is somewhat susceptible to heart rot, so it provides cavities for nesting mammals and birds, as well as wild honeybees.

One of the recent things I learned related to the tree is that native bee people are apparently not Van Morrison fans. They were surprised to find that *Nyssa* was used by native bees as a pollen and nectar source. While *Nyssa ogeche* gives us Tupelo Honey, a highly prized variety and featured in Van's 1971 hit song and album, all *Nyssa* produce high quality honey. The small greenish white flowers of Black Gum are a resource to our small generalist native bees. And speaking of flowers, the US Forest Service lists Black Gum as polygamo-dioecious, meaning it has male and female trees that also have complete flowers. It is one of the first trees to change color in the fall and produces a bright red color. This may be to attract birds to its early ripening fruit.



NYSSA SYLVATICA GLOSSY LEAVES AND FRUIT.

## On-line Resources

Wonderful websites full of encouragement for the native plant lover continue to propagate! A couple of examples:

Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia have expanded their page on sustainable gardening, useful whether you have sun or shade, wet or dry conditions, are starting from scratch or tweaking around the edges. See <https://mgnv.org/resources/sustainable-gardening/>

If you haven't yet visited Earth Sangha's Native Plant Compendium, see <https://www.earthsangha.org/compendium>

## (One of my) Favorite Wildflowers (What are yours?)

### *Rudbeckia fulgida* — Orange Coneflower

Louis Nichols



RUDBECKIA FULGIDA PHOTO BY LOUIS NCHOLS.

*Rudbeckia fulgida*, a native perennial Black-eyed Susan, is a "must-have" in my native plant garden. *R. fulgida* blooms from mid-to-late July to first frost in northern Virginia, continuing to bloom after *Rudbeckia triloba* and *Rudbeckia hirta* finish blooming. *R. fulgida* has a low compact growth habit until it blooms. When blooming, it sends up multiple bloom stalks 2-3 feet high. However, it is important to note that it does not flop over when blooming. Usually each mature plant will have 10-20 flowers per plant at any one time. The flowers are yellow with dark-brown centers, smaller but more numerous than those of *R. hirta*.

As a native species, *R. fulgida* will draw native pollinators such as native bees and butterflies. It is a larval host plant for the Silvery Checkerspot butterfly. It seeds readily, but not really to the point of crowding out other species in most cases. Early in the fall its seed heads draw goldfinches. *R. fulgida* will seed into dead leaves or light mulch: it does not need bare ground to propagate from seed.

When planting *R. fulgida*, keep in mind that the individual plants tend to form clumps 8-12 inches in diameter over time. So it would be a good idea to give the individual plants some space. *R. fulgida* prefers partial shade, but not deep shade. I planted my original plants in full sunlight and they seeded themselves back into the partial shade they prefer.

*R. fulgida* pairs well in my garden with White Wood Aster (*Eurybia divaricata*) and Mistflowers (*Conoclinium coelestinum*). Garden Phlox (*Phlox paniculata*) also works well paired with *R. fulgida*.

## VNPS-Sponsored Interns for 2022

Hi! My name is Sophia Ferens, and I had the pleasure of being the 2022 Virginia Native Plant Society (VNPS) intern at Huntley Meadows Park (HMP). I'm a rising senior at the University of Mary Washington, majoring in Environmental Science and minoring in Economics. As someone who was born and raised in Fairfax, being able to find an internship so close to home that encompassed both my degree and interests, and provided the opportunity to experience so many new and exciting things was a dream come true.



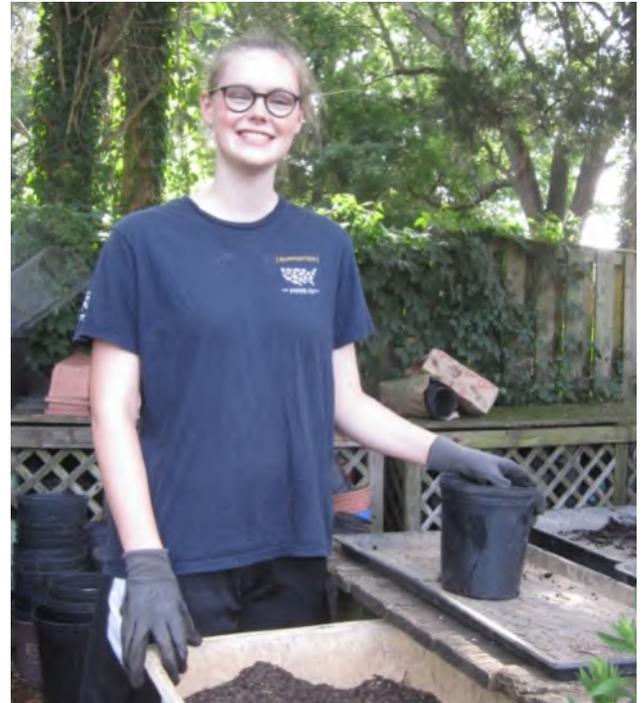
**SOPHIA FERENS WITH A SURVEYED TURTLE**

My project for the summer was creating an identification guide to plants found in the main wetland, which involved a couple of long walks with some of the very talented naturalists at the park (special shout out to Judy Dority and Karla Jamir for taking the time to help me identify wetland plants) and some long research days. Before my time at HMP park I did not have much knowledge of different plant species, and while the scientific names still trip me up sometimes, I can say that one of the most valuable things I have taken from my time here is the ability to identify native and invasive plant species. Over the course of my internship I was able to participate in a multitude of exciting projects, one of which was the collection and identification of macroinvertebrates for a water quality analysis of the main wetland. Another highlight was assisting in a turtle survey with the Natural Resource Management intern to get a better idea of the types of turtles we have here in the park. Along with those projects, I also tried my hand at other aspects of natural resource management; the removal of invasives using manual methods and herbicide, raising and lowering the wetland water levels to encourage plant growth,

maintaining park trails, and installing enclosures to support native plant growth, among other things.

The expertise and positive environment created by HMP staff and many volunteers taught me a variety of new skills and knowledge over the course of the summer. The enthusiasm and appreciation for wildlife and conservation displayed by everyone at HMP is inspiring and has emphasized all the reasons why I want to continue working in conservation and resource management post-graduation.

I cannot thank the Potowmack chapter of the VNPS enough for providing me with this experience; I now feel prepared for my next stages in life. I want to thank all members of the HMP staff and interns for making this a summer to remember, but I especially thank Matt Collins, the Natural Resource Management intern, who didn't laugh at me too much every time I fell into the wetland, and Chris King, the HMP Resource Manager, for his support and sharing his knowledge with me.



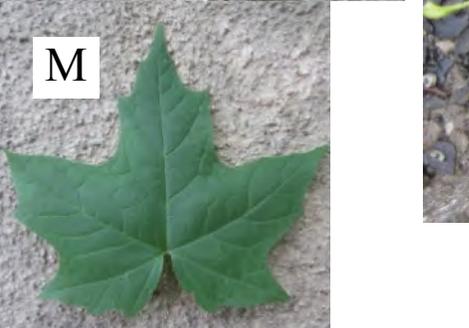
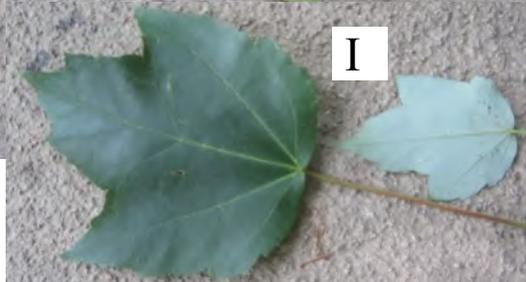
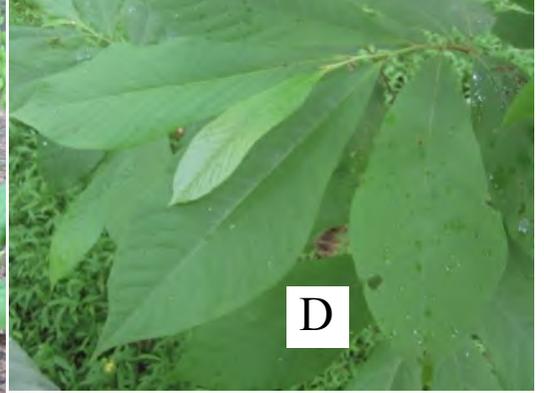
**KATHLEEN MCNERNEY AT THE VNPS POTTING TABLE**

During my time at Green Spring Gardens, I worked all over the property and became familiar with a variety of different gardens and how to care for them. I learned how to identify a number of native and invasive plants, but mostly I learned how much I have still to learn. I discovered that there's no clear distinction between a "good plant" and a "bad plant" - there are natives that are weedy and invasives that don't cause any harm. I'd spend time tearing out a certain species in one garden only to carefully weed around it in another garden. I loved being told about which plants attract which animals and then getting to see it play out in real life. I learned that yellow jackets live underground and that they do not like being disturbed and will chase you. Overall, I learned about all the coordination, cooperation, and long, labor-intensive hours it takes to keep a place as beautiful as Green Springs running. My favorite part of this internship was getting to work with passionate, like-minded people. The collective knowledge of Green Spring Gardens is astounding, and everyone I met was all too happy to share that knowledge.

### Simple Leaves

"Simple" simply means that a leaf is not compound, not made up of smaller leaflets. "Simple" leaves can be very plain or quite ornate. How many of these do you recognize? Answers on page 6. Photos by Margaret Chatham.

- 1 *Acer rubrum* (Red Maple)
- 2 *Acer saccharinum* (Silver Maple)
- 3 *Acer saccharum* (Sugar Maple)
- 4 *Asimina triloba* (Pawpaw)
- 5 *Cornus florida* (Flowering Dogwood)
- 6 *Lindera benzoin* (Spicebush)
- 7 *Liquidambar styraciflua* (Sweetgum)
- 8 *Liriodendron tulipifera* (Tulip Tree)
- 9 *Magnolia macrophylla* (Bigleaf Magnolia)
- 10 *Nyssa sylvatica* (Black Gum, Sour Gum or Tupelo)
- 11 *Platanus occidentalis* (Sycamore)
- 12 *Prunus serotina* (Black Cherry)
- 13 *Quercus palustris* (Pin Oak)
- 14 *Tilia americana* (American Basswood)



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P.O. Box 5311, Arlington, VA 22205



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## Word of the Month: Entire

*Flora of Virginia's* definition: Of a leaf, having an unbroken margin, lacking teeth or serrations.



**COMPARE THE ENTIRE LEAF EDGE OF THE REDBUD (*CERCIS CANADENSIS*) ON THE LEFT TO THE TOOTHED LEAF EDGE OF THE ARROWWOOD (*VIBURNUM DENTATUM*) BELOW. THESE ARE TWO MORE EXAMPLES OF SIMPLE LEAVES. PHOTOS BY MARGARET CHATHAM.**

