

# POTOWMACK NEWS

*Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society*

VOLUME 42, NO. 2, MAR-MAY, 2024

## Red Maple

*Acer rubrum*

By Margaret Chatham



RED MAPLE, ACER RUBRUM, SHOWING RED SAMARAS BEFORE IT LEAFS OUT, 3/30/23. ALL PHOTOS IN THIS NEWSLETTER BY MARGARET CHATHAM.

Now is a good time to scan your neighborhood or favorite park for Red Maples (*Acer rubrum*). They're the ones already flushed with red: early red flowers seamlessly morphing into red wings of seeds, all before the possibly initially red leaves spread out. Red maples are medium to large trees, attaining a height of 60 to 90 feet. Young trees and the upper branches of older trees have smooth, gray bark, which eventually breaks up into flat-topped, vertical ridges. Maples are the first element of the "MAD Horse" mnemonic for opposite-branching trees: Maple, Ash, Dogwood, Horse chestnut. Red Maple leaves are palmately veined, with three main veins and sometimes two small extras on the sides, with a toothed edge. Their shape can be quite variable, as can their fall color. They may turn red, or orange, or yellow, or all colors may be mixed on a single leaf. Most maples with reddish summer foliage are cultivars of Japanese (*Acer palmatum*) or Norway Maples (*Acer platanoides*.)

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## Upcoming

### **Nelson DeBarros: Native Plants of Freshwater Tidal Communities**

Sunday, March 3, 3-4:30 pm

Huntley Meadows Visitor Center

Co-sponsored by Friends of Dyke Marsh

### **Potowmack Chapter Quarterly Get-Together**

Sunday, March 17, 12 noon-2:30 pm

Horticulture Center, Green Spring Gardens

New event! To offset having so many of our programs by Zoom, we are starting quarterly events to see each other in person, indoors for sure, outdoors if the weather cooperates. This time, we'll visit (or talk about) our propagation beds.

### **Spring Ephemerals at Turkey Run Walks led by Margaret Chatham**

Friday, Mar 22, 10 am- noon or 1-3 pm

A short but steep walk down to the river and back, which puts many lovely flowers at eye level. Come see what's blooming. Space limited.

### **Spring at Fraser Preserve Walk led by Margaret Chatham**

Friday, Apr 5, 10 am-1 pm

A longer and less steep walk maybe not reaching the river and back. What a difference the few miles upstream from Turkey Run makes! Space limited

### **Bert Harris:**

#### **Clifton Institute Grassland Restoration Project**

Thursday, Apr. 11, 7:00 pm

Zoom: watch for registration announcement

### **Chris Ludwig:**

#### **Native Lawn Alternatives**

Thursday, May 9, 7:00 pm

Zoom: watch for registration announcement

All events are free and open to the public.

Walks require preregistration. To receive

email notices about upcoming events,

subscribe to our mailing list at [https://](https://vnps.groups.io/g/potowmack)

[vnps.groups.io/g/potowmack](https://vnps.groups.io/g/potowmack) You can also

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## Manage your VNPS Membership Online

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Subscribe to our Potowmack Chapter email discussion group to receive and send email about native plants in our area including questions, answers, and discussions. You don't have to be a VNPS member and there are no ads. Over 350 members strong! Just send a blank email to [potowmack+subscribe@vnps.groups.io](mailto:potowmack+subscribe@vnps.groups.io). Visit <https://vnps.groups.io/g/potowmack> to look around.



Check out the Potowmack Chapter Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/vnpspot>.

## VNPS Annual Workshop

### Protecting Plants in Virginia, Region by Region

Save the dates: Thursdays March 21 and 28, 6:30-9:00 pm by Zoom  
Speakers: **Shannon Alexander**, Coastal Region Steward, Virginia DCR Natural Heritage Program

**Kim Biasioli**, Land conservationist, Piedmont Environmental Council

**Nelson DeBarros**, Plant Ecologist, Fairfax County

**Laura Young**, Southwest Region Steward, Virginia DCR Natural Heritage Program

Register at <https://vnps.org/events/vnps-2024-annual-workshop-zoom/>

## Spring Native Plant Sales Coming

A very incomplete list:

- "Mid-March" Earth Sangha Plant Nursery will open for sales at 6100 Cloud Dr, Springfield, Sundays, Mondays, and Wednesdays, 9-1
- Sat, March 23 National Arboretum 8 am- 1 pm?? "details to come" per Friends of the National Arboretum
- Wed, April 3, 10-1 first Wednesday VNPS Plant Sale in the propagation beds at Green Spring Gardens Park (Also May 1, June 5, July 3, Aug 7, Sept 4 and Oct 2.)
- Sat, Apr 27. 9 am-2 pm Northern Alexandria Native Plant Sale in the parking lot of the Church of St. Clement, 1701 N Quaker Lane, Alex.
- Sat, May 18, 9 am-3 pm Green Spring Garden Day Sales by VNPS and others, some native

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Submissions to *Potowmack News* may be sent to The Editor at

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<http://www.vnps.org/potowmack>

# Foragers' Forest at GMU

by Margaret Chatham



In 2023, Sarah Roth and a small team at George Mason University designed and installed a native food forest. This project, called the Foragers' Forest "aims to create a natural space at George Mason University's largest campus in Fairfax, VA, to provide our students and community with free and accessible native foods, wildlife habitat, climate benefits, and restored ecosystem services," says her faculty advisor, Dr. Dann Sklarew at <https://www.changex.org/us/project/foragers-forest>. Sarah Roth is a Virginia Master Naturalist (ARMN Chapter), a former Earth Sangha intern, and a graduate student at George Mason.

This project is a major collaborative effort. The team was awarded three grants, including one from the AWS InCommunities Northern Virginia Sustainability Fund. The project draws on the Miyawaki method of reforestation, support from several GMU departments, and the local plant knowledge of Earth Sangha and others.

To this end, there are now over 1,500 native trees, shrubs, forbs and grasses of 54 species, densely planted in two groves on the George Mason Fairfax campus, totaling 5,200 sq.ft. between Patriot Circle, Aquia Creek Lane, and Mason Pond Drive, within the resource protection area of a restored stream on land formerly occupied by dormitories.

About half the species planted are plants people can use for food or medicine, such as Oaks (*Quercus spp.*), Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*), Red Hickory (*Carya ovalis*), Blackhaw (*Viburnum prunifolium*), American Hazelnut (*Corylus americana*), Serviceberries (*Amelanchier spp.*), Persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*), Winged Sumac (*Rhus copallinum*), Swamp Rose (*Rosa palustris*), and Strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*). Others, including many of the forbs and grasses, were chosen to amend and build the soil. Some were chosen as wildlife keystone species, such as Black

Cherry (*Prunus serotina*), Black Chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*), and several species of Goldenrods (*Solidago spp.*) and Asters (*Symphyotrichum spp.*) And then there are the Redbuds (*Cercis canadensis*) that, as Matt Bright explained, do all of the above: fixing nitrogen, bearing edible flowers and pods, and being a favorite of leaf-cutter bees. The Redbuds tend to be short-lived trees, but before they die out, will have helped the oaks and others on their way.

My photos were taken on November 17, 2023, the day of the dedication ceremony. This was just one day after the grand planting, so clearly everything has a lot of growing to do. Sarah Roth plans to add to the plantings in the coming season. Read more or check for updates at the website listed in the first paragraph.



## City Nature Challenge

April 26-29, 2024

These are the days when any iNaturalist observation you make in the greater Washington, DC, area to document what plants — or insects or herps or birds (by recorded calls?) or lichens or fungi or traces of mammals — can be found in the wilds around us count toward this year's City Nature Challenge. This is the friendly competition among many cities around the world to see which can muster the largest number of observers participating, the most observations made, and the largest number of species identified. Observations count as fully identified when at least two people agree on an ID, so once you've made your own observations, you can help identify the observations of others for the rest of the week. (While you can use the free iNaturalist app to try to identify that shrub the previous owner of your yard planted, such observations should be marked "organism is not wild" — the main focus of iNaturalist is on what grows wild, whether native or invasive exotic.)

If you need help to get started, or just want to learn more about what's out there, go to <https://citynaturechallengedc.org/virtual-inat-nights/> and consider registering for the free monthly Zoom practice sessions, 2nd Tuesday of the month at 7 pm. Each session starts with some tips by an expert on some facet of the wild world and followed by a chance to ask questions and try your hand.

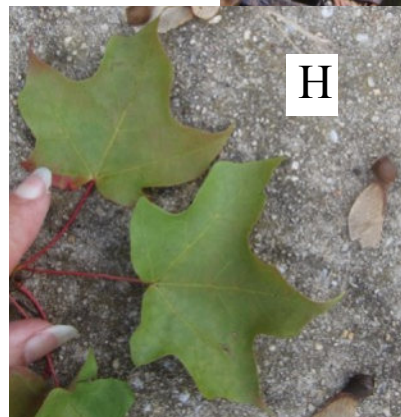
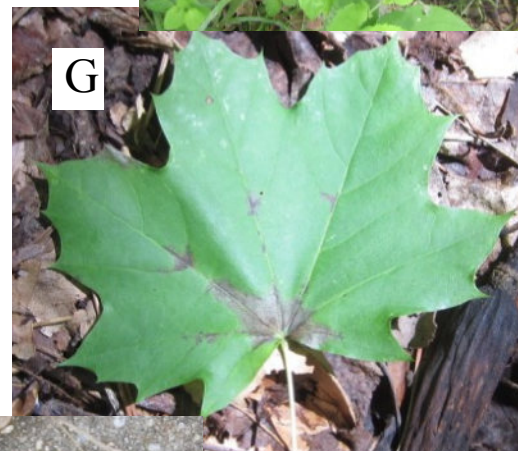
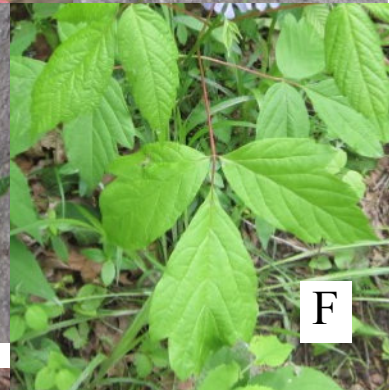
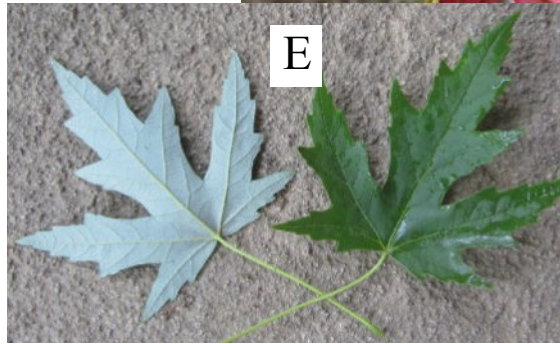
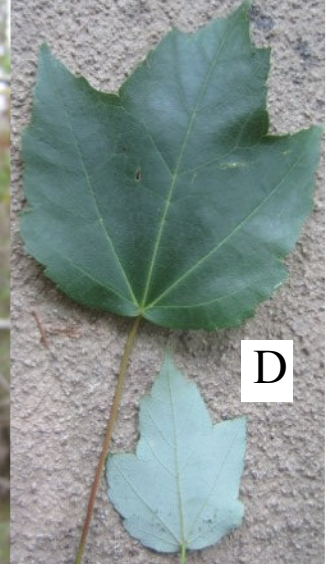
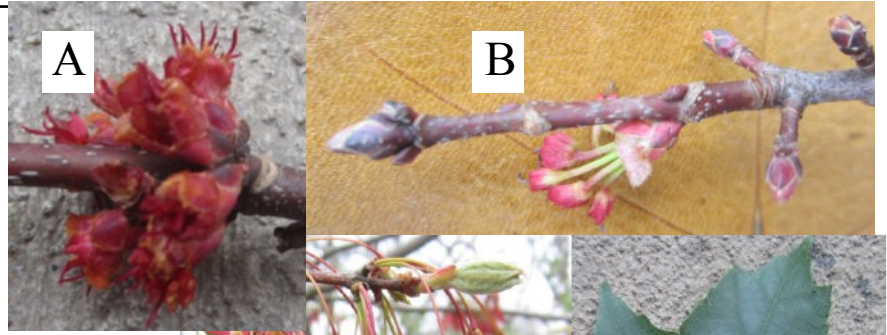
## RED MAPLE FROM PAGE 1

There are plenty of Red Maples around. The US Forest Service Climate Change Atlas says that Red Maple is very widely distributed (42.3% of the measured plots in the Eastern US forests, highest of all species), is only second to Loblolly Pine (*Pinus taeda*, much planted for wood harvest) in total abundance, and has the highest adaptability of all our native tree species. <https://www.fs.usda.gov/nrs/atlas/tree/316> Red Maples were not always this abundant. They have always been swamp trees that can also grow on high, dry ridges, but the places in between used to belong to oaks, hickories, and others. Red Maples have moved in when others were logged, or cleared for farm fields that were later abandoned. Red Maples' relatively thin bark does not protect them from fires, but after a fire they resprout readily from their roots and with mature trees able to produce as many as a million seeds a year, they can dominate regrowth in a burned area. They won't last forever: Virginia Tech's website (<https://bigtree.cnre.vt.edu/lifespan.html>) says Red Maples average 130 years, and may reach 300, while Wikipedia opines that 150 years is their maximum age, and most live less than 100 years.

Each Red Maple flower is either male or female. Some trees are truly dioecious, while others grow male (sessile) and female (develop lengthening petioles) flowers on different branches. The flowers bloom very early, well before the leaves open, and are both wind and insect pollinated. The samaras — dry seeds with aerodynamic wings — are ready to fall by late spring, and can sprout right away.

Red Maples host some 300 different Lepidoptera, including Mourning Cloak butterflies and Io, Cecropia, Rosy Maple, and Polyphemus moths. Gray squirrels nip off spring twigs and drop them to the ground for later consumption. Many birds eat Red Maple seeds. Red Maple trees can be tapped for maple syrup, but only for a short season as the flavor deteriorates once the flowers open.

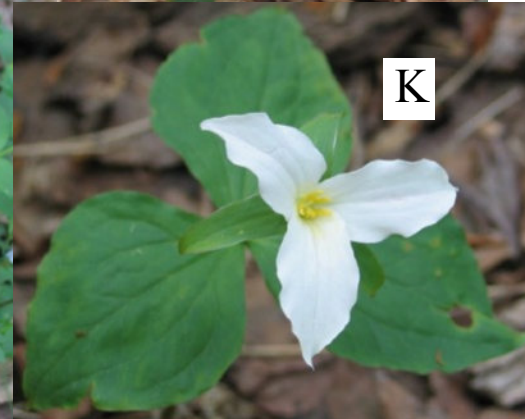
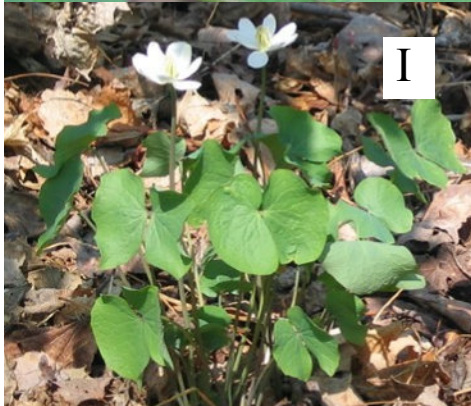
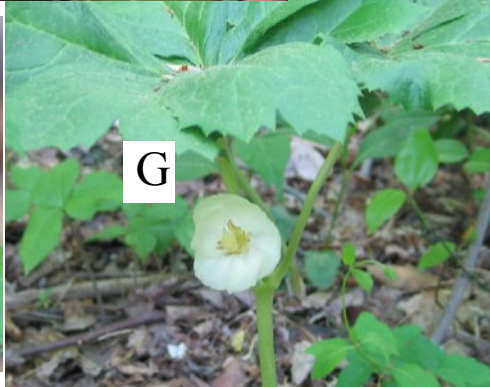
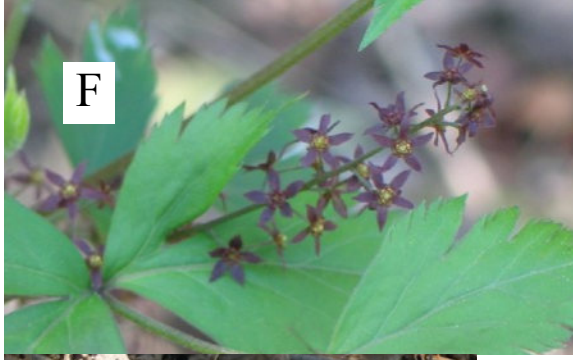
Photos: A - Red Maple female flowers 2/10/24 with visible styles; B - twig with female flowers 3/20/22 showing petioles beginning to lengthen; C - Red Maple samaras 5/7/22; D - Red Maple leaves, showing the silvery backside they share with Silver Maple; E - Silver Maple (*Acer saccharinum*) leaves; F - Box Elder (*Acer negundo*) leaves may have 3 or 5 leaflets; G - Norway Maple (*Acer platanoides*) leaf with 5 main veins plus 2 little ones on the sides, milky sap, and seeds that ripen in the fall; H - Black Maple (*Acer nigrum*) 10/20/23 with its late-ripening seed. This is a stand-in for the very similar Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*) that I don't seem to have any photos of. I - examples of possible Red Maple fall color. A whole tree may be solid red or solid yellow.



## The Flowers that Bloom in the Spring

Just a reminder of some of what's coming. Not all of these are ephemerals. How many do you recognize? Photos by Margaret Chatham.

- 1 *Cardamine concatenata*, Cutleaf Toothwort
- 2 *Claytonia virginiana*, Spring Beauty
- 3 *Dicentra canadensis*, Squirrel Corn
- 4 *Dicentra cucullaria*, Dutchman's Breeches
- 5 *Erigenia bulbosa*, Harbinger of Spring
- 6 *Jeffersonia diphylla*, Twinleaf
- 7 *Mertensia virginica*, Virginia Bluebells
- 8 *Podophyllum peltatum*, May-apple
- 9 *Polemonium reptans*, Jacob's Ladder
- 10 *Trillium grandiflorum*, Trillium
- 11 *Xanthorhiza simplicissima*, Yellowroot



## POTOWMACK NEWS

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## Word of the Month: Tepal



*Flora of Virginia* defines a tepal as “a sepal or a petal; a member of an undifferentiated perianth.” It uses the term in describing the flowers of many monocots, including lilies, Blue-Eyed Grass (*Sisyrinchium angustifolium*), onions, and the Indian Cucumber-root (*Medeola virginiana*) shown close to life size here. This photo was taken at Fraser Preserve on May 14, 2020.

PHOTO BY MARGARET CHATHAM

Answers to the puzzle on page 5: 1-H; 2-D; 3-A; 4-C; 5-B; 6-I; 7-E; 8-G; 9-J; 10-K; 11-F.