

LATE SUMMER - EARLY FALL

POTOWMACK NEWS

Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

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Pawpaw

Asimina triloba

By Margaret Chatham



PAWPAW, ASIMINA TRILOBA. ALL PHOTOS IN THIS NEWSLETTER BY MARGARET CHATHAM

"Where, oh where is dear little Susie? Way down yonder in the pawpaw patch. Picking' up pawpaws, put 'em in her pocket..." Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*) grows in clonal colonies, the patches of the old song. Because each patch is just one plant with multiple ramets (stems coming from the root) and because pawpaw is not self-fruitful, it takes two patches located near each other to cross-pollinate and enable either of them to set fruit. Pawpaw is well known to be our largest native fruit, but it doesn't ripen to a beautiful color, nor does it keep well, so is rarely commercially available.

Pawpaw is a temperate member of the largely tropical *Annonaceae*, the Custard-apple Family. Its large, simple leaves may reach 12" long. In a sunny stream valley, it may grow as a single stem to 45' tall and 8" diameter,

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Upcoming

Alex Thompson: Don't Bet on the Weather: Native Plants and Resilient Gardens

Thursday, Sept 11, 7 pm

By Zoom: watch for registration info

Alex Thompson of Native Plant Landscape Design speaks about tough native plants for tough times. This program will not be recorded.

Nature Journaling at Green Spring Gardens with Jen Brown

Fridays, Sept 12 & Oct 10, 10 am - noon

Space limited: register under events on the Potowmack Chapter part of vnps.org

VNPS Statewide Annual Meeting

Sept 19-21

Skelton 4-H Educational Conference Center at Smith Mountain Lake

Fairfax County Champion Tree Walk

with Bob Vickers

Friday, Sept 26, 10 am-noon

Join Bob Vickers to visit some of the Fairfax County Champion trees he recorded in the Virginia Big Tree Registry. The walk will be a faster pace and cover about 3 miles. We will need to carpool from our meeting point in Great Falls, so space very limited.

Dawn Olson & Alex Antram: Restoring Monarch Habitat and Inspiring Conservation at MCB Quantico

Thursday, Oct 9, 7 pm

By Zoom: watch for registration info

Dawn Olson, President of the Quantico Spouses' Garden Club, and Alex Antram, Quantico Conservation Volunteer Program Manager work together to improve habitat.

Fall Colors at Dyke Marsh

Monday, Oct 20 1-4 pm

Enjoy the turning leaves and perhaps a few late flowers with Margaret Chatham and Alan Ford. Space limited. Sign up on the Events page at www.fodm.org. Rain date Friday, Oct 24.

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://vnps.groups.io/g/potowmack> You can also send a blank email to potowmack+subscribe@vnps.groups.io

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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. Visit <https://vnps.groups.io/g/potowmack> to look around.



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

Fall Native Plant Sales (an incomplete list)

Earth Sangha continues its regular sales on Sundays, Mondays, and Wednesdays, 9 am-1 pm (except Sept 1). Fall open house Sunday, Sept 21 9 am-2 pm. See earthsangha.org for details.

Wednesdays, Sept 3 & Oct 1 10 am-1 pm VNPS-Pot First Wednesday Plant Sales in the propagation beds behind the Horticulture Center at Green Spring Gardens Park. (There will be no Green Spring Fall Garden Day this year.) vnps.org

Sat, Sept 6, 9 am-noon Prince William Master Gardeners 9535 Linton Hall Rd, Bristow, VA mastergardeners@pwccgov.org

Sat, Sept 13, 8 am-noon Town of Vienna Conservation and sustainability Commission Native Plant Sale. Vienna Community Center, 120 Cherry St, Vienna, VA

Sat, Sept 13, 9 am-2 pm Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Spring Native Plant Sale in the main Morven Park visitor parking lot, 17195 Southern Planter Lane, Leesburg, VA
loudounwildlife.org

Sat, Sept 27, 9 am-2 pm Northern Alexandria Native Plant Sale, 1701 N Quaker Lane, Alexandria, VA
<http://www.northernalexandrianativeplantsale.org>.



RIGHT: GOLDFINCH ENJOYING EVENING PRIMROSE SEED, OENOTHERA BIENNIS

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AMERICAN ELM FROM PAGE 1

PAWPAW CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

but it is more often found as an understory colony. Pawpaw



flowers bloom early, just before or as the leaves are opening. They have 2 rows of three petals, green to maroon to purple. They are designed for beetle pollination, with an odor only a beetle would find attractive. Each flower may give rise to as many as 4 fruits, though usually fewer mature. The fruits are berries, defined as fleshy fruits containing multiple seeds (pawpaw seeds can be an inch long), growing from a single pistil. The fruits may be up to 5" long, of an indefinite shape: round or oblong, straight or lumpy. They are yellowy-green and fragrant when ripe, gradually turning brown to black. William Cullina says in his book *Native Trees, Shrubs and Vines*: "Since raccoons will raid the trees, I shake down the



nearly ripe but still firm and green fruits in fall (wear a hard hat — they come down like missiles) and let them ripen indoors like bananas until they are soft and more yellow-green."

Last January, a press release came out titled "Nothin' but pawpaws in the pawpaw patch" (025-01-nothin-pawpaws-pawpaw-patch-large.html) describing a study done in Missouri on how pawpaws affected the other plants in the forest (<https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ecs2.70115>). That title is an exaggeration, but they did find that the dense shade in a pawpaw patch may suppress other young trees, shrubs and forbs. The study was done late in the season, so took no account of spring ephemerals, which can be quite happy in a pawpaw patch.

Every time I'm in a pawpaw patch at Fraser Preserve, cutting or pulling up oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*), multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*), Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*), wavy-leaf grass (*Oplismenus undulatifolius*) or Japanese knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*), that title does run through my mind.

Pawpaws are spreading in our woods, helped along by white-tailed deer eating all their native competition while avoiding pawpaw. — Sniff a crushed leaf, and you'll understand why. Pawpaw is the larval host plant for Zebra swallowtail butterflies, and many mammals eat the fruits.

VNPS-sponsored Summer Interns



HUNTLEY MEADOWS NATIVE PLANT INTERN
ALEXIS BRYAN

My name is Alexis Bryan, and I had the privilege of being the 2025 Virginia Native Plant Society Intern at Huntley Meadows Park. I am a graduating Senior at George Mason University studying Environmental Science with a concentration in Ecological Science. During my internship, I applied the skills and knowledge I learned at George Mason and other educational institutions. I was tasked with helping promote the biodiversity and wildlife at Huntley Meadows, and I was able to see the results of my labor firsthand.

One example was removing invasive vines from native plants and setting up a Wood Duck nest box in the central wetland to promote nesting. I also helped maintain the Canada goose exclosures, to deter the geese from eating the wetland plants, and could see the damage the geese were causing. With another intern, I did water quality testing by dipnetting and identifying macroinvertebrates in the wetland, and collected water parameters, which we used to create a report for county use. I also helped monitor the vernal pools located in the park.

What excited me the most was being able to design a study that could benefit Huntley Meadows. I decided to

research the health of beech trees in the park due to my interest in Beech Leaf Disease (BLD). I learned about the disease at a professional training conference which I attended as part of my internship. This piqued my interest due to the disease's ecology involving nematodes and parasitic relationships. I wished to see how the disease would progress if found, which I used in deciding how I would survey trees situated near each other to see which trees in which locations would present symptoms, if they were infected, also if the presence or the extent of ailments would be dependent on whether the tree would start to show symptoms or not.

This internship was an amazing opportunity that I will always be grateful for. Being surrounded by amazing coworkers and participating in hands-on work that supports the native wildlife and plant life will always be a memorable experience, especially since the ecology of diseases and parasites has always been something I have enjoyed learning and researching. Lastly, I'd like to thank Chris King, the Huntley Meadows staff and volunteers, the Virginia Native Plant Society-Potowmack Chapter, for sponsoring this internship, and the Friends of Huntley Meadows Park for allowing me to help and participate in their studies this summer.



Green Spring Gardens Native Plant Intern
Liam Call

Hello, my name is Liam Call. I am a student at George Mason University studying for a bachelor's degree in environmental science. I have had a passion for the natural world for as long as I can remember. Even as a kid I always wanted to work in either research or conservation although back then it was mainly zoological. However, in high school I volunteered at Ellanor C. Lawrence Park in Chantilly and my focus shifted from fauna to flora. Since then, I have had a burning passion for plants and an unquenchable curiosity about them in all forms. After high school I went on to NOVA Community College for a general studies degree

where I spent most of my elective classes learning about horticulture and the plants both native and non-native in northern Virginia. I took classes on propagation, identification, landscape design, and crop production. While I started NOVA not quite knowing exactly what I wanted to do next, sparked by my volunteering, I decided that I wanted to go work in the parks industry, working as either a horticulturist or in resource management and invasive control. I transferred to GMU after earning my degree and started studying environmental science with a concentration in wildlife and conservation. Now going into my senior year, I applied for an internship at Green Spring Gardens as the native plant intern, hoping it would help further my understanding of, and increase my ability to take care of, the native plants of the northern Virginia region.

Throughout my internship I have learned much about the care and management of the multitude of gardens around the property. As well, I have learned more than I could have hoped for about the native plants I was caring for. When I began this internship my knowledge of plants was rather limited to just the edible plants of the region but since being here, I have found a new respect and fascination in the plants that previously I would have classified as more for show. A great example of this is Ironweed, a plant that before coming here I had no clue existed but is incredibly important for pollinators such as bees and butterflies. It is the host plant for *Vanessa virginensis*, or American Lady, and *Polites origenes*, or Crossline Skipper as well. Another plant that I had overlooked was Joe Pye Weed, a plant whose dead stems serve as the nursery for solitary bees and is a key monarch waystation plant. I have also had the opportunity to work towards removal of our many invasive species such as porcelain-berry, Bermuda grass, crab grass, akebia, oriental yams, oriental bittersweet, and Japanese stiltgrass. While the removal of these plants is never ending it has been revealing natives and naturalized plants that would otherwise have been choked out, such as a native trillium.

Working with the Virginia Native Plant Society propagation crew was the highlight of it all, though. Each week I came and learned more about the plants of the region, how to propagate them, and how to care for them. Their enthusiasm and energy have made me feel welcomed and helped me to quickly learn what they were teaching me, even if it needed to be repeated a couple times. Through their guidance I have even started to grow some of my own native plants in my garden, an eastern prickly-pear native to the beaches of Virginia and a cardinal flower. Even now as my internship is ending, I can't wait to be able to volunteer for them again and keep learning everything they have for me.

My time working at Green Spring Gardens while short has been an eye-opening experience that I wouldn't trade for anything else. The experiences that I have gone through and the knowledge that I have gained will prove invaluable throughout the rest of my schooling and into my career.

Sedges

Sedges have edges, but also a vocabulary all their own. Seeds (achenes) grow inside sacks (perigynia) arranged on spikes which may hold either one or both sexes of flowers. *Carex* (the “true sedges”) is a huge genus, in which many species don’t have useful common names. From earlier in the season, here’s a random sampling of local sedge inflorescences, without which most sedges are impossible to identify. Photos by Margaret Chatham. Answers on page 6.

- 1 *Carex albicans*, White-tinged Sedge
- 2 *Carex cephalophora*, Oval-leaved Sedge
- 3 *Carex crinita*, Long-fringed Sedge
- 4 *Carex intumescens*, Bladder Sedge
- 5 *Carex jamesii*, James’s Sedge
- 6 *Carex laevivaginata*, Smooth-sheathed Sedge
- 7 *Carex laxiflora*, Loose-flowered Sedge
- 8 *Carex squarrosa*, Squarrose Sedge
- 9 *Carex vulpinoidea*, Fox Sedge



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Word of the Month: Nyctinasty



Plant movement in response to the onset of night. I always think of the way white clover (**Trifolium repens*) leaflets fold up for the night, only partially visible here because I turned on the lights to get a photo, and the leaflets immediately started unfolding again.— Margaret Chatham

Answers to puzzle on page 5: 1-F, this is a really early bloomer; 2-H; 3-D one of our largest droopy-dangly sedges; 4-C, similar *Carex grayii* would have more perigynia in a mace-like spike; 5-I, I find this one just so cute; 6-E; 7-G, a name that does help with identification; 8-A, one of those really helpful common names — “squarrose” is defined as abruptly recurved or spreading above the base; rough or scurfy due to the presence of recurved or spreading processes” — are you enlightened?; 9-B, like a fox’s tail?