

POTOWMACK NEWS

Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

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Fairfax Tree Rescuers PRISM

By Margaret Fisher



PORCELAINBERRY COVERS ALL. PHOTO BY MARGARET CHATHAM

November 8-16 is a "Week of Action" in Fairfax and Falls Church. Volunteers in every magisterial district and town are inviting elected officials and the general public to events to work on the invasive plants that so threaten our trees and natural areas. This marks the official launch of the new Fairfax Tree Rescuers PRISM. <https://www.fairfaxprism.org/>

A "PRISM" – Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management – is a collaborative effort by agencies and non-profit organizations to control one or more invasive species, whether flora or fauna. Many readers of this newsletter are familiar with the Blue Ridge PRISM, which has led the way in Virginia to educate the public on invasive plants and to push for improved public policy. Northern Virginia is also served by the National Capital Area PRISM, a program of the Metropolitan Council of Governments which

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Upcoming

Potowmack Chapter Annual Meeting

Sunday, November 9
12:30 pm Social time
1:00 pm Business Meeting (see p 3)
1:30 pm **Laura Beaty & Donna Murphy** show us how to collect & save seeds.
In person in the Horticulture Center at Green Spring Gardens Park.
No registration needed.

Nature Journaling at Green Spring Gardens with Jen Brown

Friday, Nov 14, 10 am - noon
Space limited: register under events on the Potowmack Chapter part of vnps.org

Annual Solstice Walk

Sunday, December 21, 11 am - 3 pm
Travilah Serpentine Barrens Conservation Park in Montgomery County, MD. No registration required, but car-pooling advised. No restrooms. Co-sponsored by Maryland Native Plant Society, VNPS Potowmack Chapter, and Botanical Society of Washington.

Charles Smith: Light Eaters and the Mother Tree: Exploring what plants are and are not

Thursday, January 8, 2026, 7 pm
We rely on plants for food, shelter, and many other functions. We learn early that they convert sunlight to energy, but we often remain largely "plant blind;" allowing them to form a backdrop for our lives with little understanding or appreciation. This program will lead us on a journey considering research and discussions over the last fifty years that have sometimes tried to assign plants human qualities, but have also discovered many things plants do that redefine what they are.
By Zoom; watch for registration info.

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

Manage your VNPS Membership Online

1. Go to <https://vnps.app.neoncrm.com/login>
2. If you don't know or have forgotten your password, click on "Having trouble logging in?" To receive a password reset email.
3. Once logged in, you can update your name, address, email, renew your membership, make a donation, etc.



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>.

David Gorsline writes

Since I like to pick apart scientific names of plants, let's look at the specific epithet of Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*), whose fruits have ripened to red here in the mid-Atlantic. That *benzoin* is interesting; it suggests *benzene*. Do they have something in common? And which came first?

Well, it's easy to figure out which came first, as Linnaeus named the plant in the 18th century, while Kekulé worked out the structure of benzene (the simplest aromatic hydrocarbon) in the 19th century, after Michael Faraday and others first isolated the chemical and named it earlier in that century. Benzene (benzin, benzol) is chemically derived from benzoic acid, which in turn is made from gum benzoin. Gum benzoin, known since antiquity, is an aromatic resin made from the bark of several species of trees in the genus *Styrax*.

So where did the word *benzoin* come from? Doesn't sound very Latin. It's traced back to Middle French *benjoin*, to Catalan *benjuí*, to Arabic لُبَان جَاوِي (lubān jāwiyy, "Javanese frankincense").

And just to bring it back home, we have two native species of *Styrax* in Virginia, American Snowbell (*S. americanus*) and Bigleaf Snowbell (*S. grandifolius*). Both are found in the southern counties of the state.

Editor's note: *Flora of West Virginia* says *Lindera* is named for Swedish physician J. Linder, 1676-1739, and benzoin is an old name for some member of this family.

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Donna Murphy

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Vacant:

Education

Propagation/Plant Sales

Publicity

Social Media

Submissions to *Potowmack News* may be sent to The Editor at potowmack@vnps.org

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Virginia Native Plant Society
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Arlington, VA 22205
<http://www.vnps.org/potowmack>

Potowmack Chapter Annual Meeting will be held Sunday, Nov. 9, 2025 at 1:00 PM, in the Horticulture Center at Green Spring Gardens Park. If you cannot attend to vote then, please send in this ballot by Nov. 5 to Potowmack Chapter VNPS, PO Box 5311, Arlington, VA 22205, or email your vote to vnps.pot@gmail.com

ELECTION OF OFFICERS FOR 2026

The Board of the Potowmack Chapter VNPS presents the following slate of officers for the 2026 year, with terms beginning January 1. Contact Alan Ford for further information at amford@acm.org

SLATE OF OFFICERS

President:	___Alan Ford	Write-in _____
Vice President:	___Mark Murphy	Write-in _____
Secretary:	___Jennifer Brown	Write-in _____
Treasurer:	___Kit Sheffield	Write-in _____

Proposed 2026 Budget

	2025 budget as amended	2026 proposed budget	
Income			
Regular donations	1,000	1,400	Average of 2021-24 actual donations received
PNN donations	-	-	
Member dues	8,900	8,400	Average of 2024+ 2025 YTD annualized
Interest earned	-	500	
Plant sales	22,000	21,500	2025 actual sales (lower than budget: no Fall Garden Day)
PNN Book Sales	-	9,000	Average of 2024 + 2025 YTD annualized
Other Sales	-	450	Average of 2021-24 actual sales
Total income	31,900	41,250	

Operating Expenses

Administrative	2,000	150	
Meetings and events	1,000	1,000	4 events at \$250 each
Membership development	-	150	
Programs: talks	1,200	900	6 honoraria x\$150
Programs: walks	900	1,000	6 honoraria x\$150 +\$100 for permits
Newsletter printing & mailing	2,750	2,375	five newsletters at \$475 each
Green Spring internship	5,015	5,000	2025 actual
Huntley Meadows internship	5,015	5,000	2025 actual
Commissions to Green Spring	3,520	3,225	15% of estimated sales at Green Spring
Plant Sales Tax	1,320	1,290	6% of plant sales
PNN Sales Tax	-	540	6% of PNN sales
Other Sales Tax	-	27	6% of other sales
Printing & publications	1,522	800	Average of 2021-25
Propagation committee	11,500*	1,500	Amount originally budgeted for 2025
Event planner	2,500	-	Donation to state chapter if they hired an event planner
Supplies Materials & miscellaneous	200	100	
Donations to others	3,500	3,900	\$3000 base plus 6 honoraria
Marketing and Promotion	-	150	
PNN Guides	-	9,000	
Bank Fees	-	-	
Merchant service fees	800	800	
Postal & shipping fees	300	300	
Computer & internet services	580	500	Zoom, Quickbooks, Access, licenses
Total Operating Expenses	43,622	37,707	

*Includes \$10,000 for rebuilding the pot-holding benches and shade-cloth supports at Green Spring Gardens. Any of that money not spent by the end of 2025 is expected to roll into the 2026 budget.

Funding from assets **11,722** **-**

Net income (loss) **-** **3,543**

Check one: **I approve**_____ **I do not approve**_____ **the proposed FY 2026 Budget.**

FAIRFAX TREE RESCUERS PRISM CONTINUED FROM P 1 focuses on Early Detection/Rapid Response (EDRR). The Northern Neck PRISM was founded last year and is focusing on education in that region. Fairfax Tree Rescuers PRISM is the fourth and most recent of these organizations, with the goal of creating a community-wide effort to save the trees and control at least the worst of the invasive plant infestations.

The motivation for forming Fairfax Tree Rescuers is the observation that, despite years of concentrated effort by numerous organizations and hundreds and hundreds of individuals, it is clear that we are steadily losing the battle against invasive plants. There is good reason to fear that by the end of this century, many of our parks and remnant natural areas will lie in ruin, with the trees down and not replaced. A comprehensive approach is clearly needed, not only ramping up the current efforts but finding new ways to address the problem on all lands, whether public, residential, or commercial.

The job of the organizers is to look at the bigger picture and find ways to overcome the many barriers to success that exist. The job of every resident is to take care of their own properties and to take responsibility for the roadside rights of way and nearby public lands whose managers do not have the budget to pay for the work. One strategy for achieving that is for volunteers to relay information to their neighbors and help them get organized. It is our goal to have such a Community Representative in every neighborhood and community association. That will take many hundreds of volunteers! If everyone reading this comes forward, we will be well on our way to meeting that goal. If you can't do it yourself, please recruit someone else from your neighborhood to step in. Sign up on this [volunteer interest form](#) to give us your location and to tell us about any other ways you can pitch in.

Other strategies include working with governments on a major public awareness campaign, providing incentive grants to communities, recruiting corporations to adopt parks to pay for professional contractors, training lawn and landscapers as well as the volunteer workforce, providing site visits for communities and commercial entities, and surveying the parks for the most serious infestations. Getting this together is a daunting proposition. What will you do to help? We are convinced that most of the obstacles are human-made and that it is not yet too late to solve them. All that is needed is enough people who have the will to make it happen.

A Bath for the Pollinators

By Donna Murphy

It's not often a tree is replaced by a birdbath. A unique water feature was built from what was, until recently, the large Redbud tree in the VNPS beds at Green Spring Gardens. Horticultural staff cut the ailing

tree and left the stump, a crotch with three main limbs, to form an interesting, three-legged pedestal that begged to be adorned.

Then Karl Dawson, Fairfax County Park Authority, Facilities and Grounds Chief and Arborist at Green Spring Gardens, hatched the idea for this clever bird or insect bath.

"It was such a dry August I wanted to put a little bird bath together that mimicked a stream or pond side, so insects could grab a drink! I also did not want to dig out the stump of the dead redbud I removed," he said. "The insects will have everything they need [here] in one place, water, food, shelter.

Karl Dawson is a newcomer to Green Spring Gardens, but not to Arlington, where he grew up and went to Yorktown High School. He graduated with a degree in biology from University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg. Karl then relocated to the state of Oregon and worked in Community Urban Forestry and then Utility Forestry -- think Asplundh -- involved in risk management and customer relations. In 2021, he returned to his hometown, where his interest turned to the landscape. He has been the Facilities and Grounds Chief and Arborist at Green Spring Gardens for six months. We welcome Karl and thank him for his interest and empathy for the gardens' creatures.



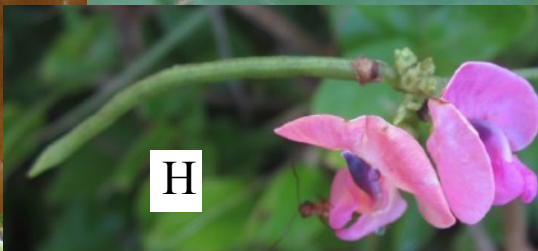
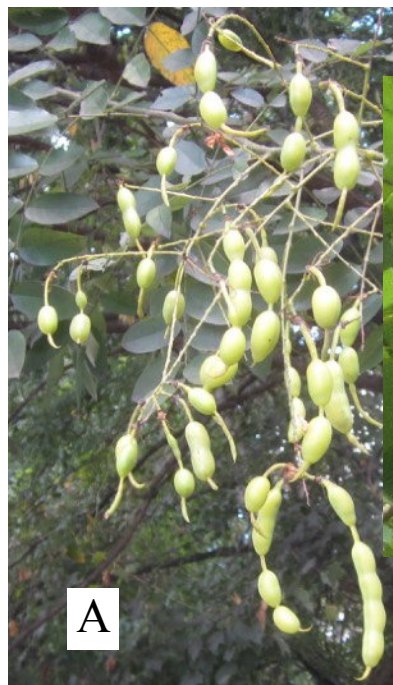
Karl Dawson with his bee bath, perched in carefully notched right angles in the tree stump. The beautiful blue pool, with a carved wooden bowl of small gravel and flat rocks for sunbathing, provides water and safe passage to creatures who fall in and can't get out.

PHOTO BY DONNA MURPHY

Peas in a Pod — or Not

The Fabaceae or Leguminosae family is large and various, including trees, vines both woody and herbaceous, and forbs. Here are some of their fruits, all local but not all native: an asterisk indicates a plant not native to Northern Virginia. Carrie Blair disagrees with the asterisk for #5, native in TN & NC. Photos by Margaret Chatham. Answers on page 6.

- 1 *Amphicarpaea bracteata*, Hog-peanut
- 2 *Baptisia australis*, False Blue Indigo
- 3 *Cercis canadensis*, Redbud
- 4 *Chamaecrista fasciculata*, Partridgepea
- 5 **Cladastris kentuckea*, American Yellowwood
- 6 *Desmodium glabellum*, Tall Tick-trefoil
- 7 *Desmodium paniculatum*, Narrow-leaf Tick-trefoil
- 8 *Robinia pseudoacacia*, Black Locust
- 9 *Senna hebecarpa*, American Senna
- 10 *Strophostylus umbellata*, Pink Wild Bean
- 11 **Styphnolobium japonicum*, Japanese Pagoda Tree
(Formerly **Sophora japonica*)
- 12 **Wisteria floribunda*, Japanese Wisteria



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Virginia Native Plant Society
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Word of the Month: Loment



An indehiscent legume (dry fruit of one carpel usually dehiscent along both sutures) constricted between the seeds or separating into one-seeded joints — as defined in *The Flora of West Virginia*. *Desmodium paniculatum* or Panicked Tick-Trefoil shown above, *Hylodesmum nudiflorum* or Naked Tick-trefoil below: “naked” because the flowering stalk bears no leaves. These are velcro seeds, and the number of seeds in a string as well as the shape of the seeds are supposed to help you identify which Tick-Trefoil you’re looking at or pulling off your clothes. — Margaret Chatham



Answers to puzzle on page 5: 1-E, one sees the leaves and vines often, flowers and pods rather rarely; 2-L, pods turn black and rattle when ripe; 3-F, flowers and green pods are edible; 4-G; 5-I, native to Tennessee and North Carolina, but not Virginia though it’s perfectly happy to grow here; 6-K; 7-D; 8-B, this may have originated farther west, but it is listed as native throughout Virginia in the Digital Atlas of Virginia Flora; 9-J; 10-H; 11-A, one of these invaded my yard years ago & reached seeding stage before I identified it — when we cut it down, its wood was the heaviest I’ve ever lifted; 12-C, the biggest pods here.