

EARLY FALL

POTOWMACK NEWS

Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

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Native Alternatives to English Ivy Part 2: Hold that Slope!

By Margaret Chatham



5/21/26. ROSA CAROLINA ON A STEEP, SUNNY SLOPE AT WAKEFIELD PARK. ALL PHOTOS IN THIS ISSUE BY MARGARET CHATHAM

English Ivy (*Hedera helix*) has been used to prevent erosion on steep slopes where growing and mowing turf grass is difficult. There are a wide variety of native plants that can serve that purpose while doing so much more for our environment, starting with the ground covers described in the previous issue of this newsletter. In this issue, we'll look at some taller plants for the same purpose. But before planting anything, you might want to look around for some substantial branches or even logs that can be placed horizontally across the slope to slow the flow downhill. Think mini-terraces to encourage rainwater to stop and soak in rather than running downhill taking soil with it. Then look for plants with spreading root systems that will hold soil in place. This may be where you can welcome a native thug or two.

You can also look upon a steep slope as an opportunity to grow "deer candy" plants. Our white tailed deer are hungry and resourceful but they aren't mountain goats, and may prefer to browse what grows on flatter pastures.

IVY REPLACEMENTS CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

UPCOMING

Milkweed and Milkweed Insects program by Judy Gallagher

Thursday, Sept 10, 7 pm by Zoom

Or should that be milkweeds, plural? Judy will show us more than one species. Register under events on the Potowmack Chapter part of vnps.org

Nature Journaling with Jen Brown

Friday, Sept 11, 10 am - noon

Monthly, 2nd Friday thru October. Lake Accotink. Space limited; register under events on the Potowmack Chapter part of vnps.org.

VNPS Statewide Annual Meeting

Oct 2-4 see <https://vnps.org/events/vnps-annual-meeting-2026>

Chapter Quarterly Social at the Grange in Great Falls

Sunday, Oct 4, 1-4 pm

Every site has its own suite of native plants. Friends old and new explore the restoration work here. No registration needed.

Lighting Matters program by Laura Greenleaf

Thur, Oct 8, 7 pm by Zoom

Explore the causes and consequences of light pollution with a focus on wildlife and ecology, and what you can do about it. Register under events on the Potowmack Chapter part of vnps.org.

Fall Colors Walk at Bon Air Park led by Leeanna Pletcher

Sunday, October 11, 1 - 2:30 pm

Join Naturalist Leeanna Pletcher to enjoy the colors of fall foliage and discuss why and how leaves change color before dropping off. Flat walk on paved and gravel paths along a wooded stream. Limited space: register under events on the Potowmack Chapter part of vnps.org.

Fall Colors at Dyke Marsh led by Alan Ford and Margaret Chatham

Mon, Oct 26, 1 pm; raindate Fri, Oct 30

This time we'll go to the end of the haul road first & work our way back. Limited space: register at <https://www.fodm.org/get-involved/volunteer-events.html>.

Save the Date: Potowmack Chapter Annual Meeting in person at Green Spring Gardens

Horticulture Center, Sunday Nov 15, 1:30-4 pm. Business meeting plus program by the Grass Bunch. No registration needed.

All events are free and open to the public. To receive email notices about upcoming events, subscribe to our mailing list at <https://vnps.groups.io/g/potowmack> Or send a blank email to potowmack+subscribe@vnps.groups.io

Potowmack Chapter Events Calendar

Manage your VNPS Membership Online

1. Go to <https://vnps.app.neoncrm.com/login>
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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

There will be no Fall Garden Day at Green Spring Gardens this year, but VNPS-Potomac Chapter propagation committee will have **first Wednesday native plant sales** on September 2 and October 7, 10 am-1 pm. Fall is the best time to plant shrubs and trees, and most perennials are happy to move in at this time of year as well. You can find at least a guess at what plants we have for sale at <https://vnps.org/potowmack/plant-sale-inventory/> Other native plant opportunities:

Earth Sangha Fall Open House Sun, Sept 27 9 am-2 pm. Native plants are available for sale on Sundays, Mondays, and Wednesdays 9 am-1 pm at their native plant nursery, 6100 Cloud Dr, Springfield. You can see what they offer at <https://www.earthsangha.org/wpnlst>

Sat, Sept 5, 9 am-noon **Prince William Master Gardeners** Teaching Garden Plant Sale at 9535 Linton Hall Rd, Bristow

Sat, Sept 12, 9 am-2 pm **Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy** Native Plant Sale at Morven Park, 17195 Southern Planter Lane, Leesburg

Sat, Sept 19, Noon - 2 pm Seed swap at Green Spring Gardens Park. Free, all ages, registration encouraged, using Code 9FG.N5MY

Sat, Sept 26, 9 am-2 pm **Northern Alexandria Native Plant Sale** At St. Clement Episcopal Church, 1701 N Quaker Lane, Alexandria

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Potowmack Chapter
Virginia Native Plant Society
P. O. Box 5311
Arlington, VA 22205

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

IVY REPLACEMENTS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Some “deer candy” options for slopes:

Hearts-a-burstin or Strawberry Bush (*Euonymus americanus*) becomes an airy shrub with evergreen stems if it can avoid deer predation. If the deer munch it down, it will still spread along the ground and hold soil, but will not



bloom and bear its iconic fruits that beg birds to feast and spread its seeds.

Maple-leaf Viburnum (*Viburnum acerifolium*), seen here, would love a chance to spread along the upper portion of a shady slope. Choose **Arrowwood** (*Viburnum dentatum*) for moister, lower elevations. Both bear bunches of small white flowers in the spring and bird-feeding, blackish fruits in the fall, provided they can escape deer predation. Maple-leaf tends to be shorter and more upright in growth habit, and its leaves often turn an unusual pink in the fall. Arrowwood ideally



takes a taller, mounding form, rooting at branch tips. Its leaves sometimes sport a dark border when they turn a muted yellow/orange.

Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) also benefits from the deer protection offered by growing on a steep slope. My mama taught me it's a poisonous plant, but the deer don't agree, and cheerfully eat away, especially in winter when little else is green or in early spring when the mountain laurel tries to put out new leaves.

On the other extreme, a steep slope may be a good place to take advantage of a native plant that is too energetic in its spreading for an organized flower bed. Some herbaceous examples are **Common Milkweed** (*Asclepias syriaca*), **Tall or Rough-stemmed Goldenrod** (*Solidago altissima* or *S. rugosa*), or **Pale-leaved Sunflower** (*Helianthus strumosus*). These are all potentially tall plants that host significant numbers of caterpillars and pollinators. All of them can be cut way back in June to encourage branching and new growth later in the season.

Shrubs for sunny slopes include:

Sweetfern (*Comptonia peregrina*), 2-4' tall, named for its fern-like, aromatic leaves, is a nitrogen-fixer for poor, or sandy soils.

Low St. Andrew's Cross (*Hypericum stragulum*) grows x-shaped yellow flowers on low, matted stems.

Shrubby St. John's-wort (*Hypericum prolificum*) 1-4' tall. I wish I had a good photo of its exuberant yellow flowers.

Fragrant Sumac (*Rhus aromatica*) is often sold as a low growing cultivar, but the wild species may reach 6' tall. Like all the Sumacs, it is dioecious, so only the female plants will



grow fruit. And like all the Sumacs, it will form a clonal colony, good for holding a slope. In order of height, the taller Sumacs are **Smooth Sumac** (*Rhus glabra*) at 2-20', **Shining or Winged Sumac** (*Rhus copallina*) at 3-30' and **Staghorn Sumac** (*Rhus typhina*) at up to 50'.

Carolina or Pasture Rose (*Rosa carolina*) shown on page one. Michael Dirr in his *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants*, says it is a “freely suckering shrub composed of erect branches forming dense thickets,” 3-6' tall, with pink flowers followed by red rose hips that maintain their color into the winter.

Of course this is far from a complete list. Let your imagination roam.

VNPS Summer Interns



I am Nathan Uhler. This summer I got the amazing opportunity to be the Virginia Native Plant Society intern at Huntley Meadows Park, working with their Resource Management Team. Through my internship I gained many valuable experiences, working with volunteers in invasive removals, clearing meadows of woody plants, and scoop sampling for macroinvertebrates. These gave me a view of what goes into resource management and its skill set.

In my past three years at George Mason University, I became extremely fond of botany and plant ecology and dedicated much of my school time to learning about them. My internship gave me experiences that are harder to find in the classroom. In particular, I got to design and perform a plant species survey of what the staff call the First Meadow. This was a fun challenge because this meadow hadn't been surveyed since 1975, when the park was first founded. This meant that I got to choose how to survey the meadow rather than following a method used by prior resource managers. I studied different survey methods and learned about the species in the meadow, culminating in a report on the meadow and my recommendations for its management.

This summer I have grown so much both personally and professionally, getting to work with many amazing people, including my mentor Chris King, his assistant Annika MacDonald, my internship buddy Natalie Buford, longtime Huntley volunteer Karla Jamir, and all the staff and volunteers at Huntley Meadows. Lastly, I would like to thank Friends of Huntley Meadows Park and the Virginia Native Plant Society's Potowmack Chapter for sponsoring this internship and giving me an amazing summer.



My name is Anthony Hall and I am a rising junior majoring in Environmental Science at Virginia Tech. During my time as the Native Plant Intern at Green Spring Gardens, I've learned a lot about the importance that native species have in our ecosystem. To start, native plants support a variety of pollinators including bees, hummingbirds and butterflies. In addition to the pivotal role they play in plant reproduction, these pollinators increase biodiversity and add to the natural beauty of the garden. Another thing I've observed is the educational capital that native species provide for our community. The plethora of native plants and flowers in our gardens offer a chance for people of all ages to learn more about the species that naturally occur in our area. It offers a space for the next generation to develop a deeper appreciation and concern for the environment.

Another area I've gained a deeper understanding of during my time here is invasive plant removal and its importance in maintaining the health and integrity of our gardens. I've learned about some of the most ferocious invasives that plague our gardens including ground ivy, stilt grass, and porcelainberry. In addition to crowding out native plants and reducing biodiversity in the wild, these species often make gardens look unsightly and disorganized if left unchecked.

Finally, I'd like to give a shoutout to my fellow staff as well as the volunteers at Green Spring. I've had the opportunity to meet and collaborate with many people during my time here, and the passion that many of them showed toward their work is something I truly admire. I feel privileged to have worked alongside people with such a deep understanding and appreciation for the fauna and flora native to Virginia. In addition to the knowledge I've gained, I've built several relationships with people that I'm sure will last well into my professional career.

Flowers on the Vine

So many vines, such a variety of flowers, showy or camouflaged. How many do you recognize? * means non-native. Photos by Margaret Chatham. Answers on page 6.

- 1 **Ampelopsis brevipedunculus*, Porcelainberry
- 2 *Amphicarpaea bracteata*, Hog Peanut
- 3 *Apios americana*, Groundnut
- 4 *Calystegia sepium*, Hedge Bindweed
- 5 *Campsis radicans*, Trumpet Creeper
- 6 **Celastrus orbiculatus*, Asian Bittersweet
- 7 **Clematis terminalis*, Sweet Autumn Clematis
- 8 *Cuscuta pentagona*, Five-angled Dodder
- 9 *Cynanchum laeve*, Honeyvine
- 10 **Lonicera japonica*, Japanese Honeysuckle
- 11 *Lonicera sempervirens*, Coral Honeysuckle
- 12 *Matelea obliqua*, Climbing Milkvine
- 13 *Menispermum canadense*, Moonseed
- 14 *Passiflora lutea*, Yellow Passionflower
- 15 *Smilax rotundifolia*, Common Greenbrier
- 16 *Vitis aestivalis*, Summer Grape



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Word of the Month: Autotrophic



Flora of Virginia's definition: "Of a plant, nutritionally independent, producing its own food from raw materials obtained more or less directly from the substrate. The term generally includes mycorrhizal and non-mycorrhizal plants, so long as they are photosynthetic."

At left, Crossvine, *Bignonia capreolata*, a showy native vine that didn't make it into the photo quiz. I like the description of vines as structural parasites, but most of them are autotrophic. The exception in this quiz? Dodder, *Cuscuta pentagona*, is parasitic. Photo by Margaret Chatham.

Answers to puzzle on page 5: 1-L; 2-D; 3-M; 4-N; 5-J; 6-O; 7-H; 8-C; 9-I; 10-B; 11-F; 12-E — adding this to my life-list of flowers at Great Falls NP set me off on this quest for photos; 13-A; 14-G; 15-P; 16-K — must need cross-pollination: my big old vine always blooms but never grows grapes.