

POTOWMACK NEWS

Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

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Happenings in Our Propagation Beds and Beyond - Season 2019

By Laura Beaty



SALE DAY SCENE. PHOTO BY LAURA BEATY

First of all, as I presume to speak for the other volunteers at the Potowmack Chapter's propagation beds, housed at Green Spring Gardens in Alexandria, let me state for all of us, 2019 has been a very eventful year. Our sales surpassed all others since we began selling plants in the early 1980s, thanks to growing attendance at First Wednesday sales. Even more thrilling is the increase in our buyers' awareness of the importance of using native plants in their home landscapes. Much credit goes to the many knowledgeable chapter speakers and walk leaders who provide fascinating information about the interactions of the natural world. Growing interest in chapter walks has challenged organizers to add enough additional walks to accommodate all who wish to participate. Some of our propagation bed volunteers are among these walk leaders and program presenters.

The Master Gardener programs throughout Virginia have sparked a growing interest in gardening in general and introduced many to the value of native plants in the home landscape in particular. Local and national "invasive plant pulls" have clearly shown all of us that native habitats are being compromised and even destroyed by plants out of place. These conditions along with the headlines about precipitous insect and bird population declines spur home gardeners to plant

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Upcoming

Potowmack Chapter Annual Meeting

Sunday, Nov 17, 1-4 pm

Green Spring Gardens Horticulture Center

Check last issue of Potowmack News for budget and slate of officers. Program:

Teaching Plant Science Using Service Learning and Citizen Science – Dr. Peter Mecca

Dr. Mecca will describe some of the science-learning opportunities available to students at George Mason High School in Falls Church: assisting National Park Service staff at Shenandoah National Park in invasive plant removal along the Appalachian Trail, or leading urban agriculture in raised beds, hydroponic and FarmBot gardening. In the future: a citizen science experience in Puerto Rico.

Annual Winter Solstice Walk

Sunday, Dec 22, 10 am-4 pm

Gold Mine Tract, C&O Canal National Historic Park

Led by Rod Simmons and a host of others. Registration not required. This walk is co-sponsored by Maryland Native Plant Society and Botanic Society of Washington on a site registered with the Old-Growth Forest Network.

All local events are free and open to the public. Walks require preregistration. To receive email notices with walk registration links and other chapter news, send an email to [vnps-pot-
subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:vnps-pot-subscribe@yahoo.com).

Manage Your VNPS Membership Online

1. Go to <https://vnps.z2systems.com/>
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Native Plant Signs Inform and Inspire

By Donna Murphy

Have you discovered the **Native Plant Signs** document on the VNPS Potowmack Chapter website (<https://vnps.org/potowmack>)? Look under *Resources* > *Potowmack Files* menu and see the document listed near the bottom of the page.

Here's a direct link to the document to view or download:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/14AWGsj8rXkBz-GA5ULFNXwYzomrCENky/view>

The Native Plant Signs project started out in the winter of 2012. I wanted to create standardized signs for our chapter plant sales with all the same types of information for each species. I used the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's [Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat and Conservation Landscaping Chesapeake Bay Watershed](#) as my information source in addition to the [Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](#) (LBJWC) database.

I also asked my VNPS colleagues for photos of the various plants and they obliged with wonderful photographs. They also offered their significant collective knowledge in proofing and fact checking the work. You may recognize the names of our contributors among the cited photographs, Laura Beaty, Margaret Chatham, Bob and Ginny Yacovissi, Rochelle Bartolomie, Marilyn Drucker, Leon Molye, Jan and Gaylan Meyer, Nancy Vehrs, Jeanne Kadet, Roberta Day and Fritz Flohr Reynolds.

Any missing photos I filled in from the LBJWC website and online [Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora](#) (Gary P. Fleming). And then, just as I was finishing my work, the *Flora of Virginia* was published and I bought a copy for a final, authoritative fact check.

The signs turned out to be a helpful resource for the plant sales and I thought they would be useful to people online too, so I assembled them all into one PDF document alphabetized by scientific name. There are over 200 plant signs in the document included with handy details like their growing preferences and what creatures they attract. The document is also searchable, but unfortunately only by the scientific name, as the program doesn't recognize the fancier font I used for the common names.

Answers to Puzzle on Page 5

1 C; 2 F; 3 E; 4 B; 5 D (some twice compound); 6 G; 7 A Photos by Margaret Chatham (surprise!)

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PROPAGATION NEWS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

natives in their own landscapes to support insects that pass protein up the food chain to local and migratory birds as one of their many beneficiaries.

Much credit for understanding the connection between native plants and insects goes to Dr. Douglas Tallamy, Entomology Chair at the University of Delaware. In his book, Bringing Nature Home - Updated and Expanded, he quantifies the numbers of kinds of caterpillars various host plants can support. This scientific information remains an eye-opener to valuing native plants in nature. Pivotal is the realization that many popular non-native trees and shrubs, purchased at garden shops, are of little or no value to insects that can only digest the native plants they evolved with. This growing body of information is driving more homeowners to begin adding native plants to their gardens.

Our Propagation Crew is able to help the public and our chapter members because its members are very dedicated, knowledgeable and diverse in their native plant experiences. Most are Virginia Master Naturalists or Virginia Master Gardeners, or both. Some assist homeowners to make their yards more wildlife friendly with Audubon at Home Ambassador visits. One member manages the natural gardens surrounding Arlington Regional Library and still finds time to work at our beds every Wednesday morning from April through October, like the rest of us. Some go from our propagation beds to Earth Sangha's and/or Arlington County's nursery to continue similar volunteer work. Some help connect buyers at Earth Sangha or Long Branch plant sales with the best plants for their needs. Another is our chapter newsletter editor who also removes invasive plants from Turkey Run in the Spring and Fraser Preserve year-round, and gives nature walks and talks. Others both plant natives and remove invasives in Arlington and Fairfax County parks. Another member of the crew, a former Potowmack Chapter board member, makes all of our plant labels and attends many plant functions around the region.



YU-HSIN HSU STARTING THE PROCESS OF MAKING POTTING SOIL.
PHOTO BY LAURA BEATY

Other crew members plan and coordinate local plant rescues to save native plants, local eco-types from meeting a bulldozer. VNPS follows strict guidelines prohibiting the sale of rescued plants. So rescued plants are planted at public sites or private homes, and grown for their seeds for later propagation.

On top of all the native plant-related public volunteer work performed by our crew, most of them also commit time to the native plant habitats in their own yards. This has been a challenging year for all gardeners due to our ongoing drought. Keeping our potted plants watered and alive through the drought required additional work days for watering this year. And, who can forget the number of days that topped 90 degrees—a record-breaking year.

New volunteers are always welcomed at the beds, whether they know a Dandelion from a Spring Beauty or not. In fact, some new volunteers join us to learn about native plants: there's no better way to acquaint yourself with all stages of plant growth from seedling to seed-set, both above and below ground level. They learn plenty in a short time from ongoing activities at the beds: weeding, potting, dividing, planting, seed tray preparations and watering. As it turns out, everyone has something to offer.

Most amazing to many of the crew is how knowledgeable our buyers are becoming. They are starting to ask for plants that host specific butterfly caterpillars, knowing the importance of that relationship. Many are seeking a list of plants that will supply nectar and pollen throughout the growing season for a variety of pollinators, from early Spring into November. We have been providing additional native honeysuckle plants, *Lonicera sempervirens*, for a growing number of buyers who are substituting them for hummingbird feeders for a better source of nutrition that doesn't require frequent cleaning and sterilization. Many times we have to do some extra research in order to answer their questions. Most encouraging for us are those individuals and members determined to reduce their lawn size to provide additional space for native plants or to replace long-spreading beds of English Ivy with native plants.



WORK AROUND THE POTTING TABLE.
PHOTO BY LAURA BEATY

Fall plant sales are the highest ever, leading us to hope that gardeners are learning the truth about the best time to plant—the Fall. The ground is workable and will remain warm until January, giving plants a fighting chance to get roots well settled into the soil before it freezes. The Propagation Crew wishes you a Happy Fall Planting Season and looks forward to serving you next year. And if you would like to join us for next year's adventures in native plant propagation, contact me at laurabeaty@mac.com.



Thank You, Roberta Day!

For — how many years? — of service as Potowmack Chapter's Publications Chair, keeping track of the various information pamphlets, fliers, books, booklets, cards, and setting them out on the back table at all our programs. Roberta has stepped down from this position, but she stands ready to train her replacement — you? This is an unelected position on the Potowmack Chapter's Board of Directors, that keeps its holder in touch with all the Chapter's doings. If you would like to try this position, contact President Alan Ford at 703-732-5291 or alanscapes@gmail.com.

PHOTO BY MARK MURPHY

More Compound Leaves: how many can you identify?

These are all local trees, but not necessarily natives. Can you match names with pictures? Answers on page 2.

1 Boxelder, *Acer negundo*

4 Yellowwood, *Cladrastis kentuckea*

6 Goldenraintree, *Koelreuteria paniculata*

2 Red Buckeye, *Aesculus pavia*

5 Honey Locust, *Gleditsia triacanthos*

7 Elderberry, *Sambucus canadensis*

3 Mockernut Hickory, *Carya tomentosa*



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Word of the Month: Awn



Awn: a slender, bristle-like appendage, usually on the tip of a lemma or glume of a grass. Lemma or glume, you ask? Each grass floret (single flower) may be surrounded by four leaf-like or sepal-like growths. From the outside in, there may be two glumes, a lemma and a palea. Not all grasses have awns, but on some grasses the awns are very conspicuous. It is the awns that make Bottlebrush Grass (*Elymus hystrix* shown at left) easy to identify.

Some awns deter browsing animals from eating the grass seeds. Other awns are twisted, and change shape with changes in humidity to dig their attached seeds into the ground.

Photo by Margaret Chatham.