Early Summer

POTOWMACK NEWS

Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

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How Vines Climb: Rootlets

By Margaret Chatham

English ivy (Hedera helix) left and Poison ivy (Toxicodendron radicans) right. English ivy leaves are growing on small, young vines; Poison ivy leaves are out of sight on branch ends. All photos in this issue by Margaret Chatham.

"Always be wary of vines that are hairy." That's the mantra to avoid contact with Poison Ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*) vines in the woods. The "radicans" in its botanic name means "rooting,"

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Upcoming

Who knows? The Potowmack Chapter doesn't normally schedule talks during the summer. Fall talks will take place on the usual schedule, in the form of Zoom meetings if we cannot physically get together at the Green Spring Gardens Horticulture Center (or Huntley Meadows for September). Annual meeting Sunday, November 15.

Walks: Nothing firm yet, but until physical walks become possible again, we may try virtual walks. Watch for announcements or check the website.

If you go out on your own (county trails are still open if you can find a place to park) and want help with plant identification, take a picture (show as much of the plant as you can: leaves as well as flower!) and post it to **iNaturalist.org** (free download) for assistance.

All events are free and open to the public. Walks require preregistration. For email notices of upcoming events, subscribe to https://vnps.groups.io/g/potowmack. Or send a blank email to potowmack+subscribe@vnps.groups.io

Manage your VNPS Membership Online

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Yahoo Groups [vnps-pot] has moved to Groups.io

The Potowmack Chapter has moved the Yahoo Groups [vnps-pot] email list to Groups.io, a replacement for Yahoo Groups. The Yahoo group is now closed, so please send all future email notices, discussion items, questions, etc. to potowmack@vnps.groups.io

The reasons are many, including that Yahoo no longer hosts message archives. Yahoo stopped offering customer support for Yahoo Groups some time ago, and there has been no public statement about the future of Yahoo Groups. Groups.io also offers better features and is easier to use - plus no advertisements.

All of the old [vnps-pot] Yahoo Group content has been copied to Groups.io (messages, photos, etc.) and of course the list of subscribers (members). You won't have to do anything to continue receiving emails from the new group at Groups.io.

To access the new Potowmack archives and other content and to join the group, visit https://vnps.groups.io/g/potowmack.

VNPS Potowmack Chapter Budget

At the January, 2020, meeting of the Chapter Board of Directors, the Board revised the budget passed at the annual meeting in November, 2019, to better reflect reality as it was then. You can see both the budget as passed and the budget as amended at https://vnps.org/potowmack/?s=budget . Of course with no programs for a couple of months, no plant sales, no walks, no interns, the budget as envisioned for this year bears little resemblance to what is now happening.

Native Plant Sales

Alas, native plant sales! But there are still options:

Earth Sangha will deliver plants to your door in northern Virginia if you go to their website to choose plants at earthsangha.org, then order by email to Matt Bright mbright@earthsangha.org and pay when you get your bill by email.

Nature By Design nature-by-design.com also has a long list of native plants on its website. You can call 703-683-GROW or email to make an appointment to visit the nursery, or for curbside pick-up, or delivery.

If/when VNPS can again sell plants, we'll send out an announcement.

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Submissions to *Potowmack News* may be sent to The Editor at vnps.pot@gmail.com

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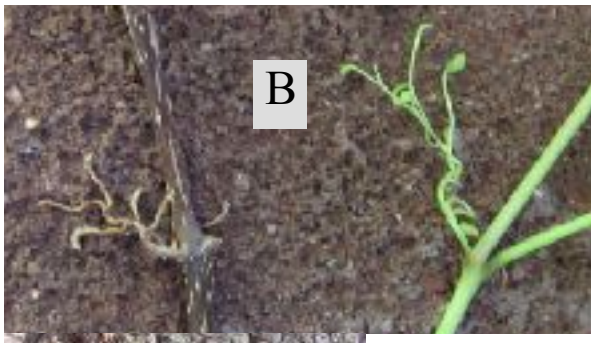
describing the rootlets that allow it to climb a tree trunk — or a house wall. But as is often the case, the same useful adaptation has been discovered by several plant genera. So not all "hairy" vines are Poison Ivy.

In our area, Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissis quinquefolia*), English Ivy (**Hedera helix* and/or **Hedera hibernica* — distinguishing between these two requires using magnification to look at the shape of the hairs on the bottoms of young leaves, so I'll be lazy and call them all English Ivy), and Winter Creeper (**Euonymus fortunei*) are all woody vines that use rootlets to climb. Obviously, the easiest way to tell them apart is by their leaves. Both Poison Ivy (three leaflets together) and Virginia Creeper (five leaflets together) are deciduous, while Winter Creeper and English Ivy (both with non-compound leaves) are evergreen. But when you see a substantial vine climbing by rootlets with leaves invisible in the canopy, or multiple vines on the same tree, how can you tell who's who?

Need I say that native, deciduous Poison Ivy and Virginia Creeper do no harm to the trees they grow on, and feed the birds with their fruits, while non-native, evergreen English ivy and Winter Creeper contribute to winter tree blow-downs, and don't give our birds the nutrition they need? Not all vines are bad for our environment: "Kill a Vine; Save a Tree" is best applied to non-native vines.

Poison Ivy's rootlets are the finest and most numerous of any of these vines. Sometimes, as in the photo on page 1, they are reddish. On old vines their color is darker, and their distribution may get patchy (A). Their texture remains fine, and they can point in any direction.



Young Virginia Creeper vines grow branched tendrils with adhesive pads at their tips to grip the surface they're climbing (B). More mature vines develop thicker rootlets than Poison Ivy that grow farther out across the side of a tree, sometimes giving the vine as a whole a flattened look (C). Older vines sometimes lose their grip on tree bark and swing out from the trunk while still attached higher up the tree.

The green bark (D) of young Winter Creeper gradually disappears under a thick growth of bristly

brown rootlets as the vine grows thicker. It grows long horizontal branches low enough to be easily seen.

Young English Ivy vines grow rootlets in the direction of the surface they're climbing, white and tender at first (E) but becoming hard and brown within a year (F). With more age, they sprout in all directions, as seen in the photo on page 1.

Showy Orchis, *Galearis spectabilis*

By Margaret Chatham

I have been spending a lot of time at Fraser Preserve, a Nature Conservancy property at the north end of Springvale Road in Great Falls, all by myself, pulling Garlic Mustard (**Alliaria petiolata*), Japanese Barberry (**Berberis thunbergii*) and other invasive exotic plants. Descriptions of the site from 1978-1982 speak of a rich flora that the deer had largely eaten up by the time I first visited it in 1998. TNC has arranged for bow-hunting in the winter for four years now, and with fewer deer, some native plants are returning: what should be common species, like Mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*) or Arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*).

Even in 1978, there was no mention of Showy Orchis, *Galearis spectabilis*, at Fraser. Suddenly this year, it has appeared, not just once, but several times — and something seems to be following me as I discover them, eating the flowers, though often not finishing off the leaves. Well, I should admit that someone else found one last year, and posted photos of it to iNaturalist. I've hunted unsuccessfully all over the area where he said it was — did the deer get there first? All this made me wonder about the life pattern of Showy Orchis: does it typically take a year off after blooming, or should you expect to find it in the same place year after year? Who eats it? Who pollinates it? I looked through all my relevant books and found detailed descriptions of how to identify the plant, but little else. Poking around on the internet found me some more, sometimes contradictory information.

Showy Orchis, like all orchids, needs a mycorrhizal associate (crutch?) to get started. Its partner is in the genus *Ceratobasidium*. It may spend 11 years as a protocorm, wholly dependent on its fungus, growing underground, before there's anything to be seen on the surface. In Minnesota, it may take 15 years to grow from germination to blooming size. An established patch of Showy Orchis may be found year after year in the same spot, with its *Ceratobasidium* in the soil right next to it, but perhaps missing from a few inches away.

Unlike some orchids, Showy Orchis rewards its pollinators with nectar in the long white spur at the back of the flower. It is most often pollinated by long-tongued bumblebees, and yes, deer are also attracted to the sweet flowers. Skunks may dig up the fleshy roots for a meal. — Time to be glad there are so few skunks in Fairfax County?

What looks like a green stem holding up the flower is actually its ovary.

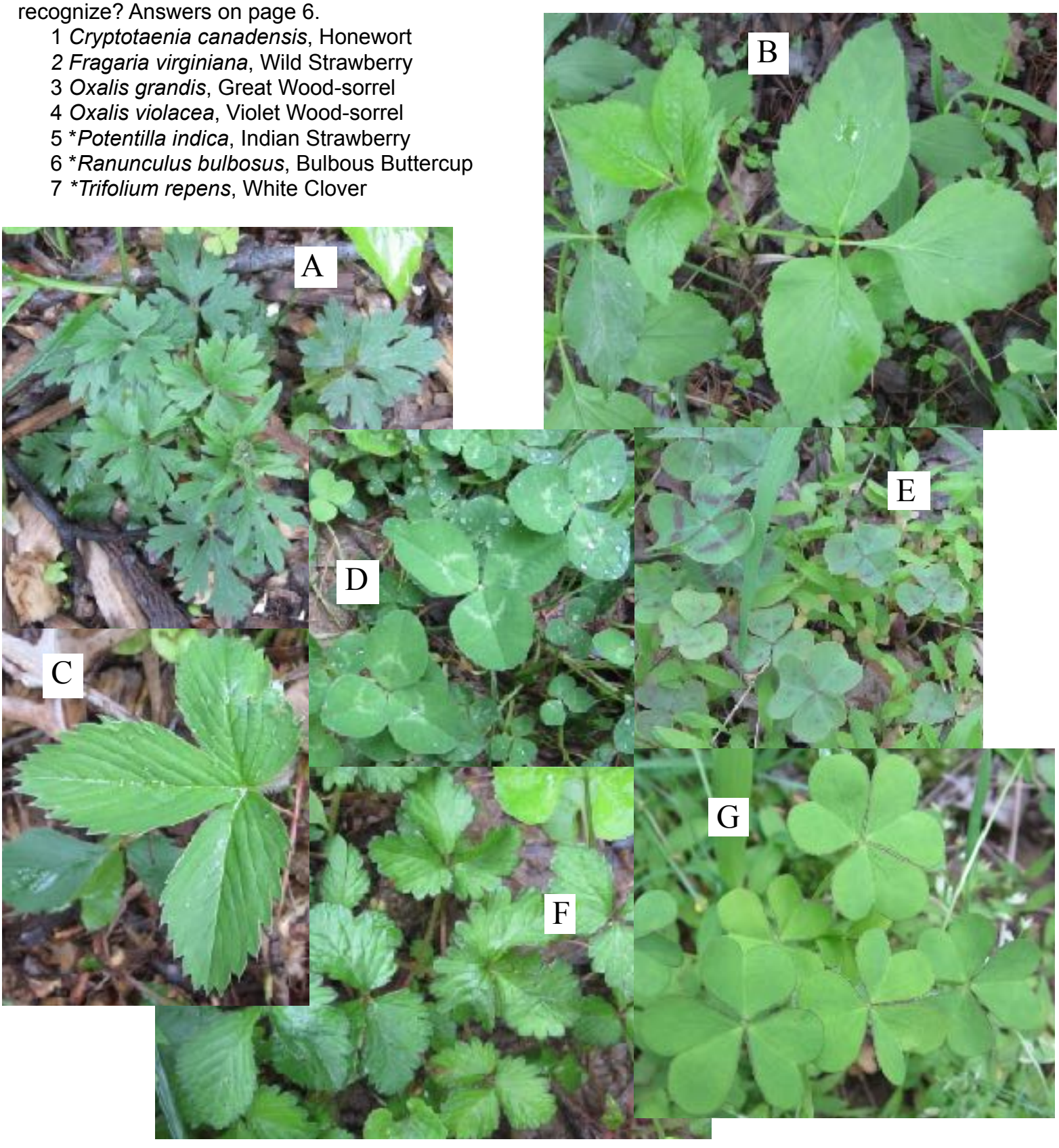
There is some dissent about where it best grows: many websites say it needs an undisturbed location with moist, base-rich soil and little competition. But there are reports that the best places to see it in the Great Smoky Mountains are highly disturbed sites along trails or next to parking lots; others say it likes acidic soils; and two of the patches I found were in an area with lots of Garlic Mustard, exactly opposite to what one would expect.

If you want to visit Fraser Preserve to see what you can see in these days of closed parks and social distancing, I recommend that you go on a weekday. Parking is limited. If the 6-car lot is full, please go out and park on Allenwood, and don't churn up any more of the roadside in the Preserve. Even if Showy Orchis doesn't require an undisturbed site, neither it nor anything else can grow under a car's tire.

Leaves of Three: Herbaceous Plants

Of course, these are not the only herbaceous plants around here with three leaflets. Non-natives indicated with an asterisk. How many do you recognize? Answers on page 6.

1 *Cryptotaenia canadensis*, Honewort
2 Fragaria virginiana, Wild Strawberry
3 *Oxalis grandis*, Great Wood-sorrel
4 *Oxalis violacea*, Violet Wood-sorrel
5 **Potentilla indica*, Indian Strawberry
6 **Ranunculus bulbosus*, Bulbous Buttercup
7 **Trifolium repens*, White Clover



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Word of the Month: **Stipule**

Stipule: one of a pair of leaf-like appendages at the base of the petiole of some plants' leaves. Their shapes can help identify roses and stemmed violets. At left, stipules of Swamp Rose (*Rosa palustris*) and the "eyelash" stipules of Multiflora Rose (**Rosa multiflora*). Below, the frilly stipules of Cream Violet (*Viola striata*) and two sets of the plainer stipules of Downy Yellow Violet (*Viola pubescens*).
Photos by Margaret Chatham

Answers for Herbaceous Leaves of Three:
1 B; 2 C (sharply dentate leaf edges); 3 G (can you see the thin purple rim around the leaf?); 4 E; 5 F (crenate leaf edges); 6 A; 7 D