AUTUMN

POTOWMACK NEWS

Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

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The Virginia Native Plant Garden at Green Spring Gardens

By Brenda Skarphol

SWEETBAY MAGNOLIA (*MAGNOLIA VIRGINIANA*) PHOTO M. CHATHAM.

The Virginia Native Plant Garden begins with sunny borders and stretches down through shady, sloped woods to Turkeycock Run and beyond. The garden features a diverse collection of native plants found in many areas of Virginia. Much of the garden has a naturalistic design and is maintained in an eco-friendly fashion. More natural woodland areas extend from the Virginia Native Plant Garden bridge to the forest below the lower pond. This garden is extensively used to educate children and adults about native plants and our natural world.

The native plant garden receives regular garden maintenance. The Horticulture Center side of Turkeycock Run has been heavily planted and receives some supplemental water during dry periods, although irrigation levels have been reduced, with resulting changes in plant composition. Planting in the sunny upper area of the garden behind the Vegetable Garden started in 1990. Many native plant species originally grew on the native plant garden site, but so did extensive stands of non-native invasive plants. Invasive plant removal started in 1989 and continues to this day. Deer damage is also a management challenge.

The natural woodland in the upland areas of the Virginia Native Plant Garden is moist, well-drained hardwood forest: the official classification is Mesic Mixed Hardwood Forest of the Northern Coastal Plain and Piedmont (http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/natural-communities/nctiid). Typical plants in this community include American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), white oak (*Quercus alba*), northern red oak (*Q. rubra*),

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Upcoming Events

Caring for the Land

Thur, Nov 10. 7:30-9 pm
Green Spring Gardens Horticulture Center

In 2002, Jim Hurley turned his natural history focus from birding to working on the plants and habitats that support birds. Beginning with his own back yard, Jim then expanded to his neighborhood; County parks; a large field and forest property next to Shenandoah National Park; the 10-county region of the newly-formed Blue Ridge PRISM, Virginia's first cooperative weed management area; work with state and federal agencies; and legislative efforts to change the Noxious Weed Law and secure state funding to battle a serious threat to Virginia's landscapes: Wavyleaf Grass.

At the center of his current work is stewardship of Rosebrook Farm with his partner Susan Roth. The various pieces of Jim's ecological journey have been realized on their property in Greene County, with five stream ravines, a 60-foot massive greenstone waterfall, fescue fields being converted to native warm season grass meadows, dry oak-hickory ridges, basic mesic forests, and alluvial bottomlands, all with their own challenges.

Along the way, Jim has been inspired by many, frustrated at times by daunting political and organizational challenges, and looking to find more allies.

Charles Smith

Thur, Jan. 12, 2017. 7:30-9 pm
Arlington Central Library Auditorium

Start the new year right with an informative talk about local natural history

All events are free and open to the public. Walks require preregistration. Join our listserve at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/vnps-pot to receive notices with walk registration links

Where You Can Whack Some Invasive Exotic Plants

Falls Church Habitat Restoration Team

Help restore the local ecosystem in city parks. Remove invasives and plant natives that will benefit local birds and butterflies. For more information contact Melissa Teates at 703-538-6961 or melanite@verizon.net

Arlington County's Remove Invasive Plants (RiP) Program

Help Rescue Arlington parks from alien plant invaders! Please bring your own tools. For more information, contact Sarah Archer at 703-228-1862 or sarcher@arlingtonva.us

Reston Association's Habitat Heroes Program

Help restore local wildlife habitat through invasive plant removal and replanting with native plants For more information, contact Ha Brock at 703-435-7986 or ha@reston.org

Fairfax County's Invasive Management Area (IMA) Program

Help remove invasive plants and learn about new invasive species. For more information, contact Leslie Gerhard at 703-324-8681 or leslie.gerhard@fairfaxcounty.gov

Word of the Month: Culm

The hollow or pithy stem of a grass, sedge, or rush, like this seed stalk of Virginia Wild Rye, *Elymus virginicus.*

Photo by Margaret Chatham

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Mosses: What's in a Name?

By Gaylan Meyer

There have been several articles in this newsletter explaining the useful understanding of the derivation of scientific names. The same can be applied to the English or common names given to various plants. I was especially struck by this phenomenon when studying mosses and thought I might share a few of these. It is sometimes easier to recognize a species in the field if you can remember a meaningful and descriptive English name. Since most mosses that I've come across are native, perhaps recognizing them in your yard may entice you to keep them as part of your native landscape. For ease of retention, I'll group the mosses where possible by a common attribute.

The first grouping's common attribute is that they are found in Donna Murphy's splendid native yard. Saffron Moss (*Ditrichum pallidum*) is named after the bright orange-yellow (saffron) stalk of its sporophyte (fruiting body). If you run across a short (3-6 mm) green moss with tall (1-4 cm), bright yellow sporophytes growing in disturbed soil or partly shaded wooded soil, it's probably Saffron Moss. Another striking moss in Donna's yard is Silver Moss (*Bryum argenteum*), aptly named after the silvery tips of its minute (1 mm) leaves. This short velvety moss forms a turf in urban areas on just about any substrate.

SILVER MOSS, *BRYUM ARGENTEUM*

Like Saffron Moss, the sporophytes of a couple other mosses have meaningful names and form another logical grouping. You can probably guess that Apple Moss *(Bartramia pomiformis*) has young capsules (the part of the fruiting body containing the spores) that are bright green globes resembling little apples. It can be found on soil or rocks in damp shaded sites. A subgrouping of several mosses with distinctive sporophytes is the Haircap Mosses: Common Haircap Moss (*Polytrichum commune*), Oak Haircap Moss (*Polytrichastrum ohioense*), and Mountain Haircap Moss (*Polytrichastrum pallidisetum*). All of these mosses have a hairy hood (cap) covering the immature capsule. The first is pretty common, found in moist soil while the second is found in oak hardwood forests and the last is found at high elevations in the mountains.

MOUNTAIN HAIRCAP MOSS, *POLYTRICHASTRUM PALLIDISETUM*

The entire gestalt of the moss plant forms a third grouping for a couple of other common mosses. Many people recognize Pincushion Moss (*Leucobryum glaucum*) since it looks just like a round, white-green pincushion. Growing on mounds of decomposed wood, it rarely has sporophytes (they would mar the smooth pincushion surface!)

PINCUSHION MOSS, *LEUCOBRYUM GLAUCUM*

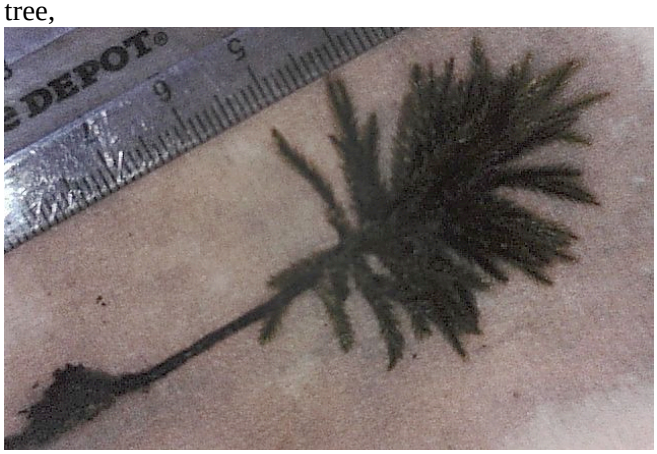
Oil Spill Moss (*Platygyrium repens*) falls in this category because its short growth form looks like someone spilled oil on a log, leaving a roundish splotch that's dark green in the middle and lighter around the edges. It is very common, loving to grow on rotted logs and tree trunks.

The last and largest of my artificial groupings is based on the shape of individual moss stems. The first subgrouping is the Starburst Mosses: Wavy Starburst Moss (*Atrichum altercristatum*), Slender Starburst Moss (*A. angustatum*), and Crispy Starburst Moss (*A. crispulum*). The individual plants all look like a starburst when viewed from the top. The Wavy one has rippled (wavy) leaves while the Slender one has very narrow (slender) leaves and the Crispy one's

leaves curl tightly around the stem when dry (crispy).

SLENDER STARBURST MOSS, *ATRICHUM ANGUSTATUM*

Then there are three mosses that form their own subgroups: American Tree Moss (Climacium americanum) is a tall moss (to 9 cm) that looks like a miniature pine tree,



AMERICAN TREE MOSS, *CLIMACIUM AMERICANUM*

Yellow Yarn Moss (*Anomodon rostratus*) looks like a carpet made of yellow yarn**,**

YELLOW YARN MOSS, *ANOMODON ROSTRATUS*

and Delicate Fern Moss (*Thuidium delicatulum*) has leaves that are twice to three times pinnate resembling fine delicate fern leaves.

DELICATE FERN MOSS, *THUIDIUM DELICATULUM*

A last subgrouping of mosses is the Broom Mosses: Boulder Broom Moss (*Dicranum fulvum*) grows on....boulders, Windswept Broom Moss (*D. scoparium*) has all the plant tops gently curving in one direction like the wind blew it that way, and Curly Broom Moss has the plant tops pointing every which way (curly). Naturally all three have individual plants that look like the individual straws in a broom.

The above listing is by no means comprehensive as there are many more mosses with descriptively apt English names (and a few that only a moss lover would appreciate). Also, there are many more characteristics to consider when trying to narrow a moss down to a specific species. However, the above groupings should give you a head start when trying to identify a moss found on a Fall/Winter hike when most of the flowers are gone.

ALL MOSS PHOTOS BY GAYLAN MEYER

GREEN SPRING CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

tuliptree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), American holly (*Ilex opaca*), and Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*).

Bottomland forest communities occur in the stream valley of the Virginia Native Plant Garden. They are a mixture of approximately 3 community types (http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/natural-communities/ncpic). These communities occur along small streams and aren't flooded or saturated that long. Typical plants in these communities at Green Spring are red maple (*Acer rubrum*), green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*), lizard's tail (*Saururus cernuus*), tuliptree, spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*), willow oak (*Q. phellos*), pin oak (*Q. palustris*), and wood reedgrass (*Cinna arundinacea*).

A number of wetlands are found in the stream valley of Turkeycock Run. There is a Coastal Plain / Outer Piedmont Acidic Seepage Swamp along the boardwalk going to the lower pond. (http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/natural-communities/ncpiiie) Typical plants in this area at Green Spring include red maple, sour gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*), sweetbay magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*), possumhaw viburnum (*Viburnum nudum*) and cinnamon fern (*Osmunda cinnamomea* or *Osmundastrum cinnamomeum*). These communities are commonly referred to as a Magnolia Bog

(now a globally rare plant community) due to abundant sweetbay magnolia. This site was probably much more open historically, since some indicator species remain. The tree canopy is now closed, turning it into a seepage swamp**.** There are other springs between the native plant garden bridge and the boardwalk. In addition, a small hidden seepage area arises below the Shrub Border at the bottom of the steep slope in back of the Virginia Native Plant Garden: skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*), royal fern (*Osmunda spectabilis*), and New York fern (*Thelypteris noveboracensis* or *Parathelypteris noveboracensis*) grow in this area.

Plant information sheets for plants with spring, summer, and fall interest in the Virginia Native Plant Garden are available on the Green Spring website under Gardening (http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/greenspring/gardening.htm) and in a binder in the Green Spring Library. A single copy for quick reference is kept in the mailbox in the garden. Eight additional information sheets with information about native plants are also available, and the vine information sheet lists several native species. Nine of these information sheets have been updated in 2016 and more are almost ready.

Stop by to visit the Virginia Native Plant Garden – there is beauty to be found in all seasons!

Brenda Skarphol also reports:

Virginia Native Plant Garden Intern

Felipe Mesa-Morales was the intern for the Virginia Native Plant Garden and natural areas at Green Spring Gardens in 2016. The Potowmack Chapter paid for his native plant internship, as they have generously done at Green Spring since the early 1990s. Felipe has a dual major in biology and public health at the College of William and Mary and will graduate in 2017. He thanks the Potowmack Chapter for funding this internship and for the opportunity to gain valuable knowledge and experience. Felipe worked with curatorial horticulturist Brenda Skarphol, numerous garden volunteers, with gardeners James Van Meter and Andrew Owen, plant records intern Jeff Hill, and other staff at Green Spring. Felipe said that he learned about native plants, weeds and invasive plants, and restoring and preserving natural and historic areas. He weeded and potted up plants in the Potowmack Chapter propagation beds, as well as assisting with preparation for the Spring Garden Day sale. He assisted garden visitors and answered questions

Felipe helped replant areas that were impacted by the replacement of the bridge across Turkeycock Run. The Friends of Green Spring budgeted $500 to purchase native plants for the native plant garden, and the Potowmack Chapter donated some plants for garden restoration. Felipe also transplanted plants from other gardens to the impacted area, including plants that were moved out of the upcoming roadbed in 2015. (The largest number of plants that were moved out are now in the Right Bioretention Area of the Entrance Garden). The soil in the former roadbed is compacted and contains crushed bluestone, which slows down planting.

Several showy plants were planted on the Left Side of the Virginia Native Plant Garden (along the Fruit Garden) to draw one's eye to the garden and serve as a focal point. He helped plant liatris (*Liatris spicata* 'Kobold'), butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), and showy goldenrod (*Solidago speciosa*) where gro-low sumac (*Rhus aromatica* 'Gro-Low') was removed, and more Zagreb threadleaf coreopsis (*Coreopsis verticillata* 'Zagreb') and rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*). He helped with shrub and tree pruning, and stone work in various areas and learned how to handle utility vehicles and the tractor. He removed weeds and invasive plants from all areas including the more natural areas along the stream and the seepage swamp (Magnolia Bog remnant) by the boardwalk. Garden maintenance tasks also included watering, and mulching.

The native plant garden is rich in wildlife and Felipe commonly noted animals such as insects, spiders, and snakes. We had some special insect excitement one August day. While digging up invasive porcelain berry vine, I suddenly saw a large, hidden yellowjacket wasp nest (the bald-faced hornet but not a true hornet) and got stung several times as I escaped by running over the riprap drainage – much excitement! T*he Kaufman Field Guide to Insects of North America* states that they are a beneficial species that kills a great number of flies and sometimes other yellowjackets. Felipe had his own adventure petting a cat on his day off while visiting Green Spring – the cat bit him and he had to get a rabies booster shot (he had some rabies shots before for living overseas for an extended period). Felipe didn't get too excited about it and thank goodness rabies shots are much better than they used to be!

FELIPE MESA-MORALES, PHOTO BY BRENDA SKARPHOL

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Oh, Deer! (What won't you eat?)

Yes, if the deer are hungry enough, they'll eat anything. But Wingstem (*Verbesina alternifolia*, shown here) and its cousin Crownbeard (*Verbesina occidentalis*, very similar but with opposite leaves) often grow unmolested. Perhaps it is the rough surface and leathery texture of the leaves that discourage the deer. In moist, sunny places, Wingstem can reach 8 or 9 feet; with more shade and less moisture it may stop at 4 feet. In either case, its flowers are fragrant when it blooms in August and September.

For more deer-resistant natives, see http://www.plantnovanatives.org/deer---native-plants.html

Photo by Margaret Chatham

If you would like to receive this newsletter (in full color!) electronically, contact Alan Ford at: amford@acm.org