

WILD NEWS

JANUARY MEETING

STARTING WILDFLOWER SEED

MONDAY, JAN. 17

7:30 P.M.

BETHEL CHURCH, MANASSAS



To a gardener January is the time for plans and dreams of beautiful spring and summer gardens. If you've tried wildflower gardening you know how difficult it is to find plants, and once found they are very expensive. The obvious solution is to start your own plants from seed.

At our January meeting Jackie Ralya, Propagation Committee Chairman, will demonstrate various seed starting processes. Jackie will explain how the seed can be grown without sophisticated greenhouse equipment — old pie plates, plastic bags, and a sunny window are all you need.

Many varieties of wildflowers are easily started from seed in late winter. The plants will reach bed-

ding size by April or May, and some perennials will bloom the first season.

An avid gardener, Jackie Ralya has a degree in horticulture with a specialty in propagation. She has been starting plants from seed for her own garden for several years. The tips Jackie will pass along apply to cultivated flower and vegetable seeds as well as wildflowers.

Bring the seed you've saved to exchange with other members. Also on the agenda for January (see separate articles) are election of officers and Virginia Wildflower Preservation Society chapter application. Our application will need 15 signatures — so show up at the meeting, sign, and become part of Virginia wildflower history!

DON'T BE LEFT OUT

If you haven't renewed your membership for the coming year please do so by February 1. The VWPS will publish a membership directory with the names of all members of our chapter, and we want the list to be complete.

Call Nancy Arrington, 368-8431, if you've forgotten what your renewal fee is, or if you aren't sure about your membership status.

BUSY BLOIS

Society member Marion Blois has given a talk on pollination to the Prince William Beekeepers Assn. and presented a wildflower slide program to the residents of Merrywood during January. She is scheduled for a workshop with Girl Scout leaders and a slide program on NVCC's nature trail for Centennial Garden Club.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Duane York, chairman, announces meeting of the Wildflower Heritage Committee on Mon., Jan. 24th, 7:30 p.m. at Bethel Church. Committee needs locations of wildflowers, especially rare ones, from all members so they can be charted on a county map and locations verified in the spring.

Claude Clemmons is scheduled to present a program on herbs at our March 21st meeting.

WILDFLOWER-OF-THE-MONTH

Want to stay warm? Curl up next to this amazing early spring wildflower which generates heat up to 63° F. above the surrounding air temperature.



JANUARY SEED EXCHANGE

Many species of wildflower seed were collected by members during the fall and summer and will be available for exchange or purchase for a small fee at the January meeting.

If you're unable to attend the meeting but would like seeds to start at home, call Nancy, 368-8431, or Elaine, 670-2347 to order the seed packets.

Seeds which will be available include:

Cardinal Flower	Jack-in-the-Pulpit
Blue-eyed Grass	Wild Pea
Butterfly Weed	Yellow Star Grass
Black-eyed Susan	Wild Phlox
Bleeding Heart	Wild Geranium
Deptford Pink	Coreopsis
Trumpet Vine	Evening Primrose



CONTRIBUTE TO VA.'s NON-GAME WILDLIFE FUND

Over \$370,000 has been contributed to Virginia's non-game wildlife fund. Again this year concerned taxpayers can contribute a portion of their Va. tax refund to this fund — just check line 20A (10A on short form) of your state tax return.

The Virginia Game Commission is using the money for projects throughout the state with emphasis on endangered and threatened species. Conway Robinson Memorial Forest was visited by members of the Commission and is being considered for funding as a "Watchable Wildlife" project.

Federal funding cuts have forced states to pay for their own wildlife programs. Virginia's program got off to a good start last year, and the Commission hopes it will be even more successful this year.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Nancy Gray, chairman of the Nominating Committee, and committee members Marion Blois and Jean Chitren will recommend election of temporary officers to serve as permanent officers for the coming year. Nominations from the floor will be accepted and are encouraged!

The Nominating Committee's slate:

President - Nancy Arrington
Vice president - Elaine Haug
Secretary - Roxetta Wyer
Treasurer - Nicky Staunton

MASTER GARDENER'S PROGRAM

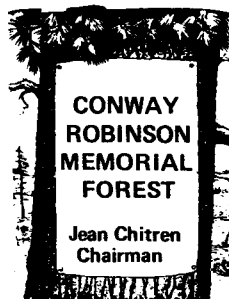
The Prince William Extension service is sponsoring The Master Gardener's Program — 50 hours of instruction covering every aspect of gardening. Topics include Home Vegetable and Fruit Production, Woody Plants, Soils, Diseases, Foliage Plants, Morphology and Physiology of Plants, Diagnosing Plant Problems, Integrated Pest Management and more.

Classes are taught by experts from VPI and other extension specialists.

Classes will be held Wednesday and Friday mornings, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., March 2 through April 22 at the Independent Hill School Board office complex.

The course is free; however, participants are required to volunteer 50 hours of community service in gardening related activities. Ed Milhous, County Extension agent (and Wildflower Society member) and organizer of the program locally is very flexible in how the volunteer hours can be spent. Wildflower Society activities qualify as do time spent helping out at the Extension Office, assisting neighbors with horticultural problems, and coordinating 4-H programs.

Call the Extension Office, 369-9262, for an application form, for more information, and to find out what "Morphology" is.



KEMPER TRAIL

In case you missed the article and photo in The Journal Messenger . . .

A portion of CRMF's 6-mile network of nature trails was dedicated to Joe Kemper at a ceremony held at the state forest in November.

Kemper served as Prince William County's first full-time forest warden for about 20 years until his retirement in the early 1970's.

The 3/4-mile trail runs through a planting of white pines which was jokingly named "Kemper's Forest" soon after the seedlings were planted under Kemper's supervision in the early 1950's.

The dedication ceremony was arranged by Prince William Chief Forest Warden, Tom Davidson, Kemper's successor. Also on hand were Assistant District Forester John Sharvis of Charlottesville, Loudoun:

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SKUNK CABBAGE

MARION BLOIS
Ass't. Professor of Biology, NVCC



The maroon and green hood of skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*) is one of the first signs of early spring. In swamps and bogs along our East Coast these leathery pointed cowls begin pushing through the snow or swamp "muck" as early as mid-February. You may notice snow patches melting as the sharp-pointed hoods begin to poke through the icy cover. How this amazing plant melts snow will be explained later — first some basics.

Skunk cabbage is a perennial member of the Araceae or arum family. Its distribution is from Nova Scotia to Florida and west to Minnesota and Iowa. Jack-in-the-pulpit and green dragon are two other members of this predominately tropical family native to our area. As with "Jacks" and green dragons, the actual flowers are numerous, small, and inconspicuous. They are imbedded in the spadix, a finger-like structure surrounded by a leathery cowl-like pointed hood, the spathe. This spathe is the most visible part of the "flower", correctly referred to as the inflorescence. The spadix is a brownish-yellow structure with an ovid head in which the flowers are studded.

The flowers on a single spadix are either male or female at any given time. Even though this family is a monocotons one, the flower parts are in 4's rather than the usual 3's. The female flowers lack petals but do have fused sepals forming a calyx. The male flowers have four stamens. The female flowers in a single inflorescence develop first. With the maturing of female flowers, heat is produced in the spathe that will release a characteristic odor attracting potential pollinators — mainly flies and gnats. The heat generated may be as high as 36-63°F. above the surrounding air temperature. A constant temperature range of 70-72°F can be maintained inside the hood for two weeks or longer.

This family of plants is the only one known to turn on an "internal furnace" to release disagreeable (to the human nose!) odors that attract pollinators. This phenomenon was recorded as early as the late 1700's by the French naturalist Lamarck. As the insects are attracted to a hooded inflorescence they fly into a heated chamber with very slippery walls that will send them sliding to the area of the small flowers to either pick up pollen if male flowers are mature or transfer pollen if female ones are receptive. Insects such as bees, though not potential pollinators, have been seen entering skunk cabbage hoods—perhaps to warm up on a chilly early spring day!

The buds for the inflorescences are formed in autumn and may be visible then, but most appear in mid-Feb. and continue through April. The fruit, visible in autumn is a spongy mass up to six inches in diameter in which spherical seeds are imbedded.

The large cabbage-like leaves begin to appear like fat fingers by late spring. Lasting all summer, they may reach one foot in width borne on 2-4' stalks. Unlike other monocots, the veins of the leaves are in a netted pattern rather than parallel. The vast root system needed to secure the plant in the soft swamp muck makes transplanting very difficult. Once established, however, skunk cabbage is long-lived, estimated to thrive for up to a thousand years.

The scientific name of skunk cabbage, *Symplocarpus foetidus*, means "fetid compound fruit". The fruit type and the skunk-like smell produced when any part of the plant is crushed account for its appropriate scientific name. The smell has been characterized as a suspicion of skunk, putrid meat, and garlic.

The presence of crystals of calcium oxalate in the vegetative parts of skunk cabbage is typical of members of the arum family. These crystals cause a burning, peppery sensation if the plant is eaten raw. This characteristic and the cabbage- or tobacco-like leaves and showy hood have given rise to other common names such as stinking cabbage, parson-in-the-pellary, and pole-cat weed. Thoreau referred to skunk cabbage as "hermits of the bog."

This early potent of spring does not have the wide medicinal and edible uses of other wild plant species. However, the roots reportedly can be ground and mixed with honey to treat asthma and other chest ailments. A salve made from dried powdered root, mixed with a carrier, can be used to treat ringworm, rheumatism, and skin etchings. Indians supposedly used roots and leaves as a poultice to treat sores and swellings as well as to draw out thorns and stickers. The odor of crushed plant parts can be inhaled to relieve headaches. Young leaves can be par-boiled with several water changes and eaten as greens. A word of caution: false hellebore (*Veratrum viride*) often grows in the same swampy setting and vaguely resembles skunk cabbage. If eaten, violent poisoning can result.

In our area skunk cabbage can be found in swampy areas and along streams throughout the county. It grows at Locust Shade and Conway Robinson Forest and in other county parks.

C.R.M.F.

and Pr. Wm. Forester Dana Malone, Loudoun Chief Forest Warden Landon Compher, Fairfax Forester-Chief Forest Warden D.E. Sheads. Representing the Wildflower Society were Elaine Haug, Sharon Jones, and Nancy Arrington.

A handsome wooden trail marker designed by Davidson was unveiled during the ceremony. The components of the marker were carefully chosen to represent Kemper. The marker is made of pine and oak with an arrow of American Chestnut, "which is approximately the same age as Kemper," said Davidson. "It has been exposed to many years of weathering by the elements and shows it, but it remains useful for many years to come. As this board was hard to find, so is the type of man we're honoring here today," Davidson concluded.

We hope all Wildflower Society members will have a chance to see the wildflowers along Kemper Trail and throughout the forest during the walks we'll schedule there in the spring.

And we hope Joe Kemper who knows the secret hiding places of CRMF's rare beauties will lead some of our walks.

Prince William Wildflower Society
P. O. Box 462
Manassas, Virginia 22110



SKUNK CABBAGE

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This February keep your eyes and nose open for this strange, first-greeter of spring. Take time to become acquainted with and enjoy one of the most unusual and fascinating early spring wildflowers!



CONTEST WINNER

Virginia Bluebell was clearly the winner in our "Favorite Wildflower" contest. The flower will be used as a logo for our group, and special emphasis will be put on its propagation, cultivation, and protection in Prince William County.

Spring Flora, popular spring wildflower course taught by Marion Blois will be offered at NVCC's Manassas Campus again this spring. Classes will be held Thursday evenings with some weekend field trips. More details next issue.

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