

PRINCE WILLIAM WILDFLOWER SOCIETY, A Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

NOVEMBER MEETING

Roadside Wildflower Plantings in Virginia

Monday, November 20, 7:30 p.m.

Bethel Lutheran Church, Sudley Rd. & Plantation Ln, Manassas

Phil Baker, botanist and horticulturist in the Environmental Office of the Virginia Department of Transportation, Richmond, is our speaker for the November meeting. Mr. Baker will give a movie presentation showing what is being done and what can be done to introduce naturalized plantings of Virginia natives along our highways. He will also discuss the successes and shortcomings of Virginia's first year of wildflower plantings. Mr. Baker travels around the state advising officials and groups such as ourselves on ways to beautify our roadsides. Come and learn what we can do to help!

Regional Flora

Marion Blois Lobstein is offering Regional Flora, Bio. 277, at NVCC Manassas Campus next semester. Field trips for the winter and spring botany class are scheduled for February 10 and 25, March 4 and 18, April 1, 7, and 22, and May 5. For more information, call Marion, 368-0184, ext. 262.

Wildflower Seed

Wildflower seeds are available from the propagation committee. Species are packaged separately (no mixes) in small quantities and include many good garden and meadow perennials. Call Nancy Arrington, 368-8431, for a list of available species or to request specific species.

No December Board Meeting

There will be NO December Board meeting because of the holidays. Next Board meeting will be on Monday, February 18 at 7:30.

● Membership Renewal

A red dot on your mailing label means you need to renew your membership. An application is enclosed for your convenience. Please renew now — we want to keep you as a PWWS member and continue sending you the newsletter.

Next Meeting

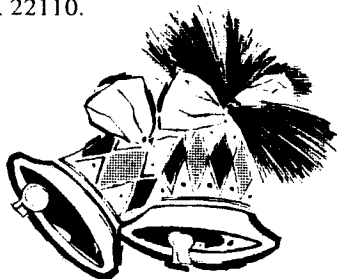
Mark your 1990 calendar for our next meeting:
Jan. 15, 7:30 p.m., Bethel Church, Manassas
Program: Members' Slide Show

Wildlife Art Show

Artists and craftsmen are invited to exhibit and sell original art works with a wildlife theme at the 15th Annual Wildlife Art and Photography Show sponsored by the Fairfax County Park Authority Conservation Division. The one-day indoor show is Sunday, March 11, 1990, 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at Wakefield Recreation Center, Annandale. Registration deadline is January 15. Call 941-1065 for forms and additional information.

Butterfly Information Available

Three handouts used with our Butterfly Gardening exhibit: a butterfly word search puzzle, a butterfly life stages sheet, and a butterfly gardening folder, are available. To request any or all, send a business-size SASE to PWWS Butterflies, P.O. Box 83, Manassas, VA 22110.



Winter Tree Hikes

Learn to identify local trees by their bark, buds and other characteristics. Participants should wear warm clothing and good walking shoes.

Sunday, Nov. 19, 8:00 a.m., Locust Shade Park,

Triangle. Hike will be about 1.5 mi. and will cover uneven terrain. Pre-registration is required, 221-8579.

Sunday, Dec. 3, 2:00 p.m., Potomac Overlook Regional Park, Arlington. Pre-registration is required, 528-5406.

WILD NEWS

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Deadline for the Jan.-Feb. issue is Jan. 1, 1990

FROM THE 

PRESIDENT

ALDEN B. BRADFORD

Nature has been kind to give us an extra long and extra warm Fall so we can be out enjoying the season. Jenifer and I took advantage of the weather and manned the PWWS booth at the Prince William Forest Park Family Fall Festival on October 14. We took our Butterfly Gardening display with handouts. The Festival was made up of environmental and conservation groups plus groups having special interests for children. The children especially enjoyed Nancy Vehr's word puzzle and Jocile Johnson's life stages explanation sheet. Events such as clogging, storytelling, sit down aerobics, and pumpkin carving were featured.

On October 26 PWWS members Jocile Johnson, Polly Jones, Jean Chitren, Jenifer and I attended the Prince William County Fair Appreciation Dinner given at the Nokesville Fire Hall. We enjoyed the home cooked dinner, music, door-prizes, and slide show recapping events at the Fair. It was nice that PWWS was included in the "thank you" for all Fair volunteers.

Marion Blois Lobstein led a Marsh Ecology field trip to Chincoteague, Virginia, the last weekend in October. Several PWWS members interested in wetlands and wildfowl including Helen Walter, Jocile, and Polly attended. Weekend events included visits to the Wildlife Refuge, nesting ponds, salt marshes, dunes, and beaches. We saw many species of waterfowl including Canada geese, egrets, gulls, cormorants, ducks, and swans, and of special interest, an arriving flock of snow geese.

Marion showed us seaside goldenrod (shorter and stockier than the leggy meadow species) and the groundsel tree (covered with a white, downy seed mass that gave the illusion of blossoms). We also saw glasswort, sea lavender, sea oxeye, and marsh elder, and the dominant vegetation of the salt marsh *Spartina alterniflora*, a big, coarse grass and *Spartina patens*, a fine-textured, small grass. The glorious weather, wonderful fresh seafood, and good company made the weekend a special event. Many thanks to Marion!

On Friday, four of us toured the Wildfowl Trust of North America near Grasonville, MD, founded by VNPS member William Sladen. The Trust is located just past the Kent Narrows Bridge

Continued next page



ALUMROOT

Heuchera americana

MARION BLOIS LOBSTEIN

Associate Professor, Biology, NVCC

When you walk in the woods in the fall and winter, you do not see much ground cover of living leaves. Some of the few evergreen leaves you do find may be the handsome basal leaves of alumroot *Heuchera americana* which help add color and interest to the forest floor or a rock ledge this time of year. Alumroot, a member of the saxifrage family (Saxifragaceae) blooms from May until mid-summer. Its habitat is dry, rocky ground and dry woods with a range from Connecticut to Georgia west to Michigan.

The genus name of *Heuchera* was named in honor of the eighteenth century botanist J.H. Heucher and the species name *americana* means "of america", both assigned by Linnaeus. (Another much rarer species, *H. pubescens*, is found in Prince William and Fauquier Counties. In this article the common name alumroot refers to *H. Americana*). Other names for alumroot are American sanicle, cliff weed, ground maple, rock geranium, and split rock. Most of these refer to the shape of the leaf or the common growth site on rocks.

The flowers of alumroot are rather small and inconspicuous individually but are attractive in mass. The flowering stems may be up to two feet or taller with numerous bell-shaped flowers that are less than 1/4" long. The flower color varies from green to pink to purple. The five-parted bell-shaped calyx has five petals and five stamens inserted on it. The pistil has two styles. The greenish, red oval capsule fruits that develop are also small (approximately 1/8") but add color to the plant until the fruits are fully ripe and turn brown. The very tiny black seeds have dark barbs visible only under magnification. Seed dispersal is mechanical when the capsule opens and the seeds drop out to the forest floor.

The single flowering stem is usually leafless but may have one or two leaves. The evergreen basal leaves have 4-6" long petioles. The smooth to slightly hairy leaves are usually broadly heart-shaped with 5-9

shallow lobes and blunt teeth. Underground storage stems or rhizomes are well developed.

Alumroot's leaves were eaten in the spring by some Indian tribes and were used to make poultices for wounds or teas for various ailments. However, it is the rhizome or "root" that has had the most medicinal uses. The rhizomes have stringent and styptic properties due to the presence of high levels of tannins. Extracts of the rhizome have been used by American Indians and in "folk medicine" to treat heart disease, sore throat, diarrhea, thrush, bowel complaints, female problems, hemorrhages, even malignant tumors as well as to treat skin ailments. This species is the source of a drug "heuchera" which has supposed antiseptic and astringent properties. However, at high dosages, extract of alumroot can act as a gastric irritant and even cause kidney and liver failure.

This fall and winter when you are enjoying a stroll or brisk walk through the woods, keep your eye out for the basal leaves of this evergreen plant. Then next spring and summer, go back to observe its blooming and fruit set. Alumroot may not be one of our showiest native plants, but it certainly adds interest to the deciduous woods all year round.

From the President, continued

off Rt. 18 going toward the Eastern shore. Not only did we see many species of waterfowl including the rare sandhill crane from Florida but we found a newly created butterfly garden composed of many Virginia native plants. Throughout the 300 acres signs depicted the wildflowers to be found there with good descriptions and drawings. Well worth a visit! Jenifer even came face to face with a red fox as she turned a corner on the trail.

November 1. The start of the second year of my, and the current Board's, term of office. We can all look forward to the new year with our garden tour, wildflower walks, and plant sale in the Spring and interesting programs in between.

Our November meeting will feature an excellent speaker, Phil Baker, who will tell us about Roadside Plantings in Virginia. In January we will view members' slides from Texas and Colorado and review our past year's activities, plus we'll have a showing of the new VNPS slide presentation, "Virginia Habitats", compiled by Cris Fleming, VNPS Education chair. Don't miss either program!

Since this is the last **Wild News** in 1989, the Board and I wish you all a magnificent Thanksgiving, a joyous Christmas, and a healthy and fortunate New Year.

NATIVES FOR THE GARDEN

NANCY ARRINGTON
Propagation Chairman



Alumroot

Heuchera americana

Alumroot is another example of our native plants being appreciated more abroad than in our own country. It has been cultivated in English gardens since 1656. Gertrude Jekyll, in *Wood and Garden*, calls it Satin-leaf and says, "The beauty of the plant is in the colour and texture of the foliage." It has come back across the Atlantic in a handsome mahogany red selection, 'Palace Purple', which originated at the Royal Botanic Gardens.

Native to dry woods and rocky outcrops from Connecticut south to Georgia, Alumroot grows throughout Virginia. Its tolerance for a variety of growing conditions makes it a valuable garden plant. Although it grows naturally in shade, plants growing in full or filtered sun in a rich, well-drained soil will form tighter, more attractive clumps.

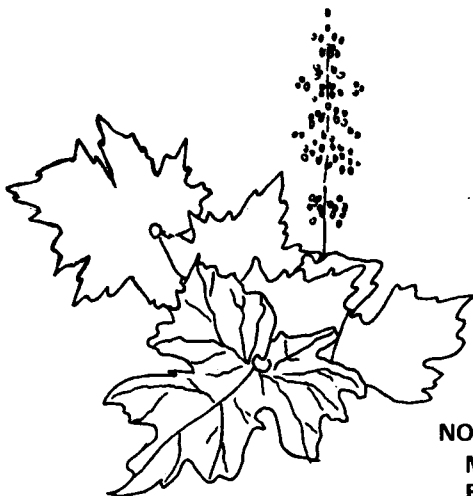
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The 3-4" shallow-lobed, rounded leaves are solid green when they first appear in early spring but become mottled and veined with dark red as the season progresses. Leaves become more bronze or burgundy in sun and after several frosts. Clumps remain attractive adding winter interest to the garden until new leaves begin growing.

Clumps may grow up to a foot across and can be used as a bold groundcover among shrubs, as an edging in a perennial border or along a path, or in combination with other wildflowers in a woodland garden. The small greenish blossoms appearing on 2' stems in May are not showy, but add an interesting delicate softness which contrasts nicely with the foliage.

After a few years plants form a woody center and growth becomes more loose and open. To keep them looking their best, divide clumps every three years and set new divisions with the crown 1" below soil level to prevent frost heaving. Although plants adapt to dry soil they will look better with supplemental watering through dry summers and a mulch.

Seed can be collected 3-4 weeks after flowering and stored in a cool, dry place until sown in the spring. The tiny seed shouldn't be sown directly where plants are to grow, but can be sown in flats or a coldframe.



Alumroot

Heuchera americana

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David & Nancy Arrington
P.O. Box 462
Manassas VA 22110