

# WILD FLOWERS

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

Number 99-06

November-December, 1999

## NOVEMBER 15 MEETING AND CRAFT SALE

Professional herbalist and Piedmont Chapter member Sharon Gorham-Roller will speak at the November 15 meeting. She will present a slide show from the United Plant Savers about the conservation of native medicinal plants and also talk about some of the most common native medicinal plants in Virginia.

As has become the practice for the November meeting, it features the annual PWWS craft sale. Members are encouraged to bring nature-related crafts to sell to fellow members at this meeting. VNPS T-shirts and mugs will also be available. This is a good opportunity to start your holiday shopping, so bring your checkbooks! Crafters, please come early to set up before the meeting.

The meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m. at Bethel Lutheran Church, at the intersection of Plantation Lane and Sudley Road in Manassas. For further information about the meeting, call President Gina Yurkonis at 540-347-1027 or Vice-President Nancy Arrington at 703-368-8431.

## NEXT MEETING

Mark your calendar for the January 17 annual member slide show meeting. Members are encouraged to share their plant-related slides from this past year's travels. If you plan to present slides, call Program Chair Charles Smith at 703-361-5125 so he can coordinate the entire program.

## PWWS ADOPTS A BED

At its October meeting, the PWWS Board agreed to participate in the Old Rose Garden's Adopt-a-Bed program. This garden is the only public garden in Prince William County and is located on the property of the Ben Lomond Manor House on Sudley Manor Drive across from the Ben Lomond Community Center Barn in Manassas.

The Rose Garden was begun in 1996 by the Lake Jackson Garden Club with roses transplanted from Smitherwood, the soon-to-be developed Manassas property owned by Judge Selwyn Smith and his wife. The garden is dedicated to Jim Syring, the designer who did not live to see the project to fruition. Besides the heritage roses, the garden contains companion plants, including many natives, that are typical of a mid-nineteenth century garden. While the Ben Lomond Manor House probably did not have a formal rose garden, the plants in the garden are common to the period. For more information about the Old Rose Garden, please visit the web site [www.geocities.com/heartland/estates/3961/](http://www.geocities.com/heartland/estates/3961/).

The chapter's L-shaped bed is located near mature trees on the outer perimeter of the garden, so it has some shade. In addition to the roses, current companion plants include brunnera and native goldenrod. Within certain guidelines, PWWS will add more native plants to the bed.

Because this is a chapter project, members are encouraged to participate in the upcoming work days on November 13 and 20. The Park Authority will supply mulch, but the volunteers must spread it. Refreshments will be served. For further information, please call Nancy Vehrs at 703-368-2898 or e-mail [nvehrs@attglobal.net](mailto:nvehrs@attglobal.net).



## From the President - Gina Yurkonis

I was honored to speak at National Wildlife Federation last month - to their "Habitat Stewards." The aim of the ongoing class is to teach people to help others establish backyard, schoolyard, or business habitats. They are a sharp group of about 30 adults, most working on their own property with hopes of spreading the word. I hope we'll see some join our chapter. One of their discussions at the beginning of class was about provenance or the heritage of a plant. Where a plant was grown and from where its ancestors came can have a lot to do with its ability to thrive in an area. For example, a red maple grown in South Carolina may do great for a few of our muggy summers, but freeze dead in the next nasty zone 7a winter, while a red maple born and bred from Northern VA stock would come through unfazed. Is bringing a plant from another region here where it will cross with local plants good or bad? Are we enhancing genetic diversity or diluting provenance?

Another discussion was the ever-debatable "are cultivars native?" Can we consider a plant with certain characteristics enhanced or eliminated through planned breeding to be native? All wonderful questions without any absolute right or wrong answers at this point, but what fun to think about and debate with fellow native plant people. I think what I love most about our organization is: we have so many members from different backgrounds, professions, and levels of experience who have found this one common interest, passion, or hobby and can share their ideas freely and learn other ideas as well.

Okay, before I break into *God Bless America*, I'd like to thank everyone who came and had a good time at the chapter's Annual Meeting in Prince William Forest Park even though it was a truly soggy day. Thank you also to those who sent in their ballots (there's that patriotism

swelling up again). To those who couldn't make it - we missed you. The t-shirts sold like the beautiful hotcakes they are and we'll have more at the November meeting for holiday gifts! If you think you want a bunch of a certain size or color, let me know so I can get extra and no one's stocking will go empty.

If you are interested in the habitat stewards class, contact NWF at 703-790-4000.

-Gina

(Note: For information on a program on backyard habits, see the last page of this issue.)

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**Program Chair:** Charles Smith

**Propagation Chair:** Nancy Arrington

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Deadline for the November-December issue is January 1, 2000. Mail information to Nancy Vehrs at 8318 Highland St., Manassas, VA 20110-3671 or e-mail to [nvehrs@attglobal.net](mailto:nvehrs@attglobal.net).

## PWWS Member Nancy Herwig Wins National Award

Nancy Herwig, with the Mid-Atlantic Council of the International Society for Aborigiculture, was presented with the National Association for Interpretation (NAI) Master Interpretive Manager Award for 1999 at NAI's annual national workshop held October 15-19 in Syracuse, New York.

The award is presented to an NAI member who has worked for a minimum of five years in the profession and whose current duties are at least 60 percent supervisory or administrative. Recipients demonstrate a mastery of interpretive techniques, site and staff management, and a respected ability to pass these skills onto others.

Nancy has over 15 years of experience in interpretive management and was employed by the Reston Association for 18 years. She developed a passion for outdoor education and interpretation. After several years on the front lines, where she conducted nature center programs, Nancy was promoted to Environmental Education Manager. There she led a continually expanding program and helped to keep alive a Reston tradition of environmental awareness and stewardship.

Nancy's colleagues highlight her ability to develop a variety of special events with numerous partners, to obtain grant funds for programs such as "Hands-On Solar Energy," to develop an accessible native plant trail, and to conduct an annual fundraising campaign to send children to the environmental education summer camp program. Congratulations, Nancy!

### HOLIDAY ALERT

Please don't use ground pine, running cedar, and other lycopodium species in holiday decorations. Besides the adverse ecological effect of wild collection, their spores are very high in oils and are highly flammable.

## Citizen Information Session

On Wednesday, November 10 at 7:30 p.m. the Prince William Natural Resources Council (PWNRC) will host a Citizen Information Session to provide citizen input for the Prince William County Strategic Plan. The period designated to collect citizen input on strategic issues for the first phase of the planning process ends in November 1999. After that, the County staff will organize and submit the issues to the Board of County Supervisors for review and selection of goals.

The meeting will be held at Bull Run Unitarian Universalist, at the corner of Church Street and Main Street in Manassas. To RSVP and to receive additional information, please call Jim Waggener, Chair, PWNRC, at 703-497-0506 or email: [kim@natureswonderworld.org](mailto:kim@natureswonderworld.org).

## Chesapeake Bay Foundation Land Advocacy Workshop

Local citizens interested in the Chesapeake Bay and local waterways should plan to attend the Prince William County Land Advocacy Workshop on November 13 from 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. at Ben Lomond Community Center in Manassas. Chesapeake Bay Foundation planning and grassroots staff will be joined by other experts in land use and citizen action to share information on the basics of the planning process, how land use affects natural resources, and ways to communicate with local officials.

At noon Ruth Griggs, Member, Prince William County Board of Supervisors, and Tom Eitler, Director of Long Range Planning for the County, will talk about the current Comprehensive Plan, as well as join others in a panel discussion on the future of Prince William County and what citizens can do to affect it.

To register, call Alli Alligood at 703-684-5923. Cost for the workshop is \$5, which covers materials and a bag lunch.

## RECAP OF THE ANNUAL MEETING

Though not well-attended because of rainy weather, the hearty souls who came to the annual meeting on October 10 at Prince William Forest Park were rewarded with free admission to this beautiful national park, good food in an indoor setting (lots of yummy desserts including a delectable Black Forest cake), wholesale prices on the new VNPS t-shirts, great door prizes, and a ranger-lead nature walk after the rain stopped.

Those present for the business meeting were Helen Rawls, Helen Walter, Jeanne & Stan Fowler, Joann Krumviede, June Najjum, Nancy Vehrs, Marie Davis, Linda & Leo Stoltz, Wendy Pierce and son, Blythe Merritt, Monique & James Price, Nancy Arrington, and Gina Yurkonis.

By the unanimous vote of members present and those voting by absentee ballot, the following members were elected to the Nominating Committee for a term of two years:

- Jeanne Fowler
- Wendy Pierce
- Leo Stoltz

Treasurer Marie Davis presented the budget for fiscal year 2000, November 1, 1999-October 31, 2000, which was unanimously approved. (See column at right.)

Jeanne Fowler suggested that someone either read the minutes aloud at meetings, or publish them in the newsletter. This will keep members better informed.

June Najjum suggested a raffle or doorprize at meetings.

Nancy Vehrs distributed seed packets of New York ironweed, Joe-Pye weed, and liatris, all of which was collected from her garden.

At the conclusion of the business meeting, President Gina Yurkonis conducted the drawings

for door prizes, which were donated by Joann Krumviede, Wendy Pierce, Nicky Staunton, Nancy Vehrs, and Gina. Winners of such prizes as a handmade stepping stone, plants, books, and a birdfeeder were: Nancy Arrington, Marie Davis, Jeanne Fowler, Blythe Merritt, June Najjum, Jim Price, and Nancy Vehrs.

Following the meeting, a ranger led the group on a woodland nature walk. Typical trees and fruits encountered were beechnut, hickories, and pawpaws. The forest floor still held many Christmas ferns and small stands of delicate maidenhair fern were present. Asters bloomed at the forest edge.

Plan now to attend next year's meeting so you can join in all the activity.



### FY 2000 BUDGET

**RECEIPTS:**

Dues	\$	900
Plant Sale		1,800
Miscellaneous		300

**TOTAL**                      **\$3,000**

**DISBURSEMENTS:**

Postage	\$	750
Printing		800
Gifts and Honoraria		250
Programs and Speakers		250
Plant Sale Expenses		200
Sales Tax		125
Education		475
Wildflower Week		150

**TOTAL**                      **\$3,000**

## WITCH HAZEL

**Marion Lobstein**  
**Associate Professor of Biology**  
**Northern Virginia Community**  
**College-Manassas Campus**

While walking through the autumn woods, you may have noticed small yellow flowers borne on the ends of twigs of a small tree. Or, you may have heard a popping noise as you walked past the same trees. What you were seeing and hearing are the flowers and "exploding" fruits of witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*). This is the only tree (or large shrub) in our area that blooms from September through December. Also, it is the only tree that bears both flowers and fruits (from last year's flowers) at the same time!

Witch hazel is widely distributed ranging from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick to central Georgia and southern Arkansas. It is commonly found along streams and on the banks of ponds, lakes, and swamps or in moist upland forests. It is considered an understory species in our deciduous forests.

The scientific name for witch hazel was assigned to this handsome plant by the famous Swedish taxonomist Linneaus. *Hamamelis* is an ancient Greek plant name and *virginiana* means it was first collected in the colony of Virginia. Other common names are snapping hazel, snapping hazelnut, tobacco wood, white hazel, and winter bloom. It is not a true hazel but rather is the Hamamelidaceae family. Sweetgum is the only other local member of this family. The "witch" part of its common name comes from the use of its branches as divining rods supposedly to find water and even buried treasure and precious metal ores such as gold!

The small yellow flowers develop in clusters of three or four on the tips of mature branches. The four strap-like petals are attached on the margin of a cup-shaped receptacle. Eight

stamens are arranged in two rows of four with the outer row usually sterile. With showy flowers, it is insect pollinated by insects still active in cooler autumn temperatures. Two shining black seeds form in a two-celled wooden capsule that has a prominent beak. These fruits ripen over the year after flowering. The small half-inch seeds are forcibly expelled from the ripened capsule creating a popping noise.

The leaves, twigs, and bark of witch hazel are distinctive. The alternate simple leaves are about four inches long and up to three inches wide. The leaf is ovate and variably lobed with an uneven base. Mature leaves have a waxy surface. Witch hazel twigs have a unique zigzag appearance. The thin smooth outer bark is light brown with purple inner bark. An individual tree can be as tall as 30 feet and can attain a diameter of 12-14 inches.



**Witch Hazel**  
*Hamamelis virginiana*

Some American Indian tribes used witch hazel to make the wooden part of bows. Other Indian uses of witch hazel were primarily medicinal: poultices, washes, and extracts were made from the inner bark, twigs, and leaves to treat inflamed eyes, skin irritation, tumors, sore muscles, varicose veins, and even hemorrhoids. Extracts of bark and leaves were rubbed on the legs of Indian athletes to keep the muscles limber.

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Teas or washes made from the leaves and/or bark were used to treat a variety of ailments from colds, sore throats, and asthma to tuberculosis and other lung ailments, menstrual cramps, cholera, and dysentery. Extracts were also used to stop excessive menstrual flow and a variety of problems involving internal bleeding. Heated and steamed branches were used in a "sauna" to ease sore muscles, while powdered dried leaves were used to stop external bleeding. Also, twigs were chewed to freshen the mouth as well as to heal and soothe bleeding gums and other mouth or throat problems. Early colonists soon discovered the value of witch hazel. Alcohol extracts as well as lotions and salves made from twigs, leaves, and bark have long been used and are still used to treat sore muscles and minor skin irritations as well as an astringent or shaving lotion. Most of these preparations are now synthetically made, but there is at least one small company in New England that still prepares "real" witch hazel extract. The astringent and other associated

properties are due to tannins in the bark and leaves.

As you walk in the late autumn woods and the wildflowers have disappeared until spring, keep your eyes and ears open for the sight and sound of the unusual witch hazel. Look for its delicate yellow flowers and listen for its fruits exploding!

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## Backyard Habitat Program

Craig Tufts, Chief Naturalist for the National Wildlife Federation, will speak on *Backyard Habitats* at the November 18 meeting of the Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society. This program is open to the public and will be held at 7:30 p.m. at Green Spring Gardens Park, 4603 Green Spring Road off Route 236 in Alexandria. For directions, call 703-642-5173.

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### PRINCE WILLIAM WILDFLOWER SOCIETY

A Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society  
PO Box 83, Manassas, VA 20108-0083



exp. 10/00

Nancy Arrington  
P. O. Box 462  
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**November Meeting: 7:30 p.m., Monday, Nov. 15, Bethel Lutheran Church  
"Native Medicinal Plants"**