



From the President - Charles Smith

The Spring Fling and the Spring Garden Tours were both very successful. The next big event is the Plant Sale. The plant sale is not only our fundraiser for the year, it is also an important opportunity for us to educate the public and promote the use of responsibly grown native plants. So please come out on Saturday, May 10, bring any plants you have, support the sale and **BRING FAMILY AND FRIENDS.**

I hope everyone has enjoyed this moist, and rather slow, spring. The plants have had a longer bloom than in recent years and now bird migration is in full swing. Butterflies are also out in great numbers now, and the early dragonflies are cruising streamsides, floodplains, and fields plucking unwary insects out of the air. Grasshoppers and bees that over-wintered as adults are now abundant.

One of the most interesting things I have seen this spring is a baby stinkpot turtle. It was caught during a children's program at a pond. Although it is last year's hatchling, its shell is not quite as big as a quarter. It is truly the smallest turtle I have ever seen. The stinkpot (*Sternotherus odoratus*), also called the eastern musk turtle, gets its name from a foul smelling musk that it secretes, both fore and aft, as a defense mechanism. It is not commonly seen due to the fact that it is largely nocturnal and doesn't bask. They can be found throughout Virginia, except on the Delmarva Peninsula, in creeks, ponds, and lakes. One of my best memories of the last few years was finding an adult stinkpot foraging in a shady part of Bull Run on a hot summer evening while fishing with my son.

To learn more about the eastern musk turtle and other reptiles and amphibians, visit the Virginia Herpetological Society website at <http://fwie.fw.vt.edu/VHS/>. If you are not familiar with VHS, please take the time to learn more. Like VNPS, VHS is a volunteer organization of amateurs, professionals, and enthusiasts that are

dedicated to learning about, educating others on, and protecting Virginia's wildlife. And there is much common ground in that many of the most sensitive reptiles and amphibians in Virginia are inextricably linked to the community of plants and animals in which they occur.

-Charles

Next Board Meeting

The next PWWS Board meeting will be held Monday, June 16 at 7:30 p.m. at Bethel Lutheran Church. All members are welcome to attend. For further information, call President Charles Smith at 703-361-5125.

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VNPS home page: <http://www.vnps.org>.

President	Charles Smith, 703-361-5125 chrissmith@juno.com
Vice President	Martha Slover, 571-238-5713
Secretary	Charlotte Cochard, 703-330-6960
Treasurer	Diane Flaherty, 703-330-9862
Botany	Marion Lobstein, 703-536-7150
Conservation	OPEN
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Membership	Nancy Vehrs, 703-368-2898
Programs	OPEN
Plant Sale	Nancy Arrington, 703-368-8431
Publicity	Leo Stoltz, 703-791-6175
Refreshments	Joann Krumviede, 703-938-4378
Registry Site	Claudia Thompson-Deahl, 754-9235
Editor	Nancy Vehrs, 703-368-2898
Original Artwork	by Nicky Staunton, 703-368-9803

Deadline for the July-August issue is **July 1, 2003**. Mail information to Nancy Vehrs at 8318 Highland St., Manassas, VA 20110-3671 or send email to nvehrs@attglobal.net.

March 17, 2003, Meeting Minutes

The Prince William Wildflower Society met on March 17, 2003, at Bethel Lutheran Church, Manassas, Virginia. President Charles Smith welcomed everyone and introduced the guest speaker, Michael Keiffer, Executive Director of the Friends of Bull Run. Michael presented an informative slide show about the Bull Run Mountain natural area. The Virginia Division of Natural Heritage, with the assistance of the Friends of Bull Run, recently completed an extensive community analysis. Michael did a great job of leading the attendees through all of the systems--from the top of the mountain to the bottom--while discussing the geology, animals, and history of the mountain. Michael entertained questions from the attendees.

Nancy Arrington and Nancy Vehrs provided refreshments for the break.

Following the break, a short business meeting was held. Treasurer Diane Flaherty reported the checking account balance at \$4079.90.

Charles announced the following upcoming events and asked for volunteers to assist with each: Prince William Spring Fling - April 26, PWWS Spring Garden Tours- April 27, PWWS Plant Sale- May 10, and the VNPS Annual Meeting- September 12-14. A tentative schedule for the VNPS annual meeting was presented.

A guest, Debbie Foster, spoke about the Tri-County Parkway. This proposal would go from Godwin Drive in Manassas, down Flat Branch past Ben Lomond Park, through Bull Run Regional Park, intersect and cross I-66, go north (through Debbie's neighborhood) cross Route 29 and go north along Bull Run Post Office Road to intersect Route 50 somewhere near South Riding. Other proposals would include improvements to existing Route 28 and extending Route 234 to link with Route 659. The discussion about the project resulted in general agreement that the proposed route through Bull Run Regional Park would be disastrous. All were urged to voice their opinions

to their State representatives.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Charlotte J. Cochard, Secretary

Attendance: Joyce Andrew, Betty Andrews, Nancy Arrington, Tom Attanaro, Tiana Camfiord, Toni Crouch, Jeanne Endrikat, Diane Flaherty, Debbie Foster, Amy Hamilton, William Hendrickson, Michael Keiffer, June Najjum, John Pauswinski, Helen Rawls, Sandra Sheriff, Mary Sherman, Sue Smith, Charles Smith, Lorrie Andrew-Spear, Nicky Staunton, Nancy Vehrs, Helen Walter, Karen Waltman, and Helen Winn.

Member in the News

PWWS member and former president Regina Yurkonis was recently profiled in the gardening section of the *Fauquier Times Democrat*, *Times Community Newspapers*, for filling a niche in gardening business with her wildlife landscape business. Gina also regularly contributes garden articles that emphasize the use of native plants.

Sign Up Now for Summer Field Botany Course at Blandy

For the 12th summer, Marion Lobstein is offering her three-week field botany class at Blandy Experimental Farm, home of the State Arboretum. After this summer, Marion will offer it only every other year. This year's dates are June 23-26, June 30-July 3, and July 7-10, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. For more information, contact Marion at 703-536-7150, e-mail: mblobstein@earthlink.net, and webpage: <http://www.home.earthlink/~mblobstein>.

Meet Our Spring Tour Gardeners

What does it take to be on the garden tour? I asked this year's spring tour gardeners, Helen Walter, Jeanne Endrikat, and Sharon Sepkowski, some questions to learn how they started and to share some wisdom from their accumulated knowledge.

What is your occupation?

Helen: Amateur gardener, professional grandmother, part time artist.

Jeanne: High school science teacher.

Sharon: Registered Nurse.

How many years have you lived in your home and, of those, how many have you gardened?

Helen: I've lived in my house on the river for six years, but didn't get serious about the yard until a couple of years ago. Before I moved here, I spent almost 20 years fixing up my yard on Bull Run Mountain.

Jeanne: I've lived and gardened for 20 years at our home.

Sharon: We will be in the house 7 years this July and have been gardening for 6 of those.

When and how did you first become interested in wildflowers and native plants, and when did you start gardening with them?

Helen: As for when and how, my mother's hobby was botany, so I grew up learning about wildflowers, but it never occurred to me to landscape with them until I joined PWWS in the mid 80s.

Jeanne: I grew up on a farm and have always been interested in them along with my mom.

Sharon: About five years ago I went to the spring sale at Green Spring Gardens Park and joined the Virginia Native Plant Society and the interest sky rocketed from there. I purchased many native plants that day and went home to plant immediately.

How long have you been a member of PWWS?

Helen: Since the mid 80s.

Jeanne: About 20 years.

Sharon: Member for 5 years.

What is/are your favorite native plant or plants?

Helen: My FAVORITE WILDFLOWER! You might as well ask which is my favorite grandchild. It's whichever is behaving best at the moment, I guess.

Jeanne: Native azalea, bluets, and jack-in-the-pulpit.

Sharon: I really have no favorite plant; it's whatever catches my interest at the moment. I do have a fondness for Heuchera and Tiarellas with all the different leaf colors and shapes.



Where do you buy your native plants?

Helen: Where do I get native plants? I get a lot from friends who have extras to share. Ideally, I get the rest from the plant sale, but that's only one morning a year, so I shop at Windy Hill and Craven's, which is near my mother and has a huge assortment of natives in the back corner.

Jeanne: Our plant sale mostly, also here and there, but mostly I just divide plants or get them from friends.

Sharon: I buy my plants at the PW spring sale, Green Spring Park semi-annual sales, Behnke's Nursery in Maryland, Andre Viette's in Fisherville, and Merrifield's. In other words, any place that sells plants, I'm there.

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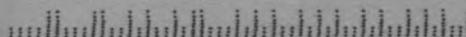
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Nancy Arrington
8388 Briarmont Lane
Manassas, VA 20112-2755



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"Reasons for the Diversity of Virginia's Flora"

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What advice would you give to someone just beginning to garden with native plants?

Helen: As for advice, probably the best thing to do is take a long hard look at what already grows on the site, unless it's a new development with invasives sprouting from the naked subsoil. I like the book *Creating Sanctuary* as a resource.

Jeanne: Enrich the soil or add shredded mulch each year and choose plants that like your environments. Also, everything has a season, so be sure to do your seasonal work when it comes or just wait until the next year to do the moving, etc.

Sharon: For the beginner, be sure and read, read, and read more about the natural habitat of the plant; and do good soil preparation before ever planting anything. Also network with other gardeners and the county extension office for their advice and help.

During the growing season, about how many hours do you spend a week working in your garden?

Helen: I spend at least one full day a week in the yard, more if I can, even in the winter, when I can do hardscaping and cleanup if I'm not snowed in.

Jeanne: In the spring, about eight hours a week until it's ready and then about one hour in the summer and about six hours a week in the fall.

Sharon: I spend about 15-20 hours a week in the garden. Every day after work and weekends.

How involved is your spouse with gardening?

Helen: I'm the only gardener in this house, so what people will see is what is possible for a middle-aged lady with a bad hip to accomplish.

Jeanne: Hardly at all if he can help it. He helps get my mulch and does some of the heavy work. He's really a city boy at heart.

Sharon: My husband Steven is very involved in the garden. All the flower bed preparation is done by him. He also does equal spring and fall clean-up. I do all the planting, with the exception of any plant/tree in a container bigger than three gallons.

What is your biggest gardening challenge and how do you cope with it?

Helen: My biggest challenge this year was the weather, the terrible heat and drought this summer, and bitter cold this winter. Seeing plants I'd given up for dead makes a strong case for using native plants. In a normal year, the biggest problems are poor soil, tree roots, and shade.

Jeanne: Dry, dry woods!! I also cannot water in the summer with my slow flowing well. I grow plants that can survive there with a little soil improvement. If they don't do well, I put them close to my house instead or give up on them.

Sharon: The biggest challenge is the deer and vole foraging. I now use "Vole Block" when planting, as the voles don't like to dig through it and for the deer, I rotate the type of sprays I use to try and deter them, with some limited success.

Briefly describe your gardening philosophy.

Helen: If I have a philosophy for gardening, it's creating sanctuary for wildlife and myself. We've made such a mess of so much of this planet that it seems critical that I be a good steward of the small patch of it that's in my care.

Jeanne: I have four ideas I stick with: (1) Natives are better than exotics! (2) Informal is better than formal, (3) Curves are better than straight arrangements, and (4) Clumps are better for show.

Sharon: I believe gardening is the most expressive form of art there is. It allows us to touch and become part of the natural process/cycle of life and should be enjoyed to the fullest.

Other comments?

Jeanne: I wish I lived in an area with better native soil and moisture so I could enjoy gardening more without the constant struggle.

So, there you have it, there is no magic formula for creating a beautiful native plant garden, each one has its special challenges, and gardeners can spend varying amounts of time creating their unique environments.

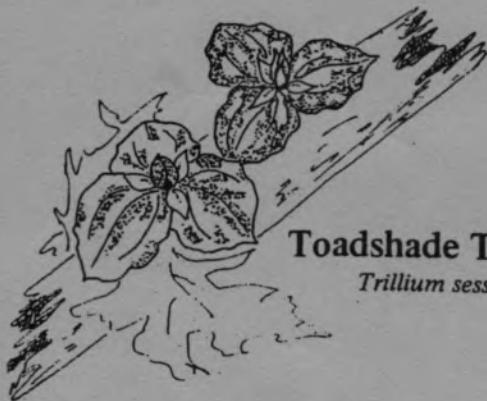
-Nancy Vehrs

Garden Day at Blandy

Don't miss Garden Fair May 10 and 11, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., at the State Arboretum at Blandy. After buying plants at the PWWS plant sale, it's the perfect way to spend the rest of Mother's Day Weekend. Garden Fair is the largest annual event at the Arboretum, and it features a huge plant and garden supply sale with more than 60 vendors offering perennials, shrubs, small trees, organically grown plants, native plants, garden art and architecture, bird houses, and much more. There's something for the whole family: guided arboretum walks, a stone wall building demonstration, a water gardening exhibit, and lots of FREE children's activities (including their own nature walk). A \$5 per car parking donation is requested, with parking proceeds being permanently invested in the Friends of the State Arboretum (FOSA) endowment. All other events are free.

Spring Fling

Many thanks to Charlotte Cochard, Diane and Rick Flaherty, and Charles Smith and his son Harry for assisting with the successful PWWS/VNPS exhibit at the gardening expo *Spring Fling* on April 26 at the county fairgrounds. The information booth attracted a significant number of visitors and many entered the drawing for the PWWS plant sale gift certificate. Congratulations to the lucky winner, *Celeste Petrie* of Manassas.



Toadshade Trillium

Trillium sessile

Events of Interest

May 9-11: 20th Annual Spring Wildflower Symposium presented by the Wintergreen Nature Foundation and Wintergreen Resort, registration fee. 434-325-7451, www.twnf.org.

May 10: Piedmont Chapter walk at the Thompson Wildlife Management Area near Linden, 1 p.m., Parking Lot 6. See trilliums and other spring ephemerals. Call Sally Anderson at 540-722-3072 or email rccsca@visuallink.com.

May 10-11: Shenandoah National Park's Wildflower Weekend. Programs free, park entrance fee. 540-999-3397, <http://www.nps.gov/shen/2g1.htm>

May 15: *Natural vs. Constructed Wetlands: A Scientific Perspective*, by Dr. Kirk Havens, Assistant Director for the Center for Coastal Resources Management at VIMS. 7:30 p.m. at the McCoart Bldg. Follow up walk on Saturday, May 17 from 10 a.m.-12 noon at a constructed wetland in the Neabsco Creek Watershed. Sponsored by the Prince William Conservation Alliance, 703-367-0069.

May 17: "Ferns and Friends," Bull Run Mountain, FoBR, \$10 fee, registration required, www.fobr.org, 703-753-2631.

May 18: Wildflower Walk, Great Falls Park, VA, 10 am., led by Marion Lobstein, 703-536-7150.

May 29: "The Right Plant in the Right Place: Invasive Plants & the Nursery Industry" featuring John Peter Thompson of Behnke Nurseries. 7:30 p.m., Arlington Central Library. Contact Jan Ferrigan at 703-228-7636, jferriga@vt.edu.

May 31: Potomack Chapter walk at Holmes Run Gorge, near Lake Barcroft, led by Rod Simmons, 703-256-7671.

June 1: Piedmont Chapter tour of Ice Mountain, 1 p.m. This Nature Conservancy site contains unusual northern plants. Call Sally Anderson to register, 540-722-3072, email rccsca@visuallink.com. Limit 15 participants.

June 25: Wednesday Design Series: Wildlife Gardening, Green Spring Gardens Park, 7-9 p.m. Registration required, 703-642-5173.

Native for the Garden: Dwarf Crested Iris

Dwarf crested iris (*Iris cristata*) is a delightful plant for the partially shaded garden. After the beautiful miniature flowers have disappeared, the foliage stays attractive until frost. It is native to Prince William County and most of Virginia's mountain and Piedmont counties.

Typical sword-shaped foliage begins growing in early spring and reaches 4-8". Flowering stems are around 2" and the 2-3" lavender blue flowers with a white or yellow crest on the sepals are nestled among the leaves. Darker blue and purple-flowered forms are available from specialty nurseries and a lovely white-flowered form is fairly common. They bloom in our area in late April into May.

Dwarf crested iris grows on rich wooded slopes and prefers good drainage in the garden. In *Growing and Propagating Wild Flowers*, Harry Phillips says plants growing in rich, moist woodland soil are likely to make excessive foliage growth at the expense of flower production. He recommends adding sand or composted leaves to the planting site and says that a very dryish, ordinary soil where water drains away rapidly will maintain the plants' naturally compact habit. It prefers neutral or slightly acid soil.

Like many woodland plants, crested iris prefers some shade, but blooms better with some direct sun. Plants in my garden that received several hours of sun bloomed profusely, but by mid-summer the foliage had turned yellow. Plants that received just a little direct sun or were in high shade bloomed sparsely, but the foliage stayed attractive. A location with a few hours of morning sun is probably ideal.

Dwarf crested iris is a wonderful edging or ground cover plant. Put it beside a path or at the front of a bed so it can be appreciated up close. It's a good filler or weaver among taller natives such as clumping ferns, Solomon's-seal, and bleeding heart. In *Pioneering with Wildflowers*, George D. Aiken recommends it for the partially

shaded rock garden and says "... this little chap struts along the rocks as gaily as if he were the biggest of his family."

Plants are easily increased by division at most any time. Seed which is set sparsely can be collected in early summer as the capsules start to dry out. It will germinate better if sown immediately while the aril is still attached. Dried seed can be stored in the refrigerator for later sowing, but germination will be slow and sparse.

-Nancy Arrington
Plant Sale Chair

(Ed. Notes: The preceding article originally appeared in the May-June 1990 edition of *Wild News*. Dwarf crested iris is always available at the annual plant sale.)



DWARF CRESTED IRIS
Iris cristata

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