



# WILD NEWS

Prince William Wildflower Society

A Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

[www.pwws.vnps.org](http://www.pwws.vnps.org)

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March-April 2013

**PWWS March Membership Meeting, March 18, 2013, 7:30 p.m., Bethel Evangelical Lutheran Church, Manassas.**

**“Crow’s Nest Natural Area Preserve,” with Michael Lott.** The Crow’s Nest Natural Area Preserve (CNNAP) is one of 61 preserves in the Virginia Natural Area Preserve System. CNNAP is 2,872 acres in size and supports approximately 2,000 acres of mature hardwood forests as well as 750 acres of tidal and freshwater wetlands. These plant communities provide important habitat for neotropical migrant birds, overwintering waterfowl, and numerous fish species. Michael’s presentation will reveal the history of the Crow’s Nest Peninsula, current activities at the preserve, and future management challenges. Michael will also focus on the different natural communities found at Crow’s Nest and the native plants associated with them.

**Michael Lott** is currently employed with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) as the Northern Region Steward/Crow’s Nest Manager. Prior to joining DCR, he worked as an environmental planner with the Stafford County Department of Planning and Zoning. While working as a research associate with Florida Atlantic University, Michael spent several years studying the life history traits of the invasive fern genus, *Lygodium*. Michael Lott holds a BA degree in Geography/Ecosystems from UCLA and an MS in Environmental Science from Florida Atlantic University.

### From the President

*Spring is here!* This wonderful season can bring chilling winds, wet snows, flooding streams and soggy grounds, extreme heat and humidity, and...the occasional “perfect day.” It’s my favorite time of the year. Nothing surpasses the excitement of those early spring days when we scratch the leaf litter and find the first dark purple leaves and buds of our lovely Virginia bluebells. Or the days in April when we hear the ethereal song of the wood thrush who has finally returned from his long vacation in the tropics. Spring can be a frenzied time of year when we have so many activities that compete for our limited



hours. I know that it is madness even in retirement to think that I can try to catch every wild bloom at its peak.

Let’s all try to participate in as many walks and activities as possible and make the most of this delightful season. Mike Lott, our speaker for the March meeting, is steward of Crow’s Nest Natural Area Preserve and he will introduce us to that

special piece of land in nearby Stafford County. He will follow up on his presentation by leading a walk for us on Thursday, April 4. Crow’s Nest Preserve for logistical reasons is not presently open to the public, but the Commonwealth’s Department of Conservation opens it on select days a few times a year.

You won’t want to miss the annual Prince William Conservation Alliance’s Bluebell Festival at Merrimac Farm Wildlife Management Area on Sunday, April 7. Last year the bluebells bloomed so early that they missed their own show. This year’s date is a week earlier. Themed walks, children’s activities, food vendors, and environmental exhibit booths (including one for PWWS) will all be part of the festival.

Another field trip we have planned for April is to the Bruce Jones Nature Preserve in Rappahannock County. Bruce, a former VNPS board member, has transformed a 180-acre farm into one that “grows wildlife.” We may want to revisit this one in the summer or fall as well.

One of our spring highlights is the annual spring wildflower garden tour the afternoon of Sunday, April 28. And what spring would be complete with our annual plant sale! Mark your calendars for Saturday, May 11, the Saturday before Mother’s Day. We will be accepting credit card payments this year, so we expect everyone to spend big! I look forward to seeing many of you at the meeting on March 18 and hope that you will join us in many of our activities and volunteer opportunities.

Happy Spring! ~Nancy

## Prince William Wildflower Society January 21, 2013 Membership Meeting

**Minutes:** President Nancy Vehrs opened meeting at 7:35 p.m. and recognized PWWS's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Founding members who were present were introduced: Nancy Arrington and Jeanne Fowler. Nancy invited all to later enjoy the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary cake provided by PWWS.

### Member Slideshow Program

Karen Waltman presented slides of wildflowers from the Burren and the Cliffs of Moher in Ireland. Nancy Vehrs and Harry Glasgow visited Costa Rica and showed us pictures of beautiful flora and interesting fauna found there. Charles Smith and his family visited Turkey, and he showed pictures from there. Charles has been comparing plant communities, and he also presented views from a variety of habitats and plant communities found at Massanutten, Fountainhead Regional Park, Cape Henry Trail in First Landing State Park, Maritime Swamp, Doves Landing, and Merrimac Farm. Thank you to the presenters for sharing their pictures with us.

### Announcements

--Nancy V. reported that, at their January meeting, the Prince William County Board of Supervisors presented a resolution in recognition of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of PWWS. The board members were presented PWWS pins and honorary membership in PWWS; six PWWS members attended.

--This spring Marion Lobstein will hold classes on the changes in nomenclature found in the new *Flora of Virginia*.

--The PWWS Garden Tour will be Sunday, April 28, and PWWS Vice President Carol Thompson and member Mary Lou Chairito will have their gardens on the tour. A third garden, preferably also near Woodbridge, is needed.

--The Native Plant Sale will be held Saturday, May 11 from 9 a.m. to Noon at Bethel Lutheran Church. Volunteers are needed for the Garden Tour and Plant Sale, and sign-up sheets will be available at the March 18<sup>th</sup> program.

--On March 16, the Virginia Native Plant Society is sponsoring a workshop, "Piedmont Places and Plants," at the University of Richmond. For information, call Nancy Vehrs at 703-368-2898 (Home) or 703-324-8555 (Cell).

--April 4 is a field trip to Crow's Nest in Stafford County.

--Bird and wildflower walks are at 8 a.m. the last Sunday of each month at

Merrimac Farm. Call Harry Glasgow to RSVP at (571) 212-2163.

Doorprizes: Tamie Boone received the book, *Bringing Nature Home*

*Present:* Amy Hamilton, Tamie Boone, Carol Thompson, Janet Wheatcraft, Glen Macdonald, Dee Brown, Nancy Arrington, Jeanne and Stan Fowler, Chris Draz, Harry Glasgow, Veronica Tangiri, Deanna LaValle High, Joyce and Mike Wenger, Helen Walter, Jan Gubrud, Laura Farron, Barbara Farron, Jeanne Endrikat, Christine Sunda, Suzy Stasulis, Nancy Vehrs, Karen Waltman.

--Respectively submitted, Karen Waltman, Secretary

## Manassas Park Elementary School's Garden Club Needs Help

Last spring several PWWS members helped members of the MPES garden club plant two butterfly gardens. Carolyn O'Connor, the club's adult leader, has asked for our help again this year.

### PWWS Annual Native Plant Sale is Saturday, May 11!

It's time to start planning for our May 11 plant sale! Think about what natives you can contribute as your plants begin emerging this spring. I have compiled some suggestions and instructions for potting, which I will have at the March membership meeting or I can email them to you ([narrington1@verizon.net](mailto:narrington1@verizon.net)).

Deanna and I are working with a label supplier to get printed labels for most of the species that we sell. We will still use the colored price labels, and we'll let you know how to get supplies of both.

Let me know if you have any questions. Thanks in advance for helping with the sale. Even if you don't have plants to contribute, there are many ways you can help out and we need all the help we can get. Let me know if you'll be available.

Nancy Arrington, (703) 408-7446

MPES, located at 9298 Cougar Dr., is an award-winning LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) school. In addition to the energy-saving features that adults can appreciate, such as a lighting system that senses how much light is coming through the windows so interior lights are dimmed or brightened accordingly, and a ventilation system that signals when windows should be opened to maintain indoor comfort, there are many features that children can appreciate and understand. Halls are named after the seasons; the floors are named after the layers of a forest; the bottom floor has animal tracks in the tiles to help children identify tracks they might see in the wild. Children also participate in the school's recycling program.

PWWS members can appreciate the fact that huge beds in the courtyard are landscaped exclusively with native trees, shrubs, ferns, and herbaceous plants. The PWWS board voted to purchase permanent, professional-style labels for these plants.

Carolyn says the club's mission is to educate its members about the school's environment so that they can understand what they are being asked to protect. Club meetings will be 3:30-4:30 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays, April 30 through May 30. Some topics for the meetings that she would like help with include identifying plants, eliminating invasives, transplanting, and learning how plants may have been used for food and medicine in the past, and how they

may currently be beneficial to birds, butterflies, and other insects. **Suzy Stasulis** has offered to explain the purpose of the property's bio-retention pond.

We all know how important it is to help children understand and appreciate the natural world so I hope you will be able to help with this project. --**Nancy Arrington**, [narrington1@verizon.net](mailto:narrington1@verizon.net), (703) 408-7446

## SPRING BEAUTY (*Claytonia virginica*)

By Marion Blois Lobstein

Spring beauty (*Claytonia virginica*) is one of the loveliest and most easily recognizable of our early spring wildflowers. Its genus name *Claytonia* was assigned by Linnaeus to honor John Clayton, one of Virginia's earliest and best known naturalists, and *virginica* to honor the site of specimen collection. John Clayton was the author of the *Flora Virginica*, a manual or "flora" of the plants of colonial Virginia. This work was last updated in 1762 and after 250 years Virginia has a modern "flora," the *Flora of Virginia* published in December 2012 (visit [www.floraofvirginia.org](http://www.floraofvirginia.org) to find out more about the *Flora of Virginia* and how to order your copy).

Spring beauty in the past has been placed in Portulacaceae (the portulaca or purslane family) but now is place in Montiaceae (the Miner's lettuce family) based on DNA evidence of its relationship with other similar plants. Its habitat is moist woods, open meadows, and even lawns. The distribution of this species is from Georgia to Nova Scotia and west into Texas. Its blooming period in our area runs from late February to early May. Spring beauty often competes with skunk cabbage, hepatica, and harbinger-of-spring as one of the earliest spring wildflowers.

A typical mature spring beauty plant is 6 to 10 inches tall. When the two slender leaves of spring beauty first appear in early spring, they resemble at first glance those of a grass. The stem is a slender, delicate structure that droops with the weight of the developing fruit. The underground storage stem is a small corm with many fibrous roots. Spring beauty is a true spring ephemeral with the above ground structures dying (senescencing) to the ground level by late spring when the leaf canopy begins to fill in above the forest floor. During the period the plants are photosynthesizing, underground corms store energy for the next spring's development of above ground structures. The corm sends up only one leaf if no flowers are to be formed for a growing season. Two leaves form on mature plants capable of forming flowers. The flower buds are formed in the fall under fallen leaves and emerge in the spring with the leaves.

The inflorescence is a racemose cyme bearing 5 to 25 flowers, approximately 1/2 to 3/4 inches across. The flowers close at night and on overcast days, which protects pollen in the flowers. There are two green sepals forming the calyx. The five white, white with pink stripes, or pink petals are slightly joined at their bases to form a saucer-shaped corolla. The pink stripes which serve as

nectar lines for pollinators remind one of peppermint candy striping. There are five stamens with pink anthers and pink filaments. The filaments reflect ultraviolet radiation which insect pollinators can see. The pistil has a superior ovary and a three-cleft style. The first day the flower opens, its stamens are functional and release pollen. The next day—and up to seven more days—the pistil is receptive to pollen. During this period the stamens bend the anthers back against the petals. The ultraviolet reflecting filaments that are also bent back may act as

nectar lines to guide the insect pollinators down to the nectary glands at the base of each petal. The nectar production of spring beauty is very generous. At least 23 different species of native bees, bumblebees, honeybees, and syrphid flies have been observed visiting spring beauty flowers. Some other spring wildflowers such as rue anemone and hepatica that are not generous nectar producers may attract pollinators by mimicking the shape and size of spring beauty.

The fruit of spring beauty is a triangular shaped capsule containing up to 25-30 or more shiny black seeds with small appendages known as elaiosomes. The fruit matures about ten days following pollination and fertilization. The seeds are forcibly ejected from the capsule at maturity and may be further dispersed by ants attracted to the elaiosomes (fat bodies on outside of seeds).



The spring beauty corm is quite tasty and has been a food source in Indian cultures and is still eaten by wild food enthusiasts. The corms, which contain vitamins A and C, can be eaten raw or cooked like small

potatoes. Squirrels and other forest wildlife will eat the corms. The leaves and flowers are also edible. Past medicinal uses have included using powdered corms to treat convulsions and as a contraception. Other species of spring beauty have been used by various Indian tribes to make poultices to treat eye problems and as an infusion to treat sore throats, dandruff, and urinary tract problems.

Even though spring beauty may be one of our commonest spring wildflowers, it still brings us much joy and beauty each spring on walks through the woods or even in our own lawns. Spring beauties can be found across our area. Enjoy the spring beauties mixed in with Virginia Bluebells at the walk along Bull Run at the Manassas National Battlefield Park (MNBPF) Stone Bridge and elsewhere in MNBPF. [Marion Blois Lobstein is Botany Chair of the Prince William Wildflower Society and Professor Emeritus (Biology), NVCC Manassas. This article is adapted from articles previously published in Wild News].

PRINCE WILLIAM WILDFLOWER SOCIETY

P.O. Box 83 - Manassas, VA 20108-0083

Chartered: January 10, 1983

Logo: *Mertensia virginica* - Virginia Bluebells

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# Prince William Wildflower Society

## SPRING 2013 EVENTS



### MARCH

**Monday, March 18, 7:30 p.m.**, Bethel Lutheran Church, Manassas. PWWS Membership Meeting will feature **Michael Lott**, Northern Region Steward, Department of Conservation and Recreation of the Virginia Division of Natural Heritage. He will be speaking to us about **Crow's Nest Natural Area Preserve** in Stafford County.

**Tuesday, March 19, 7:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.**, Leesylvania Elementary School, 15800 Neabsco Road Woodbridge 22191. **Update on boardwalk to connect Rippon Landing and Metz Wetlands.** A boardwalk over Neabsco Creek is planned to connect Rippon Landing and Metz Wetlands as part of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail. At this meeting, the contractor will update the community on the project and solicit community input on the design and use of the Boardwalk.

**Wednesday, March 27, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.**, Moose Lodge #1380, 9305 Brentsville Road, Manassas. **The Master Planning process for Dove's Landing** opens with a community meeting to gather input from residents on uses for this new parkland. Planned for passive recreation uses (birding, nature study, hiking), Dove's Landing protects more than one mile of shoreline along the Occoquan River. Read more about this site at [www.pwconserve.org/issues/conservation/doveslanding/](http://www.pwconserve.org/issues/conservation/doveslanding/).

**Sunday, March 31, 8 a.m. to 11 a.m.**, Merrimac Farm, 15020 Deepwood Lane, Nokesville 20181. **Bird Walk at Merrimac Farm.** Sponsored by Prince William Conservation Alliance ([www.pwconserve.org](http://www.pwconserve.org)). Everyone is welcome. Dress for the weather, bring binoculars and cameras. More info and RSVP (appreciated not required) to PWCA (703) 499-4954 or [alliance@pwconserve.org](mailto:alliance@pwconserve.org).



### APRIL

**Thursday, April 4. PWWS field trip to Crow's Nest.** This event is free and open to the public. Details forthcoming at the March 18 meeting.

**Saturday, April 7, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., 2013 Bluebell Festival at Merrimac Farm,** sponsored by Prince William Conservation Alliance and Virginia Dept. of Game & Inland Fisheries with support from Marine Corps Base Quantico. Please join friends and neighbors to welcome spring and view the *spectacular display of Virginia Bluebells* that carpet the floodplain along Cedar Run for nearly a mile. In the words of one visitor, "it's like walking through Oz." **Schedule of Events:** (*see <http://www.pwconserve.org> for details on the schedule of events.*) Look for local artists outside on the front lawn, where local environmental groups will also have fun nature displays and activities for children of all ages. Concessions and food from "N.C. Ribs on Wheels" will be available for purchase. A bake sale and hand painted rain barrel raffle benefitting

stewardship projects at Merrimac Farm will round out the event. Tours last about 90 minutes and take an easy one-mile walk through the floodplain. Each tour has a special focus, although leaders also cover other interesting sights you see along the way. Bring binoculars, cameras and the kids!

**Thursday, April 18, 10 a.m. (Field Trip for PWWS members): The Bruce Jones Nature Preserve** is a privately owned, 180-acre farm in Rappahannock County dedicated to promoting native biodiversity, with a primary focus on supporting pollinators, grassland birds, and birds of prey. A wide variety of native grassland plant and wildlife species are represented. The preserve also has woodland areas that support many spring ephemerals and migrating warblers. The tour is limited to 12 participants. Contact Nancy Vehrs, [nvehrs1@yahoo.com](mailto:nvehrs1@yahoo.com) or (703) 368-2898, to register.

**Sunday, April 28, 12 noon to 5:00 p.m., Annual Spring Native Garden Tour, sponsored by the Prince William Wildflower Society.** Join us for this annual outing to some of our area's greatest gardens featuring native plants. This year's tour will include three gardens, all in the eastern part of the county. Watch for details on the gardens in the mailed brochure or check online at [www.pwvs.vnps.org](http://www.pwvs.vnps.org). Gardens featured on this year's tour include the garden of PWWS Vice President Carol Thompson (off Bacon Race Road), which has not been on the tour for many years, plus two brand new gardens to PWWS, Mary Lou Chiarito's garden in Lake Ridge, and Teresa Blecksmith's garden in Montclair. The Thompson garden features a woodland setting; the two new gardens are situated on suburban lots.



### MAY

**Thursday, May 2, 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m., Prince William Conservation Alliance presents "Living Shorelines: Stream Stewards,"** at Bull Run Universalist Unitarian Church, 9350 Main St Manassas, VA 20110. Speaker is Tom Dombrowski, PWC Watershed Management Division.

**Saturday, May 12, 9:00 a.m. to Noon, PWWS Annual Native Plant Sale, Grounds of Bethel Lutheran Church, 8712 Plantation Lane, Manassas.** Sun- and shade-loving native wildflowers, shrubs, and trees; great prices, lots of variety! Bethel Lutheran Church, 8712 Plantation Lane, Manassas.

We need your plants! It's time to start potting-up for the plant sale; call or email plant sale co-chairs Nancy Arrington (703) 368-8431, [narrington1@verizon.net](mailto:narrington1@verizon.net) for more information about plants needed and what you can do to help make PWWS' sole fundraising activity a success. Watch for details about the Plant Sale in the mail—all current members will be mailed a brochure—or on our Web site ([www.pwvs.vnps.org](http://www.pwvs.vnps.org)) or Facebook page.

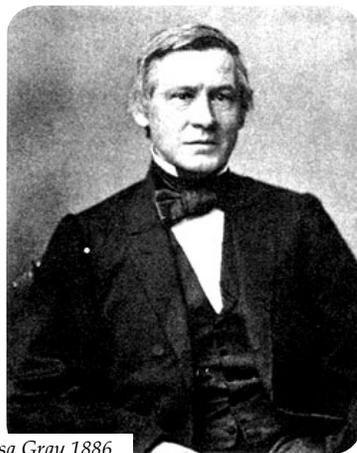
**Monday, May 20, 7:30 p.m., Bethel Lutheran Church, Manassas.** Prince William Wildflower Society's membership meeting will feature speaker Judith Dreyer of "At the Garden's Gate," who will talk about "Meadows and Wild Edibles."

## History of Classification of *Claytonia virginica* (Spring Beauty)

By Marion Blois Lobstein

The history of the classification of *Claytonia virginica* began in 1735 when John Clayton sent a collected and pressed *Claytonia virginica* specimen to Johann Friedrich Gronovius in the Netherlands. Clayton had been inspired by Mark Catesby whom Clayton had met during the period Catesby lived in Williamsburg, Virginia from 1712 to 1719. Catesby encouraged Clayton's interest in plants and taught him how to press plants to preserve them. After Catesby returned to Europe, Clayton often sent him pressed specimens of Virginia plants, and through Catesby, Clayton began to correspond with Gronovius and send him specimens. Mark Catesby also shared Clayton's specimens with Gronovius and Linnaeus. (See Clayton's image specimen at the British Natural History Museum [www.nhm.ac.uk/research-curation/research/projects/clayton-herbarium/index.html](http://www.nhm.ac.uk/research-curation/research/projects/clayton-herbarium/index.html).) Linnaeus named the genus *Claytonia* in honor of John Clayton and assigned the species epithet (name) *virginica* for the then-colony of Virginia. In the 1739 (first) and 1762 (second) editions of *Flora Virginica* by John Clayton and Gronovius, which used the Linnaean system of classifying species by number of sexual parts (stamens and pistils), *Claytonia virginica* is placed under *Pentandria Monogynia* (five stamens and one pistil).

Meanwhile, more recognizable plant families were being proposed. In 1763, the family Portulacaceae with species from 20 families, including the cactus and ice plant families, was first established by Michel Adanson. In 1789, Antoine de Jussieu pared down the number of genera in Portulacaceae, but included *Claytonia* and *Montia* (both genera named by Linnaeus). In 1820, Constantine Samuel Rafinesque proposed Montiaceae based on the



Asa Gray 1886

genus *Montia*. [The genus *Montia* was named by Linnaeus in honor of Giuseppe Monti (1682-1760), an Italian botanist.] *Montia* is very similar to *Claytonia*; there have been many switches of species of *Montia* to genus *Claytonia* over the last two hundred years].

The famous American botanist Asa Gray, as a teenager, was inspired to study botany by noting *Claytonia* in Amos Eaton's *Manual of Botany for the Northern States* (1817 edition) and finding live specimens of *Claytonia virginica* in spring 1828. Eaton still used the Linnaean system of classification. By the time Asa Gray and John Torrey wrote their *Flora of North America* in 1838, *Claytonia* was placed in Portulacaceae. In subsequent editions of *Gray's Manual of Botany* (beginning in 1848), the genus was placed in Portulacaceae.

There has been debate for over two hundred years about what genera should be in Portulacaceae and which species in genera *Claytonia* vs. *Montia* (the common name of Miner's lettuce is used for species of both genera.) By the 1980s and into the 1990s, there were more and more questions about whether *Claytonia* belonged in Portulacaceae or Montiaceae. DNA work starting in the late 1990s and continuing into the early 2000s led to *Claytonia* and *Montia* being moved to Montiaceae. The original 1998 Angiosperm Phylogeny Group (APG) and the 2003 AGPII left Portulacaceae and its genera basically unchanged, but by the 2009 APG III, both *Claytonia* and *Montia*, along with a number of other genera, were moved to the Montiaceae. The other genera moved to Montiaceae include *Hectorella*, *Calandrinia*, *Cistanthe*, *Lewisia*, and *Phemeranthus* (*Talinum*). There are approximately 25 recognized species of *Claytonia* and 12 of *Montia* worldwide, with only *Claytonia virginica* and *Claytonia caroliniana* (Carolina spring beauty) found in Virginia. *Montia fontana* (annual water miners lettuce) and *Montia linearis* (narrow leaf miners lettuce), listed on page 1368 of the *Flora of Virginia* under "Taxa Not Treated in This Manual," are two *Montia* species considered "waifs" (nonnative plants that are rare or only short-lived in an area). The *Claytonia virginica* classification change is reflected in most current floras

and taxonomic work, including in our 2012 *Flora of Virginia*.

### Some websites of interest:

--Overview of spring beauty species and medicinal uses:  
[www.texasbeyondhistory.net/coast/nature/images/spring-beauty.html](http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/coast/nature/images/spring-beauty.html)

--"Spring Beauty: The Fairy Spud," an overview of spring beauty species, common names, edible and medicinal uses:

[www.inpaws.org/images/resources/Gordon%20Mitchell%20Articles/GM\\_spring\\_beauty.pdf](http://www.inpaws.org/images/resources/Gordon%20Mitchell%20Articles/GM_spring_beauty.pdf)

--"This Spud's for You" (another common name for spring beauty is "fairy spud"):

[www.virginaliving.com/articles/this-spuds-for-you/](http://www.virginaliving.com/articles/this-spuds-for-you/)

--Interestingly, two USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) sites differ on classification of *Claytonia virginica*, with the USDA's Germplasm Resources Information Network (GRIN) recognizing Montiaceae and placing *Claytonia* and *Montia* in that family, while the USDA Plant Database still lists both genera in Portulacaceae. The two websites are [www.ars-grin.gov/cgi-bin/npgs/html/family.pl?733](http://www.ars-grin.gov/cgi-bin/npgs/html/family.pl?733) and <http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=clvi3>

--John Clayton Herbarium at Natural History Museum in London, England: [www.nhm.ac.uk/research-curation/research/projects/clayton-herbarium/index.html](http://www.nhm.ac.uk/research-curation/research/projects/clayton-herbarium/index.html)

--Background on Asa Gray:

[www.huh.harvard.edu/libraries/Gray\\_Bicent/graybio.htm](http://www.huh.harvard.edu/libraries/Gray_Bicent/graybio.htm)

--"Disintegrating Portulacaceae: a new familial classification of the suborder Portulacineae (Caryophyllales) based on molecular and Morphological data:" [zora.uzh.ch/42651/4/Nyffeler\\_Taxon\\_2010\\_V.pdf](http://zora.uzh.ch/42651/4/Nyffeler_Taxon_2010_V.pdf) (Please see the online version of this article at [www.pwvs.vnps.org](http://www.pwvs.vnps.org) for direct links to these resources.)

## Natives for the Garden

By Nancy Arrington

### Blue-star (*Amsonia tabernaemontana*)

Blue-star is a perfect plant for today's environmentally conscious gardener. It's a long-lived, easy-care perennial that never needs spraying, dividing, dead-heading, fertilizing or watering (once it has established a good root system). At home in a formal perennial bed or a naturalistic setting, it is a good nectar plant for butterflies and other pollinators and is deer resistant. Other common names are willow amsonia or willowleaf blue-star because of its willow-

like foliage, and blue dogbane because it is in the dogbane family, *Apocynaceae*.

It occurs naturally over most of the Eastern U.S., west to Texas and Arkansas. According to the *Flora of Virginia* its habitat is floodplains, forests, mesic slope forests, and low or alluvial clearings. The *Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora* shows it growing in a cluster of a dozen or so counties in southeastern Virginia.

This southeastern Virginia location has a connection to blue-star's genus name, which honors Charles Amson, a Gloucester, Virginia, physician during the mid-1700s. The unwieldy species name commemorates Jakob Theodor von Bergzabern, a 16<sup>th</sup> century German physician and herbalist, who Latinized his name as Tabernaemontanus.

Blue-star grows two and a half to three feet tall with narrow, three to four inch long willow-like leaves lining its graceful stems. Loose clusters of light blue, star-shaped flowers bloom at the tips of stems for two to three weeks in early to mid May. After flowering, blue-star's dark green foliage stays attractive (due to a sap present in all dogbanes that acts as a natural insecticide) through the growing season and turns a golden yellow in the fall. Stems can be cut back by about a third to make them sturdier and better able to withstand summer's rains and wind. Plants do not re-bloom so you will need to leave flowering stems intact if you want seeds, which can be collected when the slender pods turn brown. For better germination, snip off one end of the cylindrical seeds and soak overnight in water. Division of a mature plant's woody root system is almost possible.



Plant blue-star in an area that gets four to six hours of sun. Soil should be fertile and moist but well-drained. The pale blue flowers combine beautifully with those of other

plants blooming at

the same time including spiderworts (*Tradescantia* spp.), sundrops (*Oenothera* spp.), eared coreopsis (*C. auriculata*), columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*), and native azaleas, including pinxterbloom (*Rhododendron*

*periclymenoides*) and flame azalea (*R. calendulaceum*). After flowering, blue-star's soft billowy foliage is a good companion for asters (*Symphotrichum* spp.), summer phlox (*P. paniculata*), beebalm (*Monarda* spp.) and black-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia* spp.).

Local and mail-order nurseries carry several other blue-star species and selections that are good garden plants. A long-flowering cultivar, 'Blue Ice', 12-15" tall with dark lavender blue flowers, has become popular in



recent years. It was discovered at White Flower Farm in Connecticut and assumed to be a seedling of *A. tabernaemontana* but may prove to be a hybrid with another species.

Blue-star seeds readily in Marie Davis's garden, and she will bring plants to the May 11<sup>th</sup> plant sale. Please consider adding this lovely, long-lived, low maintenance native to your

garden. You will be pleased with its performance. – Nancy Arrington

[**Images and Photos:** Crow's Nest, DCR, accessed at [www.dcr.virginia.gov](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov); Asa Gray 1886, accessed at <http://www.asa3.org>; Spring Beauty corm and flower, both courtesy of Marion Blois Lobstein; Amsonia taeberrmontana, Sally and Andy Wasowski, NPIN image id #21261, accessed at [www.wildflower.org](http://www.wildflower.org); Monarch on Amsonia, Layla Dishman, Harris County, Texas, accessed at flicker.com; Botanical illustration of Claytonia virginica, in Dictionnaire des sciences naturelle, by Pierre Jean Francois Turpin (1816), accessed at <http://wisplants.uwsp.edu>; Address panel illustration, from The Native Flowers and Ferns of the United States by Thomas Meehan, 1879-80, accessed at <http://chestofbooks.com/flora-plants/flowers/USA/index.html>.]

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PRINCE WILLIAM WILDFLOWER SOCIETY  
A Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society  
P.O. Box 83, Manassas, Virginia, 20108-0083

**Next Meeting: Monday, March 18, 7:30 p.m.**  
**"Crow's Nest Natural Preserve" with Michael Lott**  
**Bethel Lutheran Church, 8712 Plantation Lane, Manassas, Virginia 20110**