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## Shenandoah Chapter, VNPS

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Mark Gatewood reported on February 10: Our first flower of the year on Madison Run is the ridiculously small, improbably colorful female flower of the hazel (*Corylus* sp.). Like others of the birch family (Betulaceae), hazels put out male catkins at the beginning of winter. Female flowers appear in late February into March. Individual flowers are scattered along the stem. You'll need a 10X lens to appreciate their deep magenta blooms. Hazel is easily overlooked except by squirrels and nosy naturalists, but it's worth a look.

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### Save the date!

A native plant garden and meadow tour is in the works for June 10th and 11th, 2023. Be on the lookout for an email about host sites!

### Spring Native Plant Sales events coming up on April 22 and 29!!!

April 22, 2023 at EarthDay Staunton

April 29, 2023 Riverfest, Waynesboro

We are looking for volunteers to pot up and bring native plants to donate to our sales efforts at either or both events.

We would also love to draw on the institutional wisdom of those who have been part of Shenandoah Chapter in the past and remember running plant sales.

Whether you have energy to volunteer or simply want to share helpful tips, we'd love to hear from you. We would like to build our capacity to propagate native plants to sell and share this spring and into the future.

### Upcoming Events

- Earth Day Staunton (April 22)
- Riverfest, Waynesboro (April 29)
- Blandy Annual Garden Fair, Mother's Day weekend (May 13-14)
- Native plant garden tour is in the planning stages for June 10th and 11th.

Many more events can be found in this [document](#) which will be updated regularly!



**Update on the Ridge and Valley Native Plant Guide project.**

Our Shenandoah Chapter is partnering with other VNPS chapters as well as Virginia Master Naturalists, Virginia Master Gardeners, and other non-profit organizations to create a native plant guide for the Ridge and Valley region of Virginia (called the “Mountain” region on some maps). It includes native plants found in 11 counties: (north to south) Frederick, Clarke, Shenandoah, Warren, Page, Rockingham, Highland, Augusta, Bath, Rockbridge, and Alleghany.

The guide will include over 150 plants with photographs, growth information, natural habitat, wildlife associations, and ideas about how to integrate the native plants into a home garden. Special thanks to Anne Elise Lintelman who designed the logo (above) for it.



Organizations may pre-order a box for the special wholesale price of \$11/copy with a minimum of 40 copies (plus delivery fees).

Follow this effort on the associated Facebook group and [page](#) – Plant Ridge and Valley Native Plants

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## Plant Propagation Workshop

### Sharon Landis and Katy Melton Simpson

On Saturday, March 4, a few Headwaters Master Naturalists and Virginia Native Plant Society members participated in a wonderful, hands-on field trip to Little Bluestem nursery, in Afton, to learn about the nursery and about plant propagation from Ben Kessler.

Attending were Anna Maria Johnson, Sharon Landis, Katy Melton Simpson, Eunice Sill and Elaine Smith. Little Bluestem Nursery is a local genotype nursery, a non-profit established in 2019 with the help of Virginia Organizing. They have 80 acres of small meadows and forest, a podcast called 'By the Seed of our Plants.' Little Bluestem is trying to boost their area's ecological diversity, through community education and by propagating and distributing native plants.

Ben and Kelly Walsh began the workshop by offering us the invitation to see all in the environment as having "non-human personhood," to respect the communities in which native plants thrive, notice or study how ecosystems work together. Also, that it's good to boost genetic variants. He advised us to follow the plant's lead when tending, supporting, planting or relocating. Both Ben and Kelly talked about the art of 'listening to the wind,' observing the land, noticing the communities of plants thriving there, the soil, rocks, insects, birds too and to use those observations to balance our human need to do something for or with that land. As I listened, I tried to imagine what our lands would look like if everyone adopted such a harmonious, reciprocal approach to land management!

Since most of their land is up the side of a mountain, Ben and his team used contouring with old logs, to minimize nutrient runoff from slopes. Little Bluestem's land has a stand of American Chestnuts and Slippery Elm. I loved hearing Ben's explanation of how the American Chestnut trees died off not just because of blight, but also due to imbalances in their environment such as the extinction of the passenger pigeons who gave nutrients to Chestnut trees, and the non-native European earthworm's role in major nutrient washing down forest slopes.

From there we were taken to a small, planted bed, with seed heads still intact on many of the plants. We were taught good harvesting methods, and giving back in some way to the plants when we take from them. We gathered mostly *Pycnanthemum* spp (mountain mints) seeds and walked to a nearby clearing in the woods that Kessler said was most in need of planting to distribute the seeds. A good guide in wild harvesting is to take one tenth of the seed from one tenth of the plants.

Ben talked about the processing of seeds, the use of winnowing and using screens to separate chaff from seeds, and how to properly store seeds. He mentioned stratification and scarification methods, the proper mix of potting soils for planting and what soil tilth means. (the amount of air in the soil is key to healthy roots.) All the Rockingham County residents among us laughed when Ben said in a perfect planting bed you should be able to sink your fist and forearm into the soil!

Then, he discussed potting methods, and proper mix of soils. For seed starting you need low nutrient potting soil, mixed with perlite, vermiculite, and sand. (*Potting soil recipe for seed starting*: 2 gallons compost or bagged potting soil that is not Miracle Grow, 2 gallons vermiculite, 2 gallons perlite, 1-gallon coarse sand.) He demonstrated how to put soil into a flat of pots. Loose soil is needed for meadow plants, slightly packed soil for forest plants. He planted Little Bluestem seeds and covered them with sand. Then added a dusting of Azomite



starts. He told us that potted plants like their roots tight. Only repot when the roots start showing underneath the outside of the pot. And then only repot into the next size up, not into a much bigger pot.

He talked about good fertilizers: Neptune's Harvest fish emulsion and kelp, green tea made from comfrey-horsetail-yarrow, and using a molasses soak to activate microorganisms in the soil. We had lots of questions, got wonderful answers and thoroughly enjoyed our time a Little Bluestem!

Katy's notes:

Plants in containers like roots tight, don't pot up until roots are coming out of the bottom and then only to the next size (better to repot frequently than to make a big size jump). Wait for structural roots to repot/divide. Pots are unnatural for the plants, and you want the plant to control the balance in the pot. If the plant is outsized, it can't do that.

Fertilize once plant is up and growing (multiple true leaves).

Many different options: Molasses- mix approx 1/4 cup with 1 gallon water, Neptune's harvest, liquid kelp.

Yarrow helps compost break down faster! Comfrey root can be boiled down and used as a rooting hormone!

For seed starting utilize a mix of potting soil, sand, vermiculite, and perlite. Mix changes depending on the seedlings. If they like it wet, add more vermiculite. Well drained, add more perlite. Example: Joe Pye (*Eutrochium* family) likes to stay a little damp so start in something like 50% sand with 2 parts potting soil and 1 part perlite. Then, when potting up to a quart, change to 1/3 vermiculite, 1/3 potting soil, 1/3 sand with just a little bit of perlite. Sand helps maintain air pockets and increases tilth.

When seeds need to be sown on soil surface, top with a little bit of sand. Ben often sprinkles Azomite over seeds to add nutrients.

When plants turn reddish, they often need magnesium.

More photos [here](#).



Photos by Sharon Landis

Please send Elaine Smith any items for the next newsletter, coming in April!



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