

If you're having trouble viewing this email, you can [see it online](#).



Spring is on the Move! March 2026 Newsletter

Skunk Cabbage: Winter's Hidden Treasure

Jack Monsted, Botany Chair

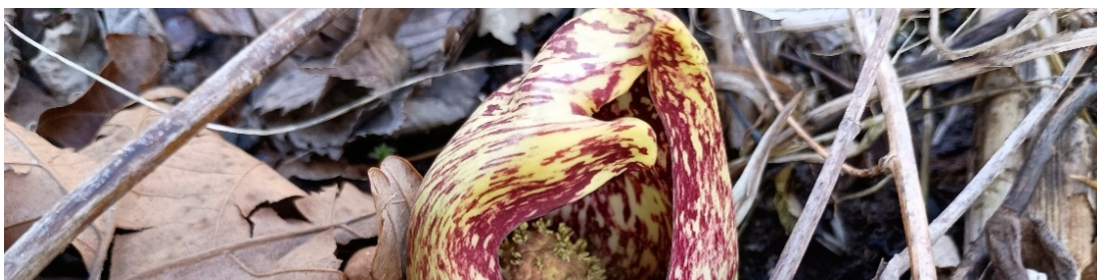




Photo of a flowering skunk cabbage (Jack Monsted)

It's mid-February, and my wife and I are treading slowly through the soft mud on the edge of a ditch. "There's one!" she yells, pointing excitedly at a patch of wet, leaf-strewn muck. It takes my eyes a second to scan, and then I see it – a strange little red and green lump with a curly top poking up from the recently frozen water. I kneel down for a closer look, and suddenly I see them everywhere: a field of funky, egg-shaped blooms covering the otherwise unremarkable ditch.

Our first skunk cabbages of the year! Each winter when the doldrums are at their peak, after every board game has been played and every craft completed, we are finally lured outside by the promise of finding the truly fantastical flowers of our earliest blooming native wildflower.

Skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*) is a strange little plant. It's in the arum family (*Araceae*), situated alongside mostly tropical relatives like the elephant ears (*Colocasia* spp.) and the notoriously foul-smelling corpse flowers (*Amorphophallus* spp.). You can see the family resemblance. In the summer it puts up a crop of very large, rounded leaves, and if you get close to its funky little flowers, they emit a faint odor of rotting meat. It's easy to imagine the types of flies and beetles such a smell attracts, some of the only pollinators to be active this early in the year.

Where it differs from its tropical cousins is habitat. The skunk cabbage is native to the Northeastern United States, with Virginia at the southernmost edge of its range. It grows exclusively in soggy habitats like swamps, bogs, and fens – if you want to get a good glimpse of the beauties, be ready to get your feet wet.

It is a remarkably long-lived plant. As a perennial, it begins its life-cycle each year with the flowers, which keep all the actual reproductive parts hidden inside a mottled green-and-red covering called the *spathe* – this is what you

first notice on the blooms. If you find one that is open enough and peek inside, you can see the pollen-bearing stamens poking up from a round structure called a *spadix* – both spathe and spadix are common to flowers in this plant family. Once it finishes blooming in spring, it puts up a cluster of very large leaves that can measure almost two feet long and half as wide. These leaves will remain until September or so before dying back for the winter. When crushed, the leaves emit a fetid scent, the main reason for both the plant's common and Latin names.

Each year, the plant's thick roots grow outwards and then permanently contract, creating 'wrinkles' that pull the plant further down into the mud, counteracting the upward growth of the new buds each year. This large, deep root system makes skunk cabbages almost impossible to transplant. Since it's also difficult to germinate from seed, this plant is not particularly suited to gardens. It's better to just go visit them in their natural habitats – a great excuse to get outside and go on a little adventure during the gray days of late winter!



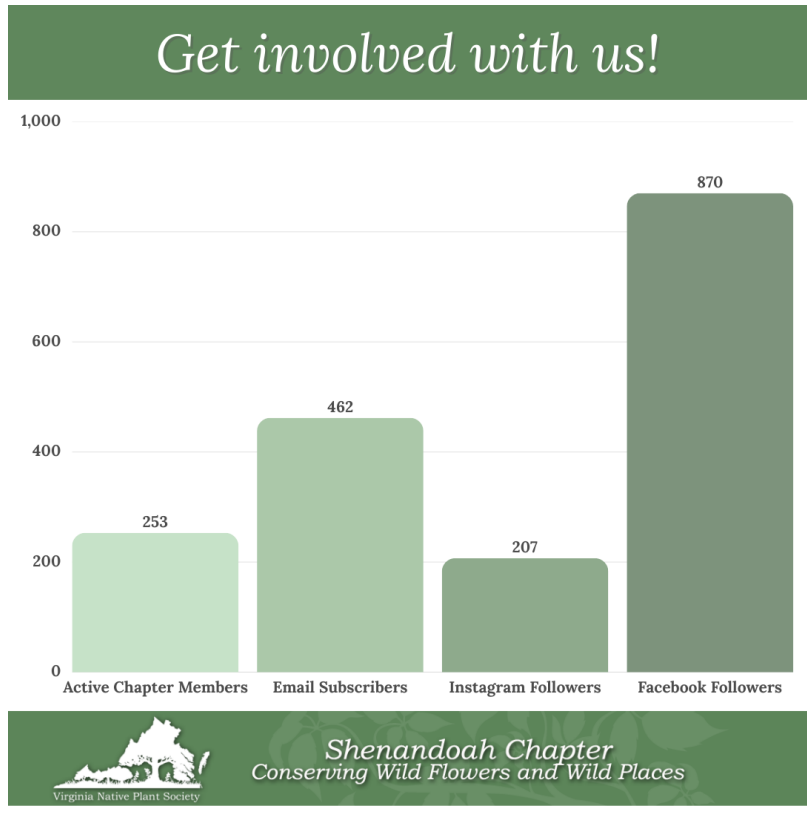
Photo of an herbarium specimen showing the deep root mass

(Smithsonian Museum of Natural History)

Our Membership is Growing!

You may have noticed a difference in the newsletter appearance and email address. This is because . . .

. . . we were surprised to discover last month that our newsletter mailing list exceeded 500 subscribers! Hurray! This meant we were no longer eligible for the free Mailchimp newsletter account, so we have migrated over to the state VNPS provider, Neon (for no cost to the chapter). You may still reach our local chapter leadership at the same email: shenandoahchapter@gmail.com. If you reply to this email directly, your response will now go to the state VNPS administrator, then be forwarded to us.



Thank you to our Technology Chair, Rebecca Clark, and to our Membership Chair, Anna Finch, for collaborating on this graphic to show our membership as of early March. "Active chapter members" refer to those who have current paid memberships that fund our ongoing activities.



With Appreciation to Our 35 Charter Members

Back when Lucy and Kean Ivy hosted our first potluck, little did we know how far our little Shenandoah Chapter would grow.

Without each of you, this Chapter would not be where it is today. Thank you.

Choose your Level of Engagement

- Newsletter Subscriber (that's you, already!)
- Social Media (Instagram and Facebook) participant
- Second Sunday Plant Social (every month in person)
- Dues-paying [member](#) through VNPS
- Volunteer for Tabling Events, Plant Sales, Social Media Team, Habitat Restoration, Leadership, and More

Reach out to our Membership Chair, Anna Finch at annafinch85@aol.com, to see how you can be more involved.

Members Spotlight





Briana Miller, pictured above, shows samples of the plant-and-pollinator playing cards to those who attended the March Second Sunday Social at the Edith J Carrier Arboretum's Plecker Education Center on March 8. Card illustrations by Maggie Johnson. Photo by Anna Maria Johnson

Members Spotlight: Briana Miller and Maggie Johnson

Briana Miller of Broadway, Virginia, has been working since spring 2023 to develop a native-plant-and-pollinator-themed board game called *PLOT*. She was inspired by her own research process when deciding what to plant around her house, which was then a new construction with hard, bare ground. As she learned more, she discovered the powerful role of native plants to bring pollinators and beauty to one's yard. She imagined there could be a fun way for others to learn about native plants, their best growing conditions, and how they interact with pollinators. Intrigued, she conceived the idea of *PLOT*.

By 2025, after working out the rules and structure, Briana was ready to find an artist-illustrator to collaborate on the game. Maggie Johnson, recent graduate from the College of William and Mary (also a Broadway resident), took on the project to make detailed illustrations for each card, featuring different plants and pollinators native to Virginia.

To learn more about the game as it evolves, visit the game's [website](#). Stay tuned for a chance to play a game prototype at a future Second Sunday Social!

Chapter Events

Wednesday, March 18 (via Zoom). VNPS Annual Workshop. The Wonderful World of Virginia's Wetlands (part 1).

Saturday, March 21, 1-4pm. Pollinators in Your Yard. Event through City of Harrisonburg. Join us for

the fourth annual [Pollinators in Your Yard](#) event, taking place in Downtown Harrisonburg at the Ice House building, where **we will be hosting an Education Station!** The event kicks off with a discussion about pollinator-friendly initiatives happening around the City of Harrisonburg. Learn details about specific pollinator animal species found in Harrisonburg's green spaces and the plant species that support them, and recent pollinator project collaborations that have taken place in around the community. Stop by our table and say hi to Anna Maria and Katy!

Wednesday, March 25 (via Zoom). VNPS Annual Workshop. The Wonderful World of Virginia's Wetlands (part 2).

April 2 at 6pm. Winter Webinar Series with Jack Monsted. Join us for the conclusion of our three-part winter webinar series. Jack will conclude with a talk about **starting a wildflower patch from seed.** Can't attend on the day of? No problem! Webinars will be recorded with links to the recordings emailed to all *registered* participants within a couple of days after each event. One-time \$10 registration covers all three webinars (including recordings). For more information and to register go [here](#).

Sunday, April 12, 1:30 - 3 pm. Second Sunday Plant Social (in person). Special Event: E-book Launch Party! Celebrate a new native plant guide featuring plants native to the Virginia Highlands.

Saturday, April 18, 9am - 2pm. Seven Bends Nursery Primavera Party. Join us for this educational event at Seven Bends Native Plant Nursery in Berryville, VA. Visit with conservation organizations from around the region, enjoy a guided nursery tour showcasing what agriculture on a plant farm looks like, native plant Q&A session with Dr. Lara Lacher, scavenger hunt for native tree saplings, and native plant raffles! Katy and Charlie will be at our table.

Saturday, April 25, from 11am - 3pm. Native Plant Sale. Join us at Earth Day Staunton in Gypsy Hill Park! Please think about sharing plants with us! Contact [Marty](#) or [Katy](#) if you'd like to contribute plants or assist on the day of the event.

Saturday, May 30, from 10am - 1pm and Sunday, May 31st from 1pm - 4pm. Ridge & Valley Native Plant Tour. Enjoy open-house style garden tours across our region. Tour website with addresses will be published the week before the event. If you are interested in hosting, please fill out this form: <https://forms.gle/aekRus2oEt5yrR6N9> Send any questions to [Katy](#).

Opportunities to Volunteer

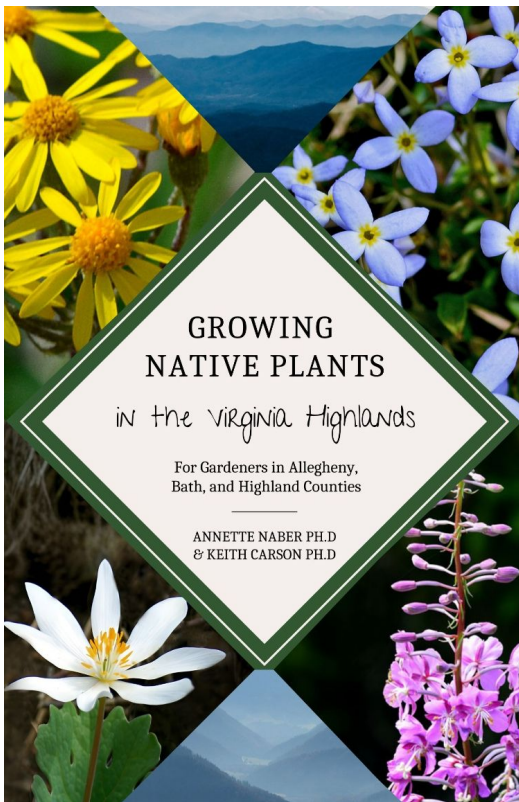


Guided walks? We would love to offer more guided walks. If you would like to lead a walk, please [contact Katy](#).

Mary Jane Epps led a winter tree identification walk for our chapter in Feb. 2023 (photo by Steven David Johnson).

Plant Ridge & Valley Natives

- a public-private partnership between businesses, government agencies, and non-profits committed to conservation



Stay tuned for a new e-book called *Growing Native Plants in the Virginia Highlands*.

Shenandoah Chapter member Dr. Annette Naber co-authored the text with Dr. Keith Carson. Our first-ever paid intern Skylar Goehring (of James Madison University) laid out all the content and designed the cover.

Join us to celebrate the book launch during our Second Sunday Social, April 12, at 1:30 in the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum's Plecker Education Center.



The guide will be available for free download in April, just in time for spring. We'll include a link in the April newsletter.

Thanks to funding from the Virginia Talent and Opportunity Partnership (VTOP) for reimbursing 50% of the cost to pay our intern and to our Chapter for covering the rest. This was a valuable investment in mentoring the next generation to make meaningful contributions to environmental sustainability while developing professional skills.

Partner Connections

Pesticide Free Landscapes for Pollinators and People. This free pre-recorded Winter Webinar from Pollinator Pathway is a powerful and timely webinar on pesticide use and its impacts on pollinators, wildlife, and human health. The conversation was thoughtful, informative, and ultimately hopeful—grounded in science and focused on real actions we can take at the local and state levels. [Available here.](#)

Bring Back the Pollinators Q&A. Wednesday, March 11th 1-2pm. Free webinar through the Xerces Society. Join Xerces experts to ask your questions about the Bring Back the Pollinators first principle: plant pollinator-friendly plants. This is your chance to get advice about how to select native plants with season-long bloom to provide nectar and pollen for the pollinators in your habitat. [More information and registration here.](#)

Invasive Plants in Spring. Tuesday, March 17th 1-2pm. Free webinar through Blue Ridge PRISM. Spring is full of new growth — and what better time to identify and remove invasive plants than when they are just tiny seedlings? This **FREE online webinar** where you'll learn how to identify invasive plants in the Virginia spring landscape. Whether you're a beginner or an expert, this session will provide valuable insights. Don't miss out on this opportunity to enhance your knowledge and skills in plant identification. The audience will have the opportunity to ask questions at the end. [More information and registration here.](#)

Hitchhiker's Guide to Marine Invasions. Tuesday, March 17, 7-8:30pm ET (online). Free webinar through the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center. How do invasive species hitchhike around the world? Join Dr. Jenny Carney-Zollars, head of SERC's ballast water sampling program, for a look at how massive cargo ships inadvertently transport tiny invaders with their cargo, and what strategies are working to reduce the risk. [More information and registration here.](#)

Spring Invasive Plant Control. Wednesday March 18th, 1-2pm. Free webinar through Blue Ridge PRISM. Join us for a **FREE online webinar** where you'll learn how to manage and control invasive plants in the spring

season. Techniques will include manual and mechanical methods, as well as careful, strategic use of herbicides where necessary. Come ready to learn practical management skills that you can apply on your own property to help curb the spread of invasives. [More information and registration here.](#)

Pollinator Pathway Spring Webinar with David L. Wagner, PhD., March 19th 6:30-8pm. Dr. Wagner, a renowned butterfly and moth expert, will lead us in an exploration of the lives of these charismatic creatures in this free webinar. Learn about the threats they face and how to protect and restore the places where these keystones of biodiversity can thrive. [More information and registration here.](#)

Beneficial Insects (talk, free) and **How to Make Cedar Bug Houses** (\$15). Saturday, March 21st. Event through CSV Master Gardeners, hosted at the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum. STOP! Before you squish that bug, join us to find out how different insects are helpful to our gardens and flower beds. You will learn why it is important to encourage insects to visit your garden and how to attract them by knowing what they eat, where they sleep, and how to identify them in their various life stages. [More information and registration here.](#)

Southeast Bumble Bee Identification Workshop. Tuesday, March 24th 6-7:30pm. Free webinar through Xerces Society. Join us for Part Two of the 2026 Southeast Bumble Bee Atlas training where we will take a closer look at our region's bumble bees! We will discuss identification tips for each of our bumble bee species by looking at photos and illustrations. You will also learn about how to tell tricky species apart and which photos are needed for identification. [More information and registration here.](#)

What Seedling is This? Thursday, March 26th, 12-1pm. Free webinar through Blue Ridge PRISM. Spring is full of new growth — and what better time to identify and remove invasive plants than when they are just tiny seedlings? This webinar will focus on the many invasive seedlings that are easy to identify and hand pull, before they become mature plants and much harder to remove. [More information and registration here.](#)

Chasing Water: Moving from Water Scarcity to Sustainability. Thursday, March 26th 7-8pm. Free webinar by Wild Virginia. Throughout much of human history, there has been enough affordable water to meet our needs as our populations grew. However, in many regions, all of the naturally replenished water supplies began to become fully consumed to support growing cities and farms. This presentation will discuss some of the places — such as the western US — now facing severe water crises with huge economic and environmental consequences. Some of the most promising solutions will be highlighted. [More information and registration here.](#)

Invasive Plant Identification Walk. Wednesday, April 1st 10-11am. Free event through Blue Ridge PRISM. Join Jacob Edel, Invasive Management Specialist at Blue Ridge PRISM and the [Edith J. Carrier Arboretum](#) in Harrisonburg for this free field training where you'll learn how to identify invasive plants in the fall. This session includes a short hike along trails, some with uneven surfaces. **Space is limited to 20 participants.** [More information and registration here.](#)

Inside the Shenandoah National Park Trust. Tuesday, April 21st 6:30-7:30pm. Free event by Wild Virginia. For almost 20 years, the Shenandoah National Park Trust has been the official philanthropic partner of Shenandoah National Park providing strategic investments in programs and

initiatives that help protect, enhance, and preserve the resources of the Park for all to enjoy. Beth Mizell who is the Good Neighbors Program Manager will introduce to you to the Trust, dive into its partnership with Shenandoah National Park highlighting the her work through the Good Neighbors Program, connect Shenandoah National Park to larger regional conservation, and share how you can be a great park neighbor. [More information and registration here.](#)

Friday, April 17th 10am - 12pm. Conservation Stewards Workday. Free event through Blue Ridge PRISM. Join Blue Ridge PRISM as we tackle invasive plants at the [Edith J. Carrier Arboretum](#) in Harrisonburg. Learn to identify and remove invasive plants that threaten the health & enjoyment of this beautiful natural area. **Space is limited to 10 participants.** [More information and registration here.](#)

Trout Lilies!



Steven David Johnson shared this sighting of *Erythronium umbilicatum* (Dimpled Trout Lilies) from March 10, 2026. They are similar to *Erythronium americanum* (Yellow Trout Lilies), but bloom 1-2 weeks earlier in sites where they are found together. The anthers of Dimpled Trout Lilies are usually brown, cinnamon, or purple compared with the yellow anthers of yellow trout

lilies. (source: Flora of Virginia app dichotomous key)

Copyright © Virginia Native Plant Society, All rights reserved.

You are included on this mailing because you provided us with an email address. While we hope to stay connected, if you prefer to be removed from this list please use the 'Unsubscribe from this list' option, below.

Our mailing address is:

Virginia Native Plant Society
400 Blandy Farm Lane, Unit #2
Boyce, VA 22620

This email was sent to {{Recipient Email}}. [Click here to unsubscribe.](#)