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## April 2026 Newsletter



Bluebells at Shenandoah State Park, Bluebell Festival, April 4, 2026. Photo by Steven David Johnson

**It's Virginia bluebell season! Or are they pinkbells, or whitebells?**

by Jack Monsted, Botany Chair



The rare white form of *Mertensia virginica* (Virginia bluebells).

Photo by Jack Monsted

Spring. It's that time of year when Virginia's parks and forests are covered in photographers and native plant lovers, traipsing up and down the floodplains looking for spring ephemeral wildflowers to pose next to or geek out over. Our seasonal allergies are acting up, but that won't prevent us from walking miles in search of our favorite patch of bloodroot, trillium, or trout lilies. While all spring ephemerals have a special place in my heart, perhaps none are as charismatic as the Virginia bluebell (*Mertensia virginica*), the queen of spring.

What's most interesting to me about Virginia bluebells is the color of their flowers. If you look closely at any given cluster of flowers on a bluebell, you'll

notice they're not just one color – they're several hues varying from a bright pink to a sky blue, even on the same plant.

The color of each bluebell flower is determined by the pH inside the flower's sap. Higher pH (less acidity) leads to pink coloration, and as the pH in the flower drops, they turn blue. This happens naturally as the flowers mature, so buds will often appear pink while mature flowers tend towards blue. There is some evidence to suggest that the acidity of the soil they're growing in can influence this as well. Plants grown in more acidic soils may appear a deeper shade of blue while those grown in more basic soils may trend more pinkish.

If you find a big enough patch of bluebells, you'll eventually come across another puzzling colorway – a plant with all white flowers. This color seems to be caused by genetics rather than environmental conditions. It's a rare mutation in which the flowers lose all pigment, leaving them completely white rather than the typical pink/blue. You can almost always find at least a few white bluebells in large populations, but they never become the dominant form.

Whether blue, pink, or white, Virginia bluebells are always a delight to behold, and their tendency to grow en masse along ravines and low-lying areas often makes for quite the spectacle. Take a moment to study the flowers the next time you find one, the variation never ceases to delight!



# "Resilience is a garden we build together"

by Charlie Wilfong

With the icy grips of winter beginning to weaken, and the promise of spring renewal just on the horizon, gardening is on the mind. What better way to awaken from winter slumber than to venture to the annual Shenandoah Valley Plant Symposium in Waynesboro, Virginia? You can never be quite sure what to expect, but a great time is sure to be had. Wayne Theater has hosted for the last several years and is a charming old structure that is functional and inviting.

For 2026, the lineup of speakers surely did not disappoint: Ulrich Lorimer (Native Plant Trust), Shannon Currey (Education & Outreach, Izel Native Plants), Paula Whyman (Author, *Bad Naturalist*), Luisa Black (Director of the Ryan Resilience Lab). All the speakers came with their A game and shared their unique perspectives on the struggles of saving, protecting and expanding our native lands through rewilding, restoration and home gardening.

Lorimer spoke directly on the importance of using genetically diverse native plants e.g. local ecotype straight species. We should all be trying to incorporate these in our gardens because the benefits are enormous. Currey shared the true power of using groundcovers in our native gardens. Native groundcovers are truly an invaluable resource simply not used enough in the home garden. Whyman gave a very relatable talk of taking on a rewilding project with no prior knowledge and the struggles that brings. A lot of us started there and her story is inspiring. Black's presentation was the finale and her passion and excitement filled the room. The work they are doing in Norfolk is something to aspire towards.

Shenandoah Valley Plant Symposium gives us a great opportunity to network, get different perspectives and enjoy others with the same passion for plants. In my experience it is not always native focused, and that's fine because we can glean useful tips and tricks from many different places. However, being native focused this year was quite a treat. Four unique backgrounds allowed

for an amazing amount of things to think over on the ride home and the coming season. I, for one, can not wait for what Shenandoah Valley Plant Symposium will offer next year and would encourage all able to attend.

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Shannon Currey shared a helpful document of ground cover options; here is a shortened list of those. This is by no means an extensive list; however, it includes some tried and true plants. Included as well was a book list, with a few listed below.

### **Shade to Part Shade**

*Geranium maculatum* (Spotted Geranium)

*Carex plantaginea* (Plantainleaf Sedge)

*Heuchera americana* (American Alumroot)

### **Mixed Sun-Shade**

*Carex cherokeensis* (Cherokee Sedge)

*Packera aurea* (Golden Ragwort)

*Aquilegia canadensis* (American Columbine)

### **Full Sun**

*Juncus tenuis* (Path Rush)

*Salvia lyrata* (Lyreleaf Sage)

*Pycnathemum tenuifolium* (Narrowleaf Mountainmint)

### **Helpful books**

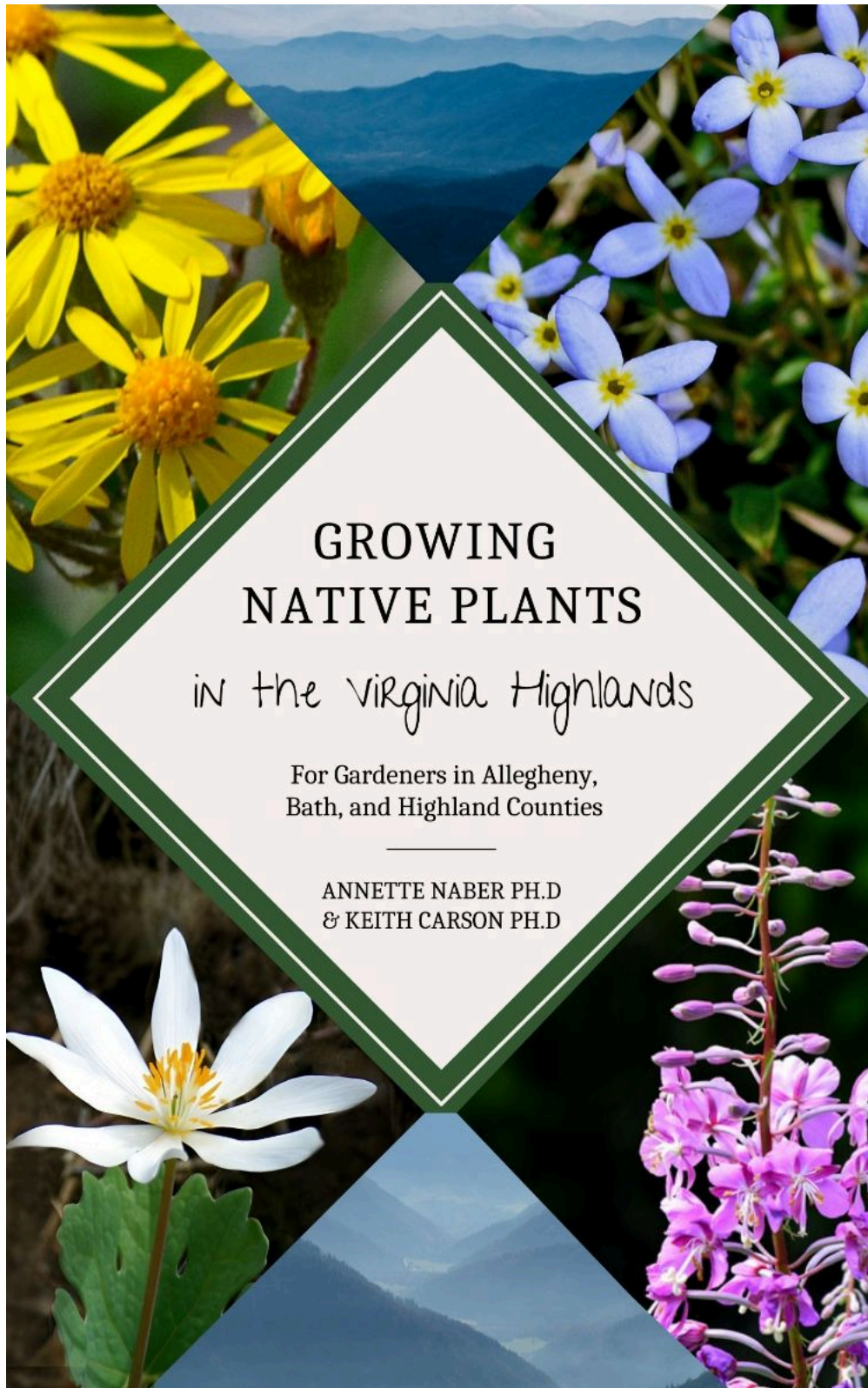
*Planting in a Post-Wild World*, Thomas Rainer & Claudia West, 2015

*Garden Revolution*, Larry Weaner, 2016

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## Upcoming Chapter Events

Featured in April: Digital Book Launch at Second Sunday Social!



Please join us to celebrate the launch of a new e-book during our Second Sunday Social, **April 12, at 1:30** in the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum's Plecker Education Center at James Madison University.

Gardeners and land stewards in the Allegheny Highlands have a new resource: [\*Growing Native Plants in the Virginia Highlands: For Gardeners in Allegheny, Bath and Highland Counties\*](#). This new book contains a discussion of the importance of native plants to our ecosystems followed by 136 profiles of plants that are native to these three counties and will help gardeners and landowners choose which plants to grow on their own property.

Annette Naber is the lead author for this book, with initial contributions by Keith Carson. The book is published with support from the Shenandoah Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society and the [Plant Ridge & Valley Natives](#) Campaign. Graphic design and layout by Skylar Goehring (James Madison University).

## Featured in May: Nature Journaling by Sensing the Natural World, with Linda Durrett



Mother Nature has stories to tell and you can learn to listen. Explore how to record what you observe in the natural world. Join Linda Durrett and practice using all your senses, creating a journal, taking notes and sketching what you experience. Using your body's innate ability to gather information through smell, touch, sound, taste, and sight, we will discover how to navigate and capture those messages, turning them into words and drawings that will document your walk.

**Linda Durrett** is a WV Master Naturalist, NC Master Gardener, a Certified Beekeeper and a Reiki Master/Teacher. With two art degrees and a journalism degree, she is also a master storyteller, traveling across the USA sharing her adventures as an Appalachian girl child; trout fishing, hiking, turkey hunting, stalking night crawlers and foraging for mushrooms. When living in North Carolina, she served a term as president of The Charlotte Art League, wrote a gardening column for the Charlotte Observer and retired from the City of Charlotte as a Public Relations and Media Relations Manager. Now a member of the WV Tygart Valley Master Naturalist Chapter, the West Virginia Storytelling Guild and the West Virginia Mushroom Club, her WV roots go back over 200 years and include fond memories of her Barbour County family farm. Linda's motto is "IMAGINATION TRANSCENDS REALITY."

Please bring notebook, pencils, pens, etc. We will be spending several hours outside so you might want sunscreen, bug spray, hat and comfortable shoes and clothing.

Details:

**Sunday, May 3, from 1-4 pm. Location:** Edith J. Carrier Arboretum (Plecker Education Center), James Madison University. \$25 registration includes class fee with basic supplies, but you can also bring your own favorites. Limited to 20 participants. Please [register](#) in advance.

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**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 [Anna](#) Finch if you'd like to contribute plants or assist on the day of the event.

**Sunday, May 3, from 1-4 pm. Nature Journaling Class with Linda Durrett.**

Location: Edith J. Carrier Arboretum (Plecker Education Center), James Madison University. \$25 registration includes supplies. Limited to 20 participants. Please [register](#) in advance.

**Note: No Second Sunday Social on May 10 due to Mother's Day.**

**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.

## Opportunities to Volunteer

- Help out Charlie at our table or with cleaning up Black's Run on Cleanup Day, April 11, in Harrisonburg:  
<https://visitharrisonburgva.com/events/blacks-run-clean-up-day/>
- Donate native plants for the chapter to sell during Staunton Earth Day. Contact [Marty](#) or [Anna Finch](#) if you'd like to contribute plants or assist on the day of the event.
- We are excited to host our 4th year of **Native Plant Tours** and need hosts! This year, the spring open-house style tour will be on **Saturday, May 30th from 10am - 1pm** and **Sunday, May 31st from 1pm to 4pm**. We'd love to showcase a range of planting stages and types from small urban gardens, to fully landscaped yards, woodlands, gardens and yards in transition from conventional to native, to reclaimed meadows, and everything in between. Plantings do not need to be perfect or pristine! Hosts can choose to participate on only one day or both. If you are interested in hosting, please fill out [this short survey](#) to submit your information.

Host sites for the tour should *ideally*:

- Be 60-70% native species or more
- Have no intentionally planted exotic invasive species
- Have intention/plans or be in the process of working to eradicate exotic invasive species
- Be predominantly plants native to the ridge and valley region based on state/county level of the Virginia Flora

- No use of pesticides
- Gardens and meadows in the 40-60% native range are welcome if they are in transition towards more native plants

Please consider helping to increase interest and awareness about the beauty, diversity, and importance of native plants. As always, we hope our tours will attract not just native plant enthusiasts, eager to see what others are doing, but also novice gardeners and those interested in learning more about natives. If you are not in a position to host, we hope you can join us on the tour! Please spread the word: the event is live on Facebook ([Saturday](#) and [Sunday](#)) and our [chapter website](#). Addresses will be published on the [tour website](#) the week before the event.

If you are interested in hosting, please fill out [this short survey](#) to submit your information.

Send any questions to [Katy](#).



Snapshot from our March Second Sunday Social. Photo by Anna Finch

## Choose your Perfect Level of Chapter Engagement

- Subscribe to the newsletter
- Follow and participate on Social Media (Instagram and Facebook)

- Attend Second Sunday Plant Social (every month in person)
- Join as a full voting [member](#) through VNPS
- Volunteer

*Reach out to our Membership Chair [Anna Finch](#) to see how you can level up your engagement.*

## Partner Connections

**Tuesday, April 21st 6:30-7:30pm. Inside the Shenandoah National Park Trust.** 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.](#)

**April 24 - May 2. Edith J. Carrier Arboretum Plant Sale.** See more information at their [website](#).

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## Your Moment of Zen



*Asimina triloba* (American Paw Paw) in bloom on Saturday, April 4. With Juvenal's Duskywing. Not pictured: Zebra swallowtail butterflies, for whom paw paws are the host plant.

Photo by Steven David Johnson

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