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Virginia Native Plant Society
Conserving Wild Flowers and Wild Places



August 2026 Newsletter



Rudbeckia laciniata (foreground) and *Rudbeckia triloba* (background) blooming in Jack's yard on August 14th.

Summer is for the Susans!

Jack Monsted

The sunny, yellow flowers of *Rudbeckia* are synonymous with summer in our part of Virginia. While almost all plant enthusiasts in Virginia are familiar with the common black eyed susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), there are three other species of *Rudbeckia* that grow in our region, each with their own unique floral display, bloom time, and growth form. Below, I'll run down the basics for how to distinguish the four species as well as include some gardening tips for using them in your own space.

We'll start with the black eyed susan (*R. hirta*). This plant is unique among the *rudbeckias* in that it is remarkably short lived, existing almost always as an annual or biennial. In an ideal setting, the seeds germinate in early autumn, overwinter as small rosettes, and then grow quickly and furiously the following year to bloom right around the summer solstice. Once the plant blooms and sets seeds, it dies back, making room for the next generation. It is the earliest blooming of the four locally native *Rudbeckias*, and has perhaps the largest,

showiest flowers. This plant is a must include in any native wildflower patch you'd like to start from seed, as it will provide lovely blooms for the first few years while longer lived perennials get established.

The second *Rudbeckia* is the brown eyed susan (*R. triloba*). This plant tends to grow a bit shorter than *hirta*, topping out around 3 feet in most settings. It blooms a bit later, the flowers typically opening up in late July right after the flowers of the black eyed susan are beginning to fade - having both in a meadow planting is a great way to ensure continual flowers throughout the summer. Morphologically, it has slightly smaller flowers than the typical black eyed susan, but they have deeper orange ray florets (petals) and disk florets that are more brown in color. It also sports leaves that tend to be divided into three distinct lobes, hence the latin name *triloba*.

Next up, the cut-leaf coneflower (*R. laciniata*). This plant is by far the largest of the three *Rudbeckias*, and can easily reach more than 7 feet tall in good conditions. It also spreads by rhizomes once established, making it quite a strong competitor in areas with good soil and not much deer presence (I've found deer love this plant and will eat it first whenever possible). It typically blooms in late July, just slightly after the brown eyed susan, and its flowers are quite unique among the *Rudbeckias*. The petals are a pale yellow, and tend to curve downward at maturity, while the green bracts between the petals curve upwards. Combine that with the fact that the disk florets at the center of each flower have a distinct greenish tint, and the whole floral display reads as much more green, without the black and brown centers that the other members of the genus have. Nonetheless, it creates an impressive impact in the garden when planted en masse.

Finally, we have the orange cone-flower (*R. fulgida*). This is the latest blooming of the bunch with flowers typically not emerging until well into August and sometimes persisting into October. It is slightly taller than the brown eyed susan and its flowers have a similar orange hue. However, the leaves are distinct from this cousin, typically growing rather narrow and lacking the three lobes. Unfortunately, this plant is relatively uncommon in our region, growing more predominantly in Virginia's Piedmont.

Backpack Project Update



This summer, Shenandoah VNPS created 8 native plant garden backpacks to donate to Massanutten Regional Library (MRL) branches across Rockingham, Harrisonburg, and Page counties. Each backpack contains tools and resources to help folks begin their very own native plant garden. These backpacks will be a part of the existing “Library of Things” — a collection of non-traditional materials available for library patrons to borrow, just like books! We’re excited to be adding to this collection! (For more info on MRL’s “Library of Things”, check out their [existing collection](#)). These backpacks will be available to borrow from any MRL branch starting in September 2026.

In addition to the backpacks, we’ve created some additional related resources that will also be available at MRL:

- Bilingual wildflower coloring pages (Huge thank you to local artist Maggie Johnson for contributing the illustrations for this resource!). Find these educational resources in the backpacks, or at our mobile exhibit at MRL’s Central Library during the month of September.
- Native plant book list brochure — a curated list of native plant book recommendations for adults and children in both English and Spanish. Find this ongoing resource starting in September at one of the book recommendation kiosks at Central Library.

Generous contributions from both our membership and local organizations/businesses made this project possible! Thank you for partnering with us on this project!

Local organization/business sponsors:

1. Anne Elise Lintelman, Wilder Landscapes
2. Edith J. Carrier Arboretum at JMU
3. Dr. Iara Lacher, Seven Bends Plant Nursery
4. Milmont Greenhouses
5. Parentheses Books
6. Randy’s Hardware, Bridgewater
7. Stone Soup Books
8. Walkabout Outfitters

If you’d like to get involved, you can support the ongoing expansion of this project [here](#). Thank you so much for your support!

Thanks so much to our community's generosity in bringing this project to life!



Marty and Rebecca stuffing the backpacks!

Interested in getting involved with this project or becoming a sponsor?

[Learn more!](#)

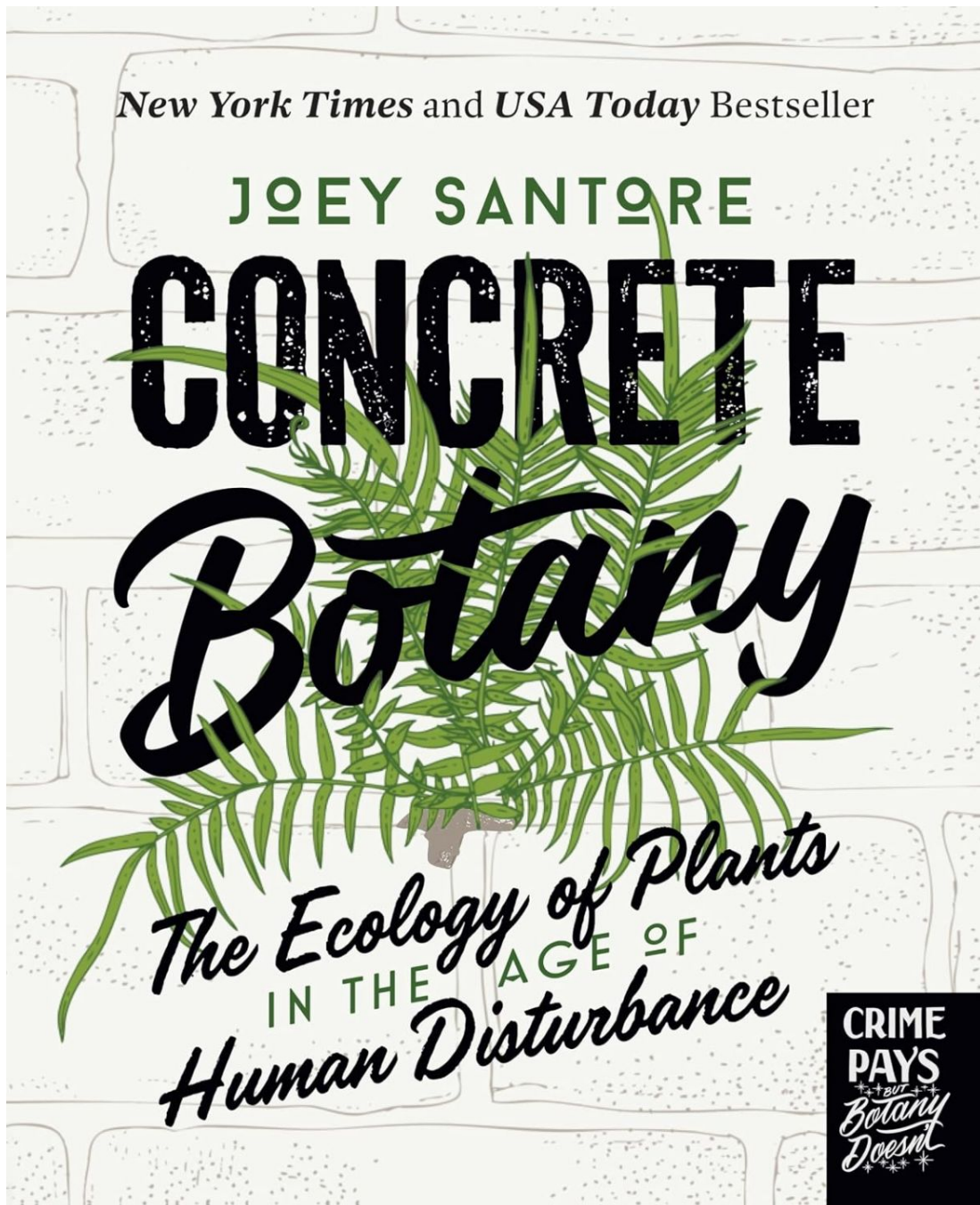
Chapter Board Positions

Are you interested in getting involved with the chapter board? Would you be interested in taking on the treasurer's position or heading up our social media presence? The president's position is open due to term limits, and Marty Diecchio has been nominated. The president serves on the state level VNPS board; provides vision and structure and monitors the chapter Gmail account. They also oversee and delegate tasks to other members of the board. The role of the treasurer is to track chapter expenses and income, including sales of the Plant Ridge and Valley Natives guide. They file the annual IRS

postcard, and submit reports to state level VNPS treasurer who provides guidance and oversight. The social media lead is a new position. We have Instagram and Facebook accounts. This person would help us get the word out about events, share plant knowledge, and repost high quality content from trusted sources like the Flora of Virginia and our partner organizations. If you are interested reach out via our chapter [email](#).

Book Club

The next meeting of the book club will be August 18th at 7pm, and the book will be [Concrete Botany: The Ecology of Plants in the Age of Human Disturbance](#) by Joey Santore. Contact [Eunice Sill](#) for more information.



Fall Native Plant Tour

Seeking Hosts! and Save the date!

Our Fall Native Plant Tour will be **September 26th (10am-2pm)** and **27th (12pm-4pm)**. You can host one day or both. Please consider helping to increase interest and awareness about the beauty, diversity, and importance of native plants! Anyone interested in hosting, please submit your [information here](#).

We'd love to have a range of planting stages and types to showcase the different life stages and possibilities of planting with natives. Your plantings do not need to be perfect or pristine! We hope these plants tours will attract not only native plant enthusiasts eager to see what others are doing, but also novice gardeners and those interested in learning more about native plants.

We are looking for all kinds of locations: small urban gardens, fully landscaped yards, reclaimed meadows, woodlands, those in transition from conventional to native plantings, and everything in between.

Host sites featured on the tour should *ideally*:

- Be 60-70% native species or more
- Be predominantly plants native to the ridge and valley region based on state/county level of the Virginia Flora
- Have no intentionally planted exotic invasive species
- Have intention/plans or be in the process of working to eradicate exotic invasive species
- Use no pesticides
- Gardens and meadows in the 40-60% native range are welcome if they are in transition towards more native plants!

Contact [Katy](#) with any questions!

Second Sunday Social

We are continuing our Second Sunday Socials in the education center at the JMU Edith J. Carrier Arboretum going forward. The next one is September 13th.

We were visited on August 9th by Jack Monsted, his wife Emily and their beautiful baby boy, Win. Win was a big hit!



Leah holding Win, Joe, Jack and Emily.



Elaine and Eunice modeling their ghost pipe shirts at the social! Designed by our own Maggie Johnson. Get yours today!

Native Plant Mobile Exhibit

When: September 2026

Where: MRL's Central Library in Harrisonburg

We've curated a native plant mobile exhibit that will be on display at Massanutten Regional Library's Central Library during the month of September. Find our newly curated native plant book list, bilingual wildflower coloring sheets, and more. Drop by during operating hours to check it out!

Native Plant Sales

Check out this [list](#) of upcoming plant sales around the state!

JMD Native Plant Celebration

The best kept secret in the valley is out! JMD Farm Market and Garden Center has the best selection of native plants in the central Shenandoah Valley. Join us for their 2nd annual Native Plant Celebration **Saturday, September 19, 9am-4:30**. All native plants will be on sale along with many other selections. We will be there with a table sharing information and answering your native plant questions.

JMD is tucked away between Verona and Waynesboro, near Barren Ridge Vineyard and Stable Craft Brewery. Fall planting season is here!

NEW! A Community Native Plant Grant

In 2026, for the first time ever, the VNPS Shenandoah Chapter will award a total of \$1,000 to one or more well-defined projects located within the Virginia counties of Augusta, Highland, Page, Rockingham, or Shenandoah that address the VNPS Mission and Goals.

Grants will be awarded to projects that incorporate one or more of the following themes:

- Conserving native plant communities in their natural habitats through conservation and land stewardship practices.
- Educating the public about the value of native plants and how to encourage them.
- Establishing gardens, preserves, or parks that incorporate native plants.
- Projects that incorporate public education or consistent, current and long-term public access will be given priority.

Grant proposals will be accepted on a rolling basis.

For application requirements and to apply, download the application at <https://vnps.org/shenandoah/community-native-plant-grant/>

Seeking Wildflower Walk Leaders!

We would love to offer some late summer or fall wildflower walks! Do you have a familiar walk where you can identify a few native plants? Consider inviting our members to come appreciate them with you!

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
- Lead a native plant walk or bioblitz
- Volunteer

Reach out to us at [Shenandoah Chapter](#) to see how you can level up your engagement.

Your Moment of Zen



Yellow Fringed Orchid, by Steven David Johnson.

Platanthera ciliaris. Found on a roadside path near Runyon's Creek Road in the George Washington National Forest. Found with cinnamon fern and other wet-loving plants.

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