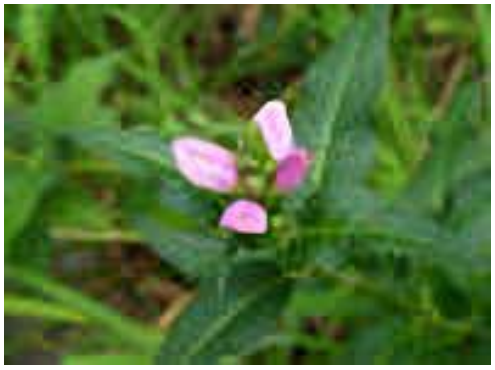
Wildflower Spot – September 2006
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

Turtlehead

Chelone spp.

By Helen Hamilton, *President of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*



Almost everybody is familiar with the These flowers are well named because when viewed from the side, they look just like a turtle with its mouth open; push the sides of the blossom and the mouth actually opens. White or rose-pink, the flowers are one inch long in short spikes at the ends of 1-3-foot stems. They will grow shorter when pinched back in the spring.

Turtleheads like partial shade and moisture, so use plenty of humus and mulch to hold in moisture. They can be grown in containers, but the pot should have a saucer of water at all times. These plants grow naturally on the coastal plain along streambanks, in wet meadows, swamps, and marshes. Blooming July-October, they make long-lasting cut flowers and are attractive to butterflies. ❖

Photo: Taken at Seasons Trace development in Williamsburg, August, 2006 by Helen Hamilton
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

Wildflower Spot – September 2007
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

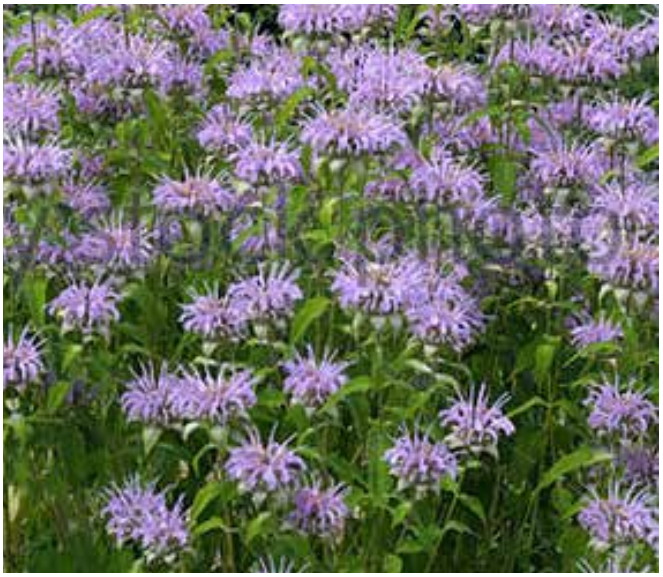
Wild Bergamot

Monarda fistulosa

By Helen Hamilton, *President of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

Wild bergamot is easily recognized with clusters of dense heads of pink to lavender twolipped flowers, looking like ragged pompons. Growing in groups 2-3 feet tall, butterflies and hummingbirds feed constantly on the tubular flowers. The square stems and paired leaves, together with its flower characteristics, place this plant in the mint family. A close relative Beebalm (*Monarda didyma*) produces stunning true red flowers, but in Virginia it is native only to counties in the mountain region.

Easy to grow in the home garden, Wild bergamot thrives in a wide range of soils, from acid to lime, from to rich to poor, from sand to clay. Found in upland woods, thickets and prairies across much of Canada and [from British Columbia] and south to Georgia and Arizona. It occurs in scattered counties across Virginia, mostly in mountainous areas. Bearing profuse flowers at the ends of tall stems, this is a striking plant for the perennial border, stunning in masses with black-eyed Susans and blazing star. As a meadow plant, full sun is preferable. Wild bergamot begins flowering in June and continues through September.



The aromatic leaves have been used to make mint tea, and oil from the leaves was formerly used to treat respiratory ailments. Linnaeus named the genus Monarda in honor of a 16th century Spanish physician and botanist, Nicolas Bautista Monardes. The species name "*fistulosa*" may refer to the tubular flowers. ["fistulose" is usually used in reference to hollow stems.] ❖

Photo: Wild Bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*) by Helen Hamilton
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

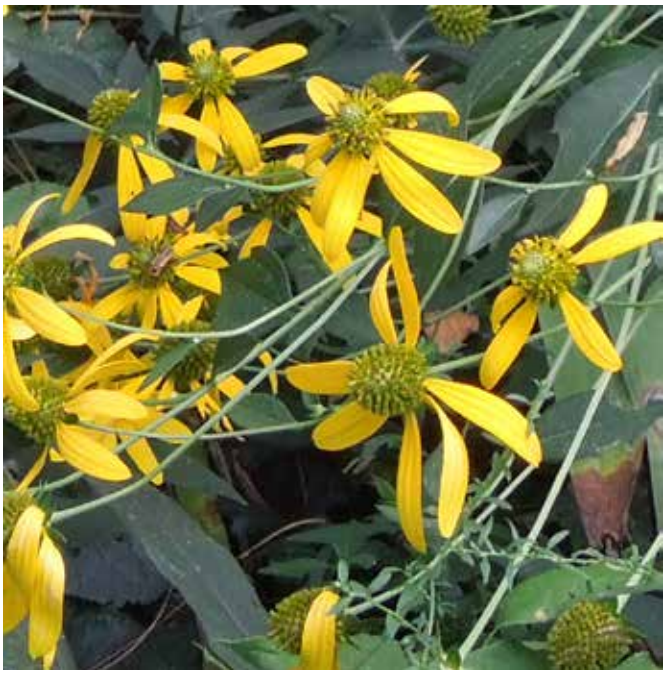
Wildflower Spot – September 2008
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

Green-Headed Coneflower

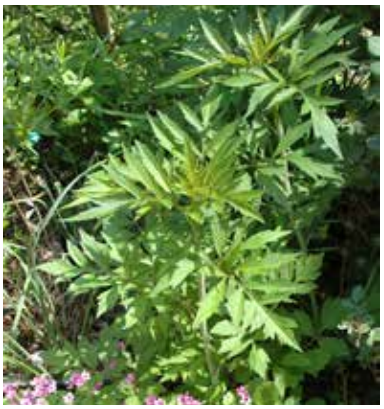
Rudbeckia laciniata

By Helen Hamilton, *President of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

A valuable addition to the wild garden, Green-headed Coneflower typically grows 5-8 feet tall with bright yellow flowers which can be five inches across. The green centers are unusual in this genus of the Black-eyed and Brown-eyed Susans; the plant is also known as Tall Coneflower or Cutleaf Coneflower. The species name "laciniata" means "torn", referring to the deeply divided and toothed leaves.



This native plant was first described centuries ago and can be found in abandoned gardens; its typical native habitats are in moist places such as creek banks. Coneflowers are field flowers and nonstop summer-to-fall bloomers. They are tough, drought-resistant plants that love full sun and seem to bloom forever, never needing deadheading. In fact, no one deadheads coneflowers until very late in the fall when the stems and seedheads are black and the birds have eaten all the seeds long ago.



Green-headed Coneflower is found throughout Virginia, and ranges from Quebec to Florida, and west to Montana and Arizona. Cultivars are available in the nursery trade. Traditionally the plant has been used to treat indigestion, burns and other ailments. ❖

Photo: Green-Headed Coneflower (*Rudbeckia laciniata*) taken by Rick Gardner.
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

Devil's Walking Stick

Aralia spinosa

By Helen Hamilton, *President of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

Unmistakable with the very large (up to 3 feet) compound leaves and their very spiny stalks (petioles), the common name "Devil's Walking Stick" refers to the single stem, heavy with spines. Blooming along the roadsides from August through October, this shrub is not a plant for the home garden, unless it is placed where children do not play.

Devil's Walking Stick is an attractive plant for the woods edge, with the changing colors of the flowers and fruits throughout late summer and into fall. In late summer, huge clusters of creamy flowers top the plant, which develop into dark red fruits (drupes) in the fall. Many species of wild birds prize the fruits, leaving behind lacy red stalks. In spite of the formidable array of prickles, the twigs are often browsed by white-tailed deer.

Scattered throughout eastern U.S. and most counties in Virginia, Devil's Walking Stick grows in upland and low woods and woods edges. The plant grows on moist, well-drained fertile to poor soils, and is often found on dry and stony slopes. It colonizes freely by rhizomes and suckers.

Devil's Walking Stick is recommended as a native alternative to the alien Chinaberrytree (*Melia azedarach* and Sacred bamboo (*Nandina domestica*). ❖

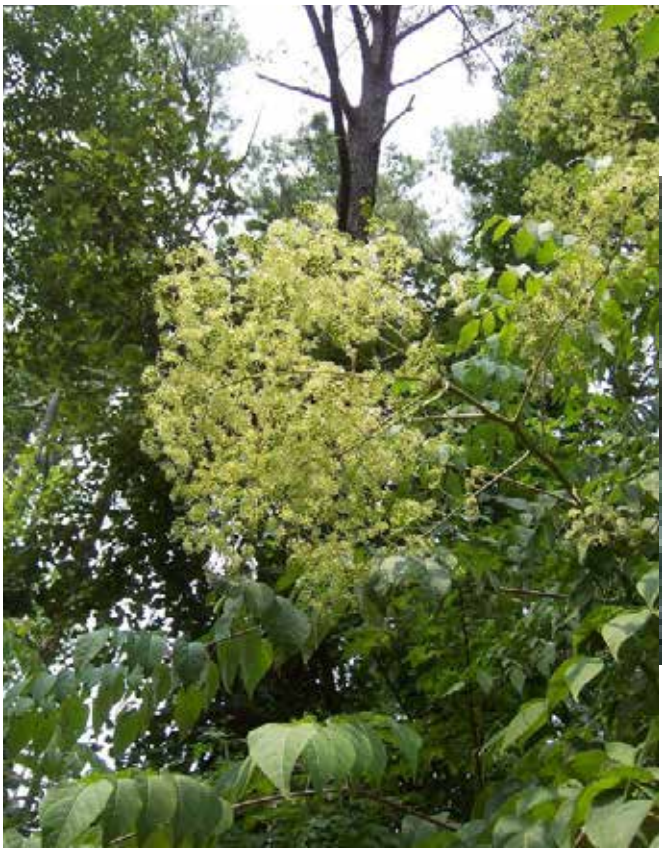
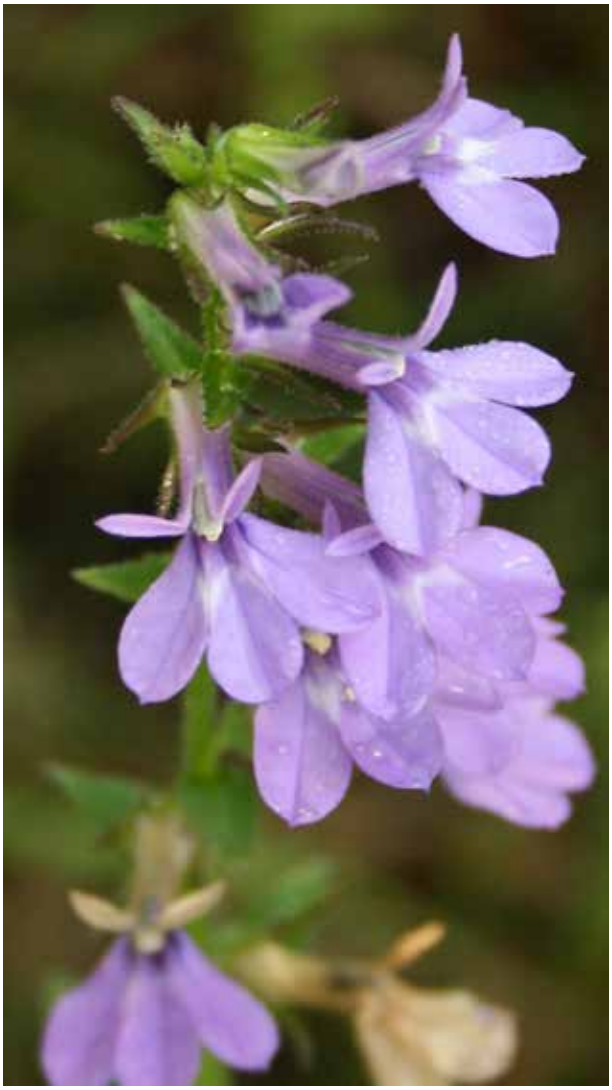


Photo: Devil's Walking Stick (*Aralia spinosa*) from VNPS.
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

Downy Lobelia

Lobelia puberula
Campanulaceae, Bellflower Family

By Helen Hamilton, *President of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*



A pretty little perennial plant growing 1-3 feet in height, Downy Lobelia is a member of the Bellflower Family, and related to Red and Blue Cardinal Flowers. The flowers are typical of the cardinal flowers with 5 petals fused into a tube. The three lower petal lobes project downward with the upper two petals curled upward. The violet-blue flowers are ¾ inch long with a white center, arranged in a spike, usually one-sided. Stems and leaves are softly hairy.

Downy Lobelia is found mostly along the coastal plain from New Jersey southward to Florida and westward to Illinois and Texas, and in most of the eastern and piedmont counties of Virginia. The plant prefers wet soil, in open woods and clearings, in sun or shade. The blooms appear August through October.
The species name comes from the Latin *"puber"* meaning "downy" and refers to the hairs on the plant. ❖

Photo: Downy lobelia *(Lobelia puberula)* taken by Helen Hamilton
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

Wildflower Spot – September 2011
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

Annual Wild Rice

Zizania aquatica

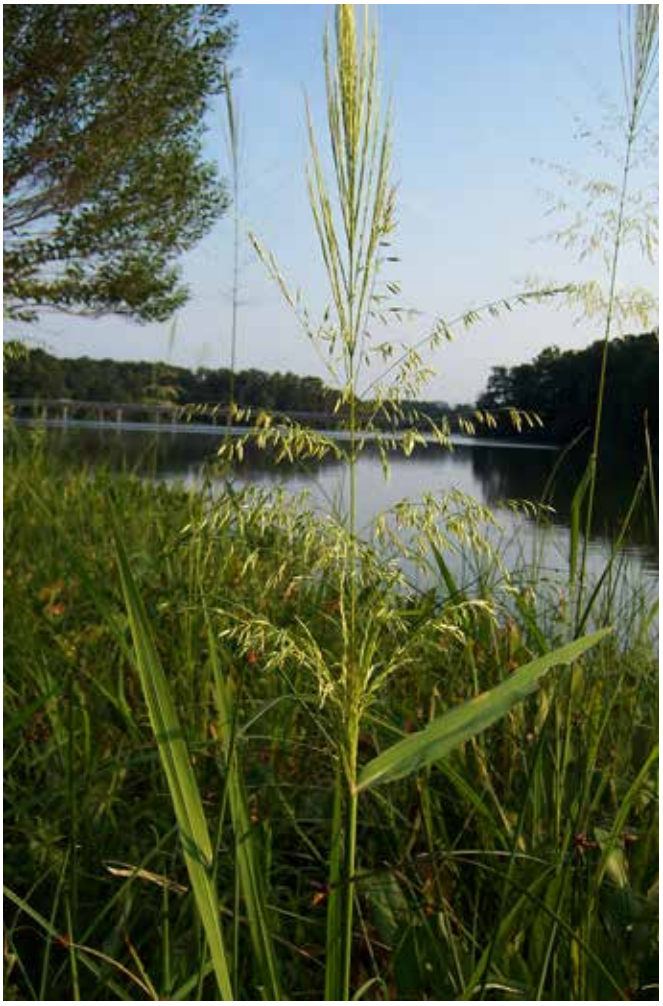
By Helen Hamilton, *President of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

Often seen just offshore in marshes, Wild Rice is recognizable instantly with a large, open flower cluster, divided in two parts. The lower branches have drooping male spikelets, while on the upper branches the female spikelets (flowers) are more erect and compressed. This annual grass grows up to 10 feet high, with stout stems and large leaves, up to four feet long and two inches wide.

Wild Rice grows only in our coastal counties, in fresh and slightly brackish marshes, stream borders, and shallow waters. The plant extends from southern Quebec to the coastal states from Maine to Florida and Louisiana. Flowers appear from May into October.

Stands of Wild Rice are repeatedly harvested because the seeds do not mature simultaneously and readily shatter from the plant. Native Americans used canoes, pulling the stalks into the boat and gently beating the flower to release only the mature kernels. A famous Indian dish was tassimanonny – wild rice, corn and fish boiled together.

A staple food of the Indians, gamebirds, ducks and blackbirds, Wild Rice has been cultivated during the last 15 years and can be found in many stores. Compared with other cereals, it is high in protein and low in fat.



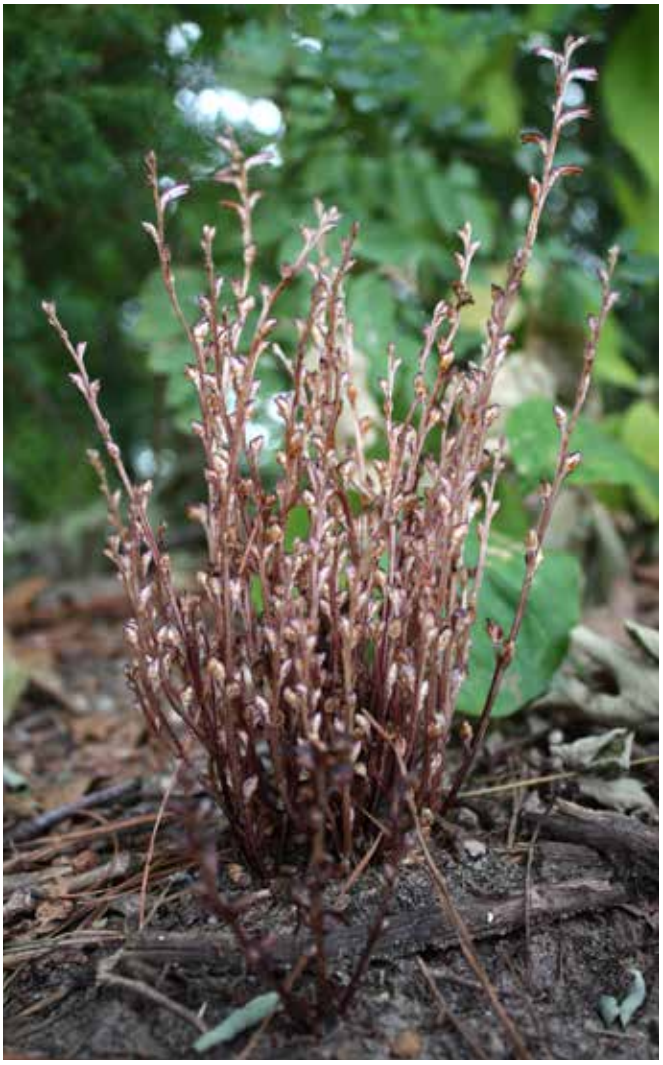
The genus name *Zizania* is an adaptation of *zizanion* for an ancient name of some wild grains, and *aquatica* means "growing in or near water."
Note: Southern wild rice (*Zizaniopsis miliacea*) is a perennial plant that ranges only as far north as Virginia and Maryland. In its flower cluster the male and female spikelets both occur throughout the flower cluster. ❖

Photo: Annual Wild Rice *(Zizania aquatica)* taken by Phillip Merritt
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

Beechdrops

Epifagus virginiana

By Helen Hamilton, *Past-president of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*



This interesting little plant is parasitic on the roots of beech trees where it grows and receives nourishment. Growing 6-18" tall, the many-branched stems are pale brown, usually with fine brown-purple lines. Lacking chlorophyll, the leaves are represented by dry, brownish scales. Near the top of the stem are ½" long, tubular white flowers, delicately marked with brown-purple stripes. The flowers lower on the stem are tiny and bud-like –never opening, but self-fertilizing and producing abundant seeds. Fruit is a small ¼" brown capsule. Dried stalks often persist under the trees throughout the winter and into spring.

Beechdrops grows in dry woods, under beech trees in every county of Virginia, flowering from September through November. The range extends from Quebec and Nova Scotia to Wisconsin, and south to Florida and Louisiana.

The plant is well-named, *Epifagus* derived from the Greek *epi,* meaning "upon," and *phagos,* "the beech." A tea made from the fresh plant was once used for diarrhea, dysentery, mouth sores and cold sores. Also known as "cancer root," the plant was used in folk medicine as a cancer remedy, but recent tests for antitumor activity proved negative. ❖

Photo: Beechdrops *(Epifagus virginiana)* taken by Phillip Merritt
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

Seashore Mallow

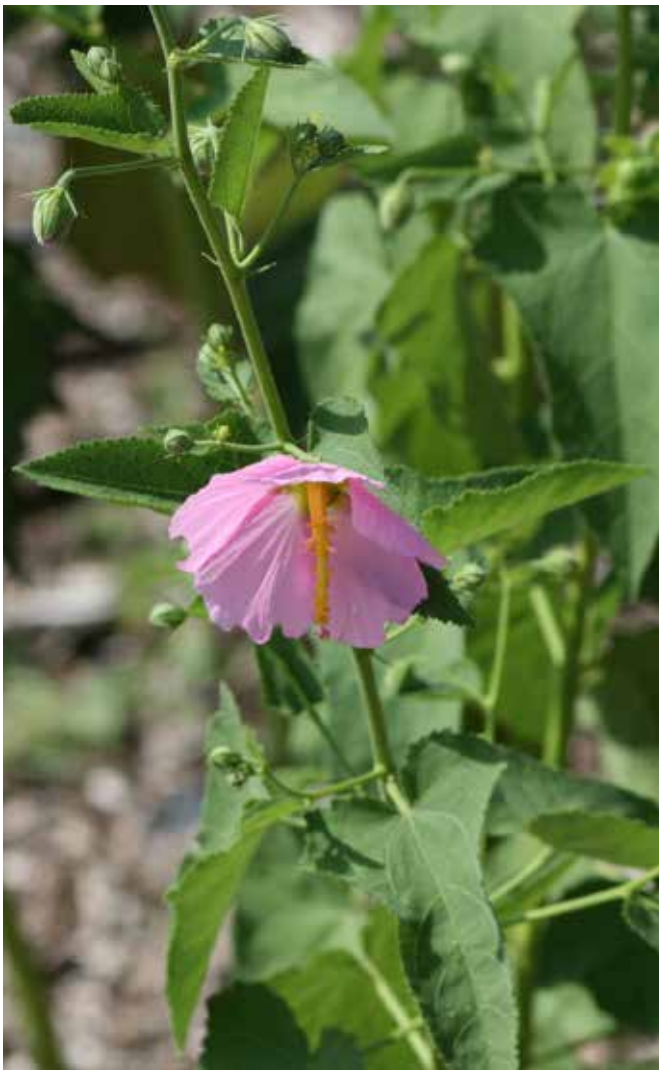
Kosteletzkya virginica

By Helen Hamilton, *Past-president of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

A very showy plant with profuse display of pink and yellow flowers, blooming in terminal, often leafy clusters, closing at night. The flower looks like Hibiscus, but they are much smaller and a deep pink. A single plant can have hundreds of 3-inch flowers, normally blooming July through October. In wet summers, seed pods will form earlier.

As in other members of the Mallow Family, the stamens are fused into a yellow central column. The gray-green leaves are egg-shaped, pointed, and usually with triangular lobes at the base. Lower leaves are maple-like with 3-5 lobes. The erect, branching stems are 1-3 feet tall.

Growing in full sun in brackish marshes, wet meadows, swamps and shores, Seashore Mallow occurs only in Virginia's Coastal Plain. Moderately salt tolerant, the plant prefers sand and soils with high acidity, but will tolerate clay habitats. These plants prefer mucky soils, but will grow well in garden soils that are regularly irrigated, as in rain gardens. This species ranges from Long Island to Florida and Texas and to the West Indies.



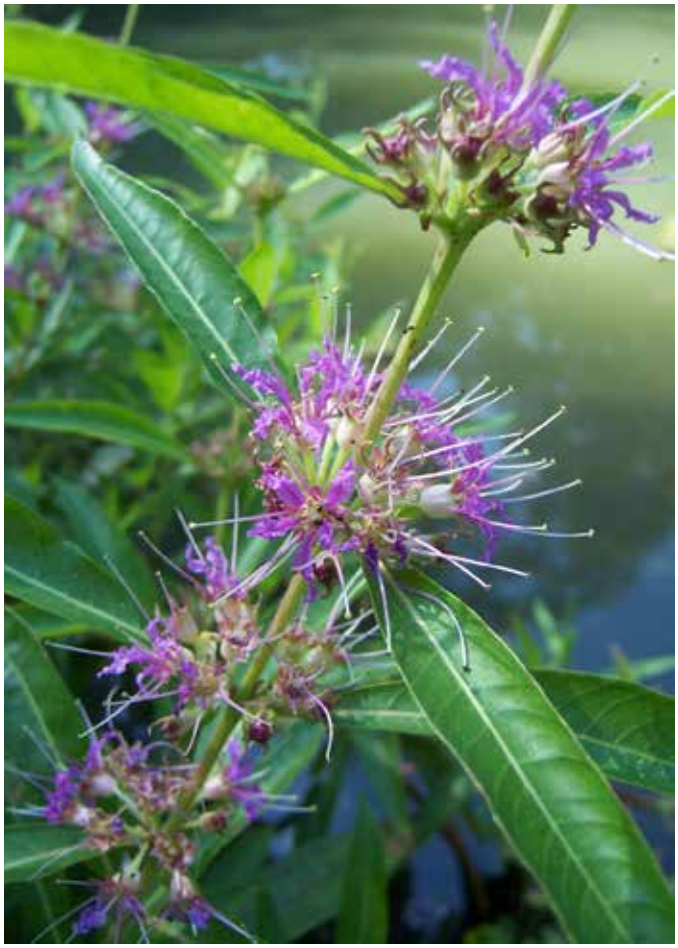
Seashore Mallow attracts butterflies and hummingbirds. The genus was named for Vincenz Kostelezky, 1801-1887, a Bohemian botanist. ❖

Photo: Seashore Mallow (*Kosteletzkya virginica*) taken by Helen Hamilton
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

Swamp Loosestrife

Decodon verticillatus

By Helen Hamilton, *Past-president of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*



This is a somewhat shrubby perennial, with long stems that can form an arch, allowing the tip to become submerged. Colonies of new plants often form where the stem tips touch moist ground. The leaves are lance-shaped and opposite on the stem or in whorls of 3 or 4. Bell-shaped pink-purple flowers cluster in the leaf axils, the most prominent feature being the 5 long protruding stamens. Each flower also has 5 short stamens, surrounded by 5 petals. Also known as Water Willow, this species is not a true willow, which are woody shrubs or trees that do not produce pink flowers.

Swamp Loosestrife grows in Virginia only in the coastal counties, in standing water of marshes or swamps or in tidal freshwater wetlands. It is common in the Coastal Plain and rare in the mountain regions. The plant is in bloom from July through September, followed by ¼-inch round seeds. The range is along the coast from Maine to Florida, Louisiana and to Indiana and Missouri.

The lower stems are swollen and spongy in texture, and attractive to muskrats. Ducks eat the seed capsules which probably float on the water. Many insects such as honeybees, bumblebees, and Swallowtail butterflies cross-pollinate the plants as they feed on nectar from the flowers. Caterpillars of moths and butterflies eat the foliage.

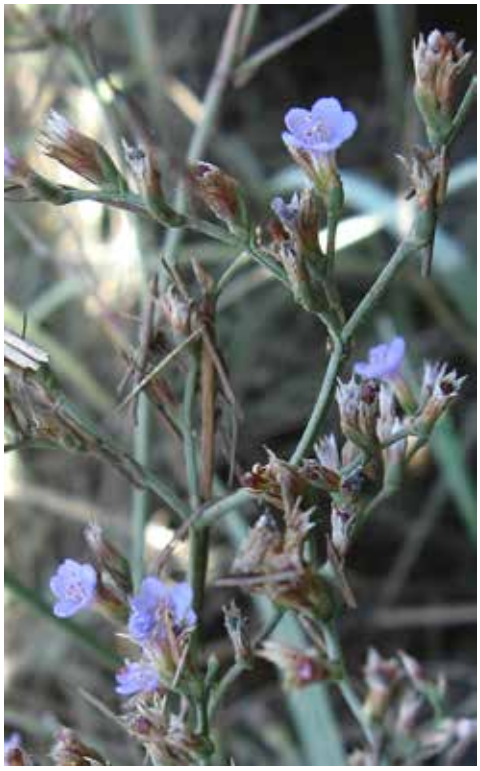
The genus name *Decodon* comes from the Greek *deca,* "ten," and *odous,* "tooth," referring to the jagged appearance of the flower parts. ❖

Photo: Swamp Loosestrife (*Decodon verticillatus*) taken by Phillip Merritt
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

Sea Lavender

Limonium carolinianum

By Helen Hamilton, *Past-president of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*



This plant is easy to recognize, forming a "sea" of tiny lavender flowers waving across the salt marshes in late summer and early fall. A tap-rooted perennial, the large, fleshy, lance-shaped leaves grow mostly from the base of the plant. The stem is thin and bare, and branches many times, carrying small buds and flower that mature from the bottom upwards. Blooming from August through October, the 5 petals are purple to lavender, but the outside base of the flower (sepals) is white, an unusual combination.

Growing in salty soil, Sea Lavender is common in salt or brackish marshes in the coastal counties of Virginia. The range extends along the coast from Labrador south to Florida, west to Texas and northeast Mexico.

Our ancestors' druggists sold large quantities for use as an astringent. The 18th century botanist Mannasseh Cutler, calling it "Marsh Rosemary," wrote of a decoction of the roots used as a gargle in cankers and sore throats. The flowers are prized for bouquets and dried arrangements, retaining their color for several years, even when dried. "Leimonion", the ancient Greek name, is presumably derived from *leimon,* a marsh.

Some nurseries offer Limonium Seeds, also known as Perennial Statice. These species are nonnative, originating from Europe, Asia, Russia, and the Mediterranean region. ❖

Photo: Sea Lavender (*Limonium carolinianum*) taken by Phillip Merritt and Jan Newton
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

Wildflower Spot – September 2016
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

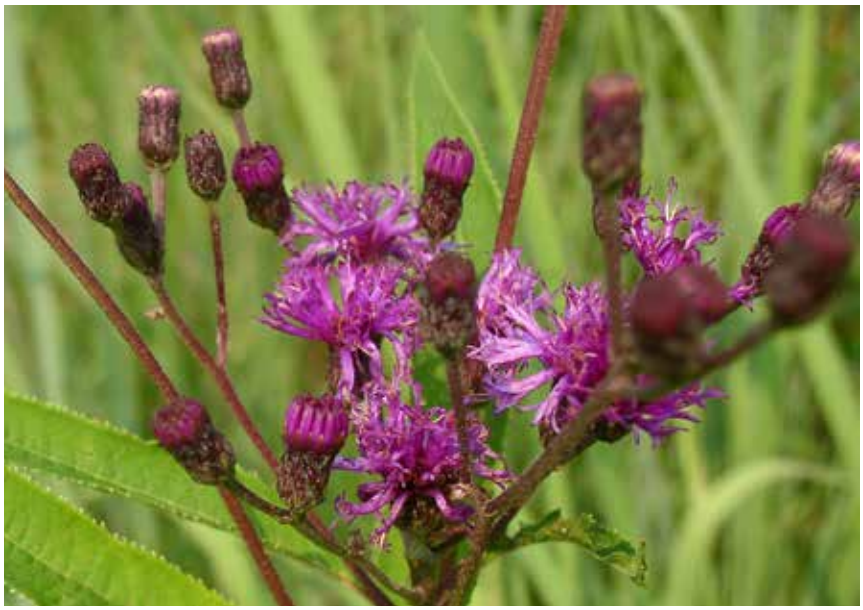
New York Ironweed

Vernonia noveboracensis

By Helen Hamilton, *Past-president of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

These handsome plants can be really tall, to 10 feet, but the sturdy stems usually keep the plants upright during the blooming season, July through September. Brilliant, deep purple flowers at the top of the plants are regularly visited by nectaring insects, especially the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail and other large butterflies. Long, lance-shaped leaves have fine teeth all along the edges.

Occurring in nearly every county of Virginia, this native perennial occurs throughout the U.S. east Coast, in moist or wet areas of fields and stream banks. Preferring moist soil in full sun, it works well in a rain garden but will tolerate some dry periods. This plant requires little care in the home garden and will grow in somewhat drier sites in a border or native meadow garden with sunflowers, asters, and blazing star.



Like Joe Pye Weed, Ironweed has no ray flowers. The dense flower heads of composed only of disk flowers, where insects can gather much nectar in a short period of time.

The common name could refer to its tough stems, or the rusty colored older flowers and seeds. The genus was named for an English botanist who collected plants in Maryland in the late 1600s; *noveboracensis* means "of New York." ❖

Photo: Ironweed (*Vernonia noveboracensis*) taken by Helen Hamilton
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

Wildflower Spot – September 2017
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

Meadow-beauty

Rhexia mariana/virginica

By Helen Hamilton, *Past-president of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

Now blooming heavily in roadside ditches, the color of this unusual four-petaled flower ranges from almost white to deep pink, with prominent, bent yellow anthers. In damp soil and full sun Meadow Beauty blooms from July through September. Although found in wet acidic spots in the wild, this low-growing plant does well in an average soil that is irrigated during extreme drought. Even after its long bloom season ends, the plant remains attractive as the numerous urn- shaped seedpods retain their rosy color.

Rhexia is the only genus of the mostly tropical Melastomataceae family found in the North. Both species are found in our area. *Rhexia mariana* is blooming in the Williamsburg Botanical Garden, and along the ditches of the entrance roadway. The flower is paler in color than *Rhexia virginica,* with winged stems and vivid rose-purple petals.

This plant is common along roadsides, the edges of fields and meadows, and can often be found for sale in local nurseries or online. It overwinters as a sweet potato-like tuber. The seedpods are somewhat sticky, and may become attached to the fur and feathers of passing animals, which carry the seeds to new locations.

Pollen in the bright yellow, curved anthers can only be released by bumblebees that visit the flowers and perform "buzz pollination" – the bees vibrate their thoracic muscles near the anthers, opening pores to release pollen, which is deposited on the pistils of neighboring flowers. This unusual method of pollination also occurs in tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, cranberries, and blueberries. Greenhouses that grow these plants have resident bumblebees to produce their harvest. ❖

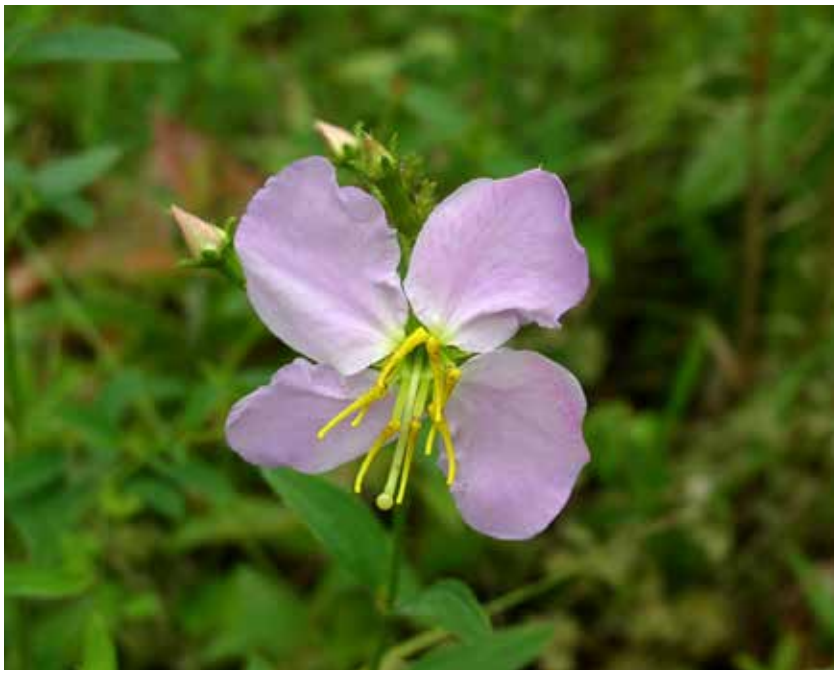


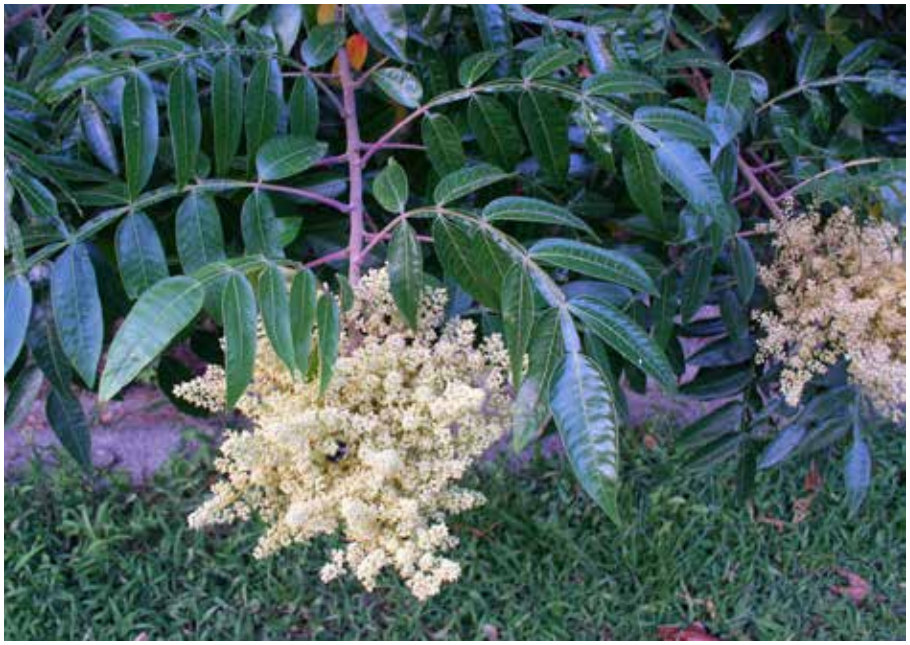
Photo: Meadow-beauty (*Rhexia mariana*) taken by Helen Hamilton
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

Wildflower Spot – September 2018
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

Shining Sumac

Rhus copallina

By Helen Hamilton, *Past-president of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*



Glossy, dark-green compound leaves suggest the common name of this desirable landscape plant, often planted for its shiny leaves which turn scarlet in the fall. The leaves are 8-12 inches long with 9-21 leaflets, carrying wings on either side of the midrib.

In summer Shining Sumac is topped with striking white 4 to 6-inch flower pyramids, which produce clouds of dark red fruit. The shrub is large and spreading and not suited to small areas. However, it is very useful for new homes where the developer has denuded the property; the leaves are acid and help rebuild soil that has been stripped of its organic matter. In an established landscape, it could be planted on the edge of a lawn or driveway to attract birds. This plant is fast growing, generally pest and disease-free, and drought tolerant.

Shining Sumac grows in open, dry places from southern Maine to Florida and west to Indiana, southeast Nebraska and Texas. The shrub grows wild in nearly every county in Virginia, and furnishes winter food for many upland gamebirds, songbirds, and large and small mammals. Wildlife eat the fruit, and deer also browse the twigs.

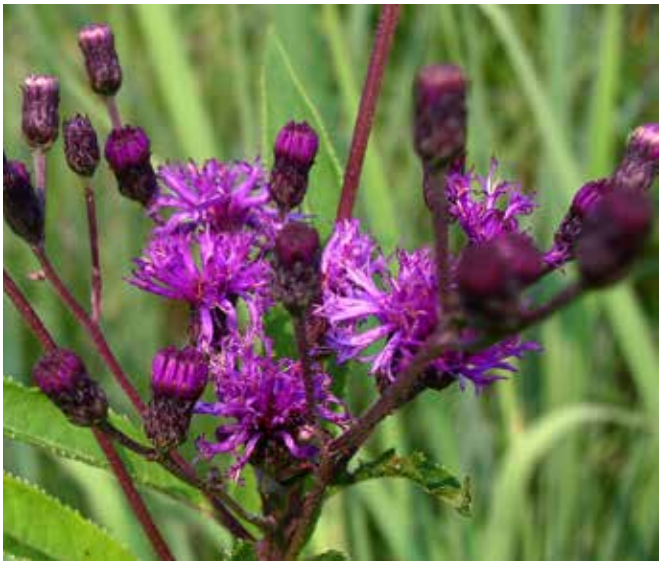
The sour fruit can be nibbled or made into a drink like lemonade, and American Indians used parts of the plant for some medicinal purposes.❖

Photo: Shining Sumac (*Rhus copallina*) taken by Helen Hamilton
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

New York Ironweed

Vernonia noveboracensis

By Helen Hamilton, *Past-president of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*



These are handsome, robust plants with stunning floral color. The sturdy stems grow three to ten feet tall and maintain an upright posture throughout the fall. Leaves are lance-shaped and finely toothed. The intense deep purple flowers bloom from late summer to early fall and are powerful butterfly magnets, especially attracting the tiger swallowtail. Skippers, moths and native bees are also seen collecting nectar from the flowers.

Ironweed is a member of the aster family that includes sunflowers, daisies and black-eyed susans. These flowers have no rays, only flowers in the central disk area.

Ironweeds are usually found in moist or wet areas of fields and streambanks. They are easy to grow in average to wet soils in full sun to part shade. To reduce the height of the plant, the stems can be cut back in mid-summer, or cut nearly to the ground in late spring. In the home garden, ironweed can grow in a rain garden, in a meadow or wildflower garden, or in the back of border plants. Hardy from Maine to north Florida, ironweed is common in all regions of Virginia. Ironweeds are usually not browsed by deer and rabbits.

Some explanations of the common name: one refers to the difficulty of pulling the plant up by the roots – battling a plant with a will of iron; another refers to the plant doing well in areas of old fires, especially with rusted metal nearby; the "iron" could describe the tall and sturdy stems or could refer to the rusty-tinged color of fading flowers and the rusty colored seeds.

Upland Ironweed (*V. glauca*) is a similar plant, with shorter stems and wider leaves, and grows in drier soils. The species name "glauca" refers to the whitish leaf undersides. As the flowers fade, they are replaced with bristly white hairs that are brownish in New York Ironweed.

The genus was named for William Vernon, an English botanist who collected in Maryland in the late 1600s. The species name "noveboracensis" refers to New York where the first collections may have been made of this plant. Native Americans made tea from the leaves and roots of ironweeds for relief of female problems and as a blood tonic. ❖

Photo: New York Ironweed (*Vernonia noveboracensis*) taken by Helen Hamilton
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

Wildflower Spot – September 2020
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

Joe-Pye Weed

Eutrochium dubium

By Helen Hamilton, *Past-president of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

These tall, majestic plants are real butterfly magnets. Blooming in late summer until frost, they range from 3 to 10 feet tall with dense heads of fluffy pinkish flowers that are usually covered with butterflies, bees, beetles and wasps, all feeding and pollinating. When in flower, Joe-pye-weeds can be the star of the garden, but a little rough for a formal garden. Long blooming (from July-October) and deer resistant, these plants can grow very large and are great in a wild garden or placed to the rear or where a strong accent is needed.

Joe-pye-weeds are meadow plants; most require full sun, acid, rich soil and moist drainage, although some can tolerate shade, less moisture, coastal conditions and clay soil. Clump-forming, they will not form extensive drifts. Before blooming, these plants are easy to recognize by their leaves which are generally in whorls of 3-6 leaflets that are lance-shaped to oval and with teeth on the edges. At the top of each stem, clusters of tiny flowers appear in rounded groups, terminating in a large dome of blossoms, as much as 18 inches across. Members of the Aster Family, Joe-pye-weeds have no rays (petals), only disk flowers, and they are tiny, allowing small insects easy access to nectar. Also visiting these tightly packed flowers and many butterflies, including tiger swallowtails, monarchs and viceroys.

Three species of Joe-pye-weed are native to the Coastal Plain, the shortest is Coastal Joe-pye-weed, growing 5 feet tall. The leaves of this plant have 3 conspicuous veins extending from the petiole, whereas the leaves of other species have only one main vein. A popular cultivar 'Little Joe' is only 3 feet tall and compact and is an excellent choice for a small butterfly garden. The flowers are mauve purple in a rounded terminal group. Also a good choice for a rain garden, Coastal Joe-pye-weed grows naturally in bogs, swamps and wet clearings, usually in acidic, poor soils.

Purple Joe-pye-weed (*E. purpureum*) grows to 7 feet tall and Hollow-stem Joe-pye-weed (*E. fistulosum*) can be over 11 feet tall. The flowers of both species are pale pink to purplish, in rounded domes, or loose clusters at the tops of stems.

"Joe-pye Weed" comes from a tale about a North American Indian called Joe Pye, who walked the streets of Boston, selling a cure for typhus, using an elixir of this plant to induce profuse sweating, thus breaking the fever (although this story is in some doubt among authors). This plant is also called Gravel root because it has the ability to remove and to a certain degree dissolve kidney stones or gravel. ❖

Photo: Joe-pye-weed (*Eutrochium dubium*) taken by Helen Hamilton
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.