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

Sweetspire

Itea virginica

Sweet Pepperbush

Clethra alnifolia

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

Sweetspire is a small shrub, to 6 feet tall, covered with 4-inch white flower-spears in late spring. The fall color is spectacular and long-lasting, the leaves a mix of yellow, orange, crimson and maroon. Cultivars have larger and longer flower spikes, and more compact growth habit.

Sweetspire grows in full sun to part shade and is relatively free of pests. It is found chiefly on the coastal plain in swamps and wet woods, from southern New Jersey to Florida and west to east Texas.

An extremely useful landscape plant, Sweetspire will grow under eaves where there is no air circulation and no drainage. But it is happier as a small, mass planting put by a deck, on the edge of a lawn, or on the fringe of a wooded area. By a creek, Sweetspire provides invaluable erosion control and, with its feet wet, will produce even better fall color.

When the blooms of Sweetspire are fading, Sweet Pepperbush has begun to flower and continues into summer. In addition to being one of the few summer flowering shrubs, Sweet Pepperbush also has a long season of lovely fall leaf color. While the long white flower "spikes" of both plants are superficially similar, the flowers of Sweet Pepperbush produce outstanding fragrance, like fine French perfume. Both are small shrubs which like part shade, acid and moist soil; Sweet Pepperbush tolerates difficult shady spots and thrives in wet, even soggy conditions. Both are favorites of butterflies and birds.

Both shrubs have fine-toothed leaves. Those of Sweetspire are oval and light green whereas the leaves of Sweet Pepperbush are darker green, narrow at the base and wide in the middle. ❖

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Thimbleweed

Anemone virginiana

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

This spring-blooming anemone grows up to 2' tall (sometimes taller in the wild) and typically occurs in rocky or dry open woods or wooded slopes. One-inch diameter flowers are borne on erect stems above the foliage and feature five, greenish-white, petal-like sepals and a thimble-like, center mound of yellowish stamens. Flowers give way to thimble-shaped, cottony seed heads which remain on the plants well into winter. Three-parted, deeply cut leaves may carry a reddish tinge late into the season.

Thimbleweed is an excellent spring flower for the shaded or woodland garden, and also a good choice for naturalized areas or native wildflower gardens. The plant tends to spread into unoccupied areas, effectively forming a nice groundcover through the season. It will be found in other areas of the garden next year, from dissemination of its seeds.

Growing in nearly every county in Virginia, the blooming season extends June through August. The plant prefers moist, sandy soils, and is easily grown in average, well-drained soil in full sun to part shade. No serious insect or disease problems have been reported.

Native Americans used the roots of thimbleweed medicinally. It was used against diarrhea, whooping cough, tuberculosis, and witchcraft. It was also used as a general stimulant and to prepare a love potion. Smoke from roasting seeds was used to revive the unconscious by being blown into the nostrils of the patient. How many of these uses actually worked and how many were wishful thinking is an interesting question that might be worthy of study. ❖

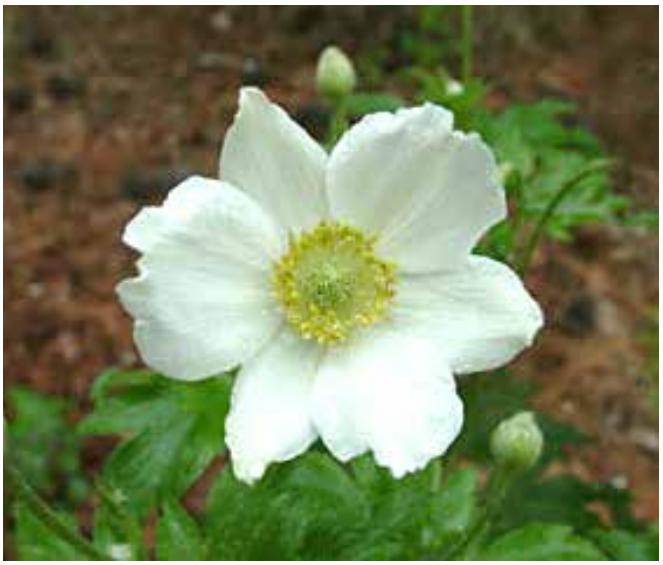


Photo: Thimbleweed (*Anemone virginiana*)
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

Coral Honeysuckle

Lonicera sempervirens

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

This pretty, native Coral Honeysuckle is neither invasive nor aggressive, unlike the exotic highly invasive Japanese honeysuckle *Lonicera japonica* (see www.invasive.org). Blooming April through October, hummingbirds love the nectar from the flowers, two-inch clusters of narrow, scarlet trumpets with orange tips. The leaves are blue-green and smooth (not fuzzy like Japanese honeysuckle), and the terminal leaflet is fused.

Coral honeysuckle will climb up trellises, trees, and crawl along fences; it looks great on a mailbox! A premier choice for an arbor, the vine is almost always blooming and never makes a mess with drippy, juicy fruits. A native yellow-flowered form, Clayton Honeysuckle, can be found in most local nurseries.

Not fussy about growing conditions, Coral Honeysuckle will grow in sun to part-sun, average to moist drainage, and any soil. The root system is deep, and can colonize. Over the winter some leaves remain, and the tangled stems furnish shelter for birds. In late summer, fall, and into winter, small red fruits are enjoyed by many birds. Coral Honeysuckle is a larval plant for the spring azure butterfly.

Growing in woods and thickets all over eastern U.S. and Canada, Coral Honeysuckle is found in eastern and central counties in Virginia. ❖

Photo: Coral and Clayton Honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) by Jan Newton.
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

Lizard's Tail

Saururus cernuus

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

These white nodding spikes of tiny, fragrant flowers growing in wet places are instantly recognizable. The heart-shaped leaves grow beneath a flower spike on stems 2-4 feet high. The foliage when crushed has a pleasant aroma like sassafras.

Found in coastal and piedmont regions of Virginia, and most states of eastern U.S. and Canada, Lizard's Tail requires wet soil and partial shade, and is common in swamps, shaded marshes and stream margins. The plant can tolerate saturated soils with up to 4 inches of water.

Lizard's Tail is a great spreading groundcover for moist soils, shallow water, and containers. The plant is well-suited for wetland gardens, bogs or pond areas, and is deer resistant. Blooming June-September, it will colonize large areas. It is both wind- and insect-pollinated.

The young shoots and leaves provide forage for cattle and sheep, but when overeaten this plant may be toxic, and should not be ingested by humans. The flowers attract birds, especially wood ducks.

From the Greek *sauros* (lizard) and *oura* (tail), both the common name and the genus name refer to the long, finger-like spike of flowers that appear during the summer months.

Containing several novel compounds with sedative effects, American Indians used a tea from the whole plant for general illnesses, and the root as a poultice for wounds and inflammations. ❖

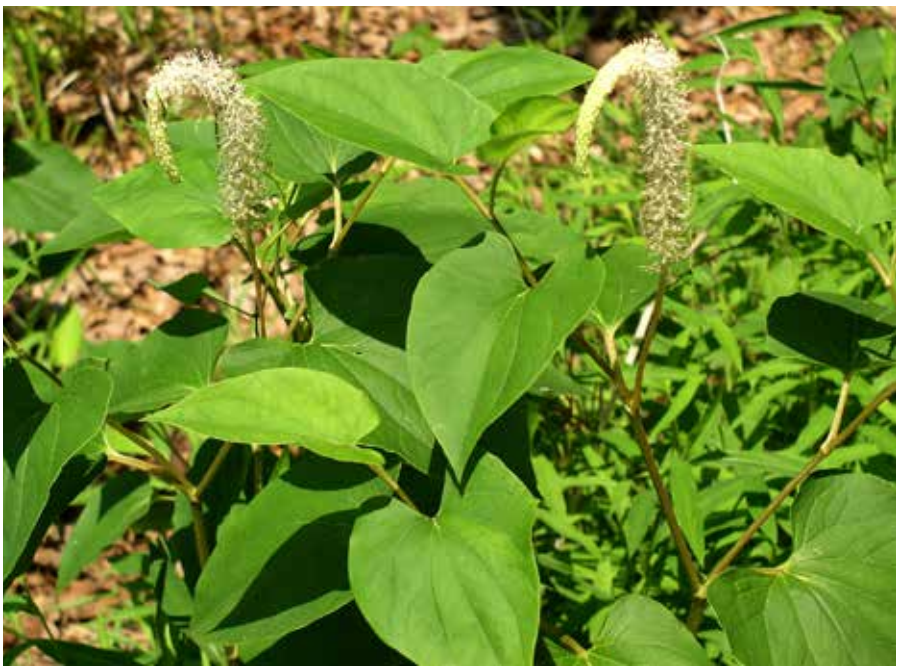


Photo: Lizard's Tail *(Saururus cernuus)* by Helen Hamilton, taken in the Ellipse Garden in Freedom Park, Williamsburg Botanical Garden

For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

Tall Skullcap

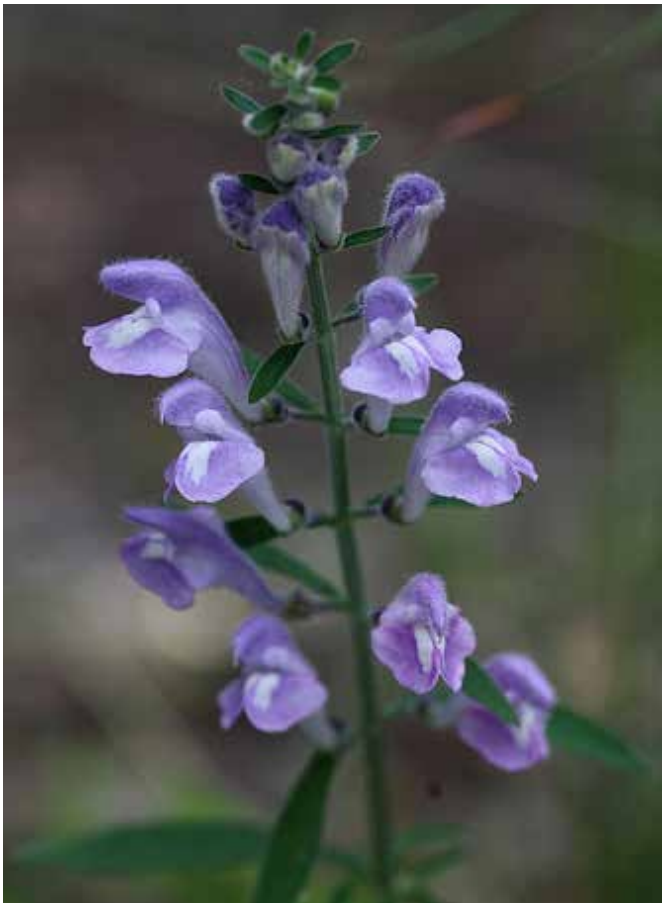
Scutellaria integrifolia

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

The soft blue flowers of this species of skullcap are about one inch long, with arched upper lip and flaring lower lip. Tall or hyssop skullcap can be distinguished from other skullcaps by the combination of untoothed leaves and showy flowers clustered in a terminal raceme. Stems are square, and finely hairy, 1-2 feet tall, somewhat sprawling. This perennial plant begins in the spring as a basal rosette of arrow-shaped leaves, but soon produces its upright stalk with opposite, elliptical leaves.

Once flowering is complete, wafer-like seed capsules ripen along the stems. Like many members of the mint family, skullcap produces large numbers of seed, resulting in large numbers of seedlings. Where unwanted, they are easy to remove. Deadheading the flowers just after blooming will limit the number of seeds produced. This plant mixes well with black-eyed susan (*Rudbeckia hirta)* and beardtongue *(Penstemon digitalis).* Once established, the plant thrives and spreads without much additional care.

Skullcap grows best in full sun and wet soil in fields and borders of woods and clearings.



Found in nearly every county in Virginia, especially in the coastal plain, the range extends from eastern Massachusetts to Florida and Texas, and inland to southern Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee.

The many different species of skullcaps are recognized by the tiny projection, or hump, on the top of the calyx surrounding the base of the flower. ❖

Photo: Tall Skullcap *(Scutellaria integrifolia)* taken by Phillip Merritt
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

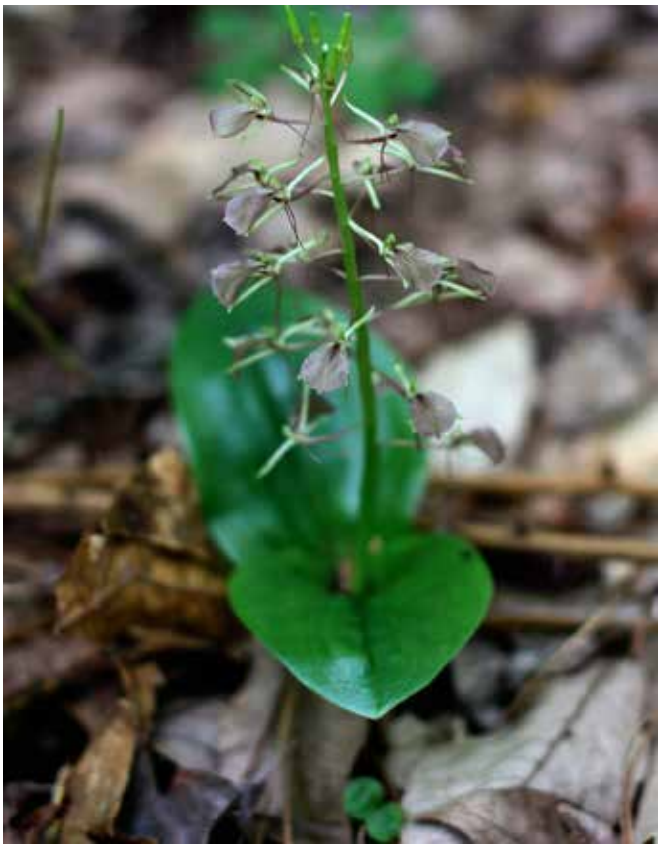
Purple Twayblade

Liparis liliifolia

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

This small orchid lacks bright colors and, blending into the background, can be overlooked. Blooming May-July, the flowering stems have 5-30 flowers on slender reddish stalks. They are ½ inch long, greenish and purplish-brown, with broad translucent lips prominently veined with reddish purple. Fertilized flowers produce elliptical seed capsules which split open to release numerous tiny seeds, distributed by the wind. The plant has only two leaves ("twayblade"), in a pair at the base, 3-6 inches long and half as much across. They are shiny medium green, oval, and with smooth margins, slightly bent.

Purple Twayblade grows in rich woods, moist forest, and floodplains in every county in Virginia. This orchid adapts to many soil types, and prefers partial sunlight to light shade. But it cannot survive without the presence of a specific fungus in the soil. The range is from Maine to Minnesota and south to Georgia and Arkansas.



The genus name *Liparis* comes from the Greek *liparos,* meaning "fat," or "shining," referring to the smooth and lustrous leaves. *Liliifolia* is derived from the Latin *lilium* for "lily," and *folia* for "leaf." This orchid is endangered in several states. ❖

Photo: Purple Twayblade (*Liparis liliifolia)* taken by Phillip Merritt
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

Pinweed

Lechea racemulosa

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

These little plants are easily overlooked, but they grow in dry sites with few other plants. No more than 1 foot tall with stiff, wiry stems, the leaves on the stem are short and narrow. Late in the season, shoots are produced at the base with numerous crowded leaves. Blooming June through August, many tiny, 3-petaled red flowers with feathery red stigmas are open only on sunny mornings for a few hours. The flowers are followed by small red capsules twice as long as thick.

Pinweed is found in every county in Virginia and ranges from southeastern New York to Ontario, south to Georgia and Alabama, growing in dry soil in sandy, open woods and fields. Two other species with broader fruits grow in Virginia: Leggett's Pinweed (*L. pulchella),* in coastal counties and Piedmont, and Beach Pinweed (*L. maritima),* only in coastal areas, usually on dunes. Beach Pinweed is adapted to harsh conditions with tiny hairs on the leaves, which retard moisture loss and protect against solar radiation.

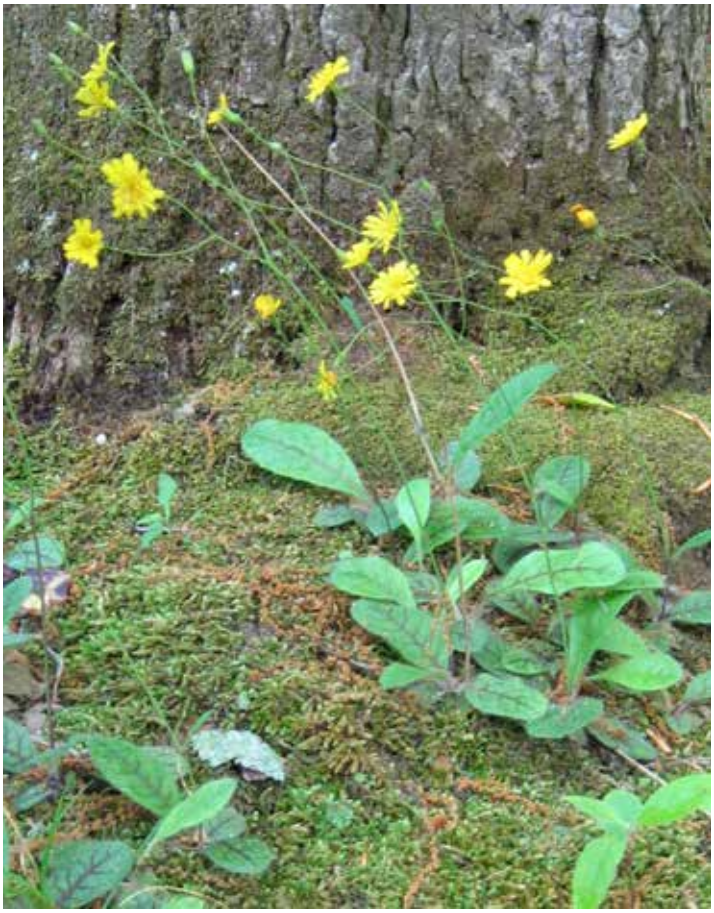
The common name comes from the small capsules that resemble the heads of tailor's pins. *Racemosus* is Latin for "full of clusters," referring to the fruits arranged in small racemes. ❖

Photo: Pinweed (*Lechea racemulosa)* taken by Phillip Merritt
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

Rattlesnake Weed

Hieracium venosum

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



Now blooming along roadsides, edge of woods and meadows, Rattlesnake Weed has small yellow dandelion-like flower heads on long wiry stems. They grow in clusters, 1-2 feet tall, with flowers April through July. The tiny, one-seeded dry fruits carry yellowish bristles.

Most of the leaves are at the base of the plant. They are green, veined with purple and egg-shaped, often densely hairy on the edges.

Rattlesnake Weed grows in dry open woods, thickets and clearings, in every county in Virginia. The plant ranges from New York to northern Georgia and west to Michigan, Kentucky, Tennessee and Alabama.

The genus name comes from the Greek *hierax,* for "a hawk," suggesting another common name, "Veined Hawkweed." Pliny and others supposed that hawks used this plant to strengthen their eyesight. While relatively widespread, Rattlesnake Weed is most common in areas where rattlesnakes occur. Another source of the common name is its use as a snakebite remedy. Powdered leaves and roots and teas have been used medicinally, and folk medicine considered the juice in fresh leaves effective against warts. ❖

Photo: Rattlesnake Weed (*Hieracium venosum*) taken by Kathi Mestayer
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

Water Pennywort

Hydrocotyle ranunculoides

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

The leaves of Pennywort are often seen floating on the water's surface, attached to 4-12-inch stems which root at the nodes. With 5 or 6 lobes, the leaves resemble those of buttercups, hence the species name *ranunculoides,* meaning "like *Ranunculus."* The petiole attaches at the bottom of a deep cleft almost at the middle of the blade. Small white or greenish flowers appear in a flat-topped group (umbel) at the end of a short stalk from April through July.

The flowers are followed by dry fruits (achenes) that can float on water and distribute the plant to new locations. Fine fibrous roots that penetrate the soil or drift in the water allow Water Pennywort to form large dense colonies in muddy soil or shallow water.

Pennyworts are common in swamps, marshes, ditches and wet soils from New England and south to Florida and Texas, western U.S. and tropical America, but grow only in the eastern counties of Virginia.

Two related species are common on the Coastal Plain, both with the petioles attaching at the center of the circular, sometimes lobed, but not cleft leaves: *H. umbellata* has one umbel of 10 or more flowers; in *H. verticillata* several clusters of 7 or fewer flowers are in whorls along the flower stem.

The genus name *Hydrocotyle* is derived from the Greek *hydro,* "water," and *cotyle,* "a flat cup," referring to the leaves of some species being somewhat cup-shaped. ❖

Photo: Water Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*) taken by Helen Hamiton
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

Climbing Hydrangea

Decumaria barbara

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

This handsome woody vine needs a climbing surface, without which it does not produce flowers. Like Trumpet Creeper and Climbing Euonymus, adventitious roots readily cling to tree bark, stone walls and fences. A high climber, the stems can reach over 60 feet in height. The opposite leaves are oval, usually toothed, glossy above, and deciduous. Blooming May through June, the numerous fragrant white flowers bear 7-10 petals and 20-30 stamens. From July through October this vine produces fruit capsules shaped like tops and strongly ribbed. In the winter, Climbing Hydrangea is often conspicuous with its clusters of dark fruits hanging from a bare stem clinging high on the trunk of a tree.

Climbing Hydrangea prefers partial shade in swamps, wet woods and moist forests. Occurring only in the southeast counties of Virginia, this vine extends to Florida, west to Louisiana and Texas, and to some mountainous habitats of South Carolina and Tennessee.

The Hydrangea Family is represented in Virginia by only 3 genera. Mock Orange (Philadelphus) is a shrub (native and introduced) of mountainous regions, and an occasional cultivated escape elsewhere. The genus Decumaria has only two species, Climbing Hydrangea that is native to eastern North America, and another species of eastern Asia. Such a startling distribution, seen also in hickories, tulip-trees, sassafras and many other plants, reflects massive geological and climatic changes and extinctions over millions of years.

The third genus includes the native Wild Hydrangea (Hydrangea arborescens) that grows all over Virginia, and attracts bees, birds and butterflies. Many beautiful cultivars are sold in garden centers but they are usually sterile and do not offer food for pollinating insects. ❖

Photo: Climbing Hydrangea (*Decumaria barbara)* taken by Phillip Merritt
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

Sundrops

Oenothera fruticosa

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

This bright little early summer plant blooms in the morning and closes in the evening; evening-primroses are relatives, they bloom in evening and close during the day. Sundrops have 2-inch lemon yellow flowers with 4 petals and in the center 8 prominent stamens and a large 4-lobed stigma, forming a cross. This is a biennial plant, forming only rosettes of leaves the first year. The leaves are elliptical in shape with smooth edges -- both the stems and leaves covered with fine hairs.

By the second year the flowers are in a spike-like cluster at the top of stems usually about 3 feet tall, with some branching. The flowers of Sundrops start to appear in April and will continue blooming until August**;** they make a nice contrast planted with orange Butterfly Weed and dark-blue Spiderwort.

The scientific name of the family is derived from *onager,* the Greek word for wild ass, beasts who threw stones with their hind legs when agitated. In ancient times, a stone-throwing catapult became known as an onager. Sundrops flowers are followed by ribbed, club-shaped pods with many tiny seeds that are vigorously released, as with a catapult, to be spread throughout the garden.

Widespread across Virginia, Sundrops prefers moist, well-drained soil in full to part sun. The plant ranges from Nova Scotia to New York and south to Florida and Alabama. ❖

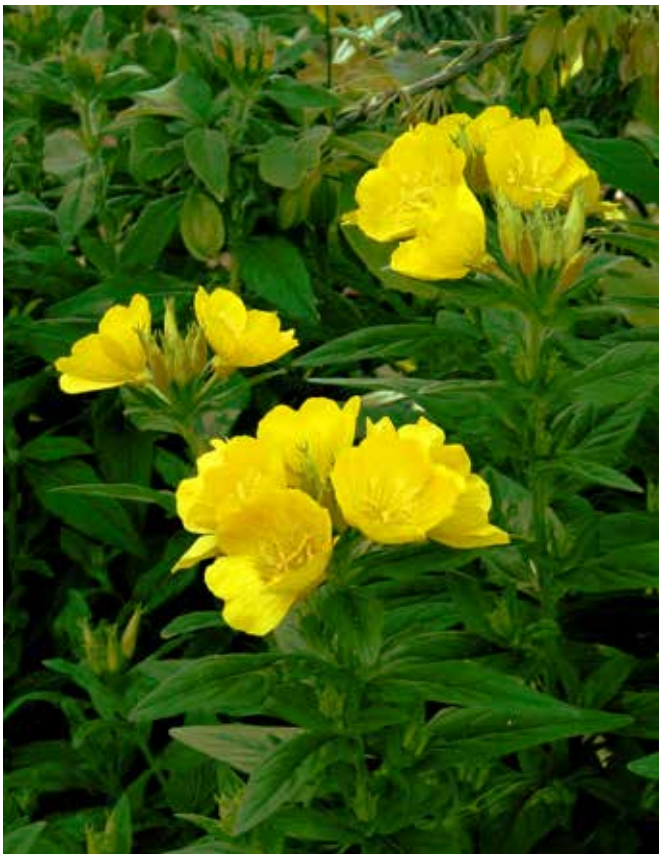
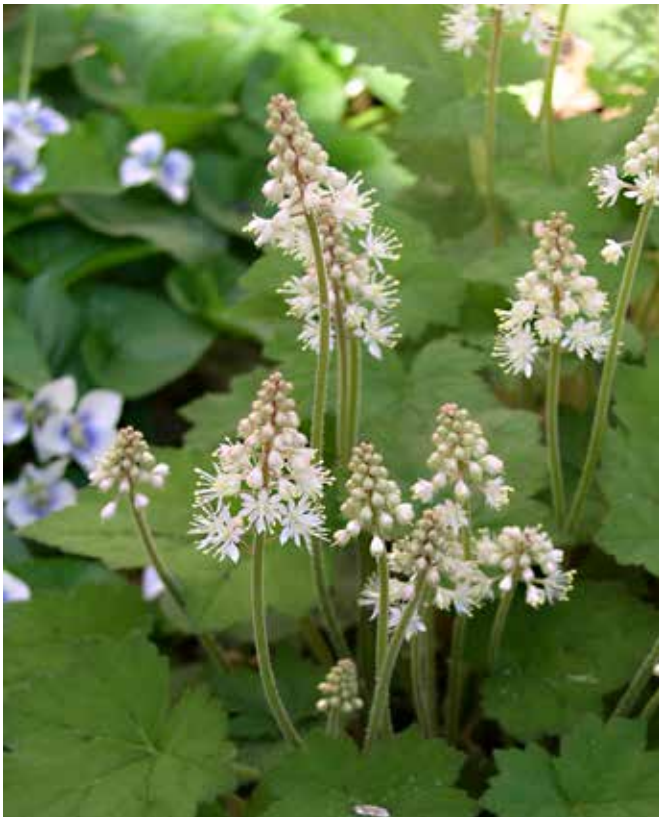


Photo: Sundrops (*Oenothera fruticosa*) taken by Helen Hamilton
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

Foamflower

Tiarella cordifolia

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



A very pretty flower, with a light, airy character, foamflower blooms across Virginia from April through July, in habitat simulating its native moist woods. It can tolerate sun to shade, but needs moisture and rich, loamy soil. Using a few rocks at the site helps to maintain cool roots. If the plant appreciates its site, there will soon be a colony of foamflowers thanks to wandering rhizomes.

This is a perennial with maple-like leaves, and flowers that bloom in a spike up to six inches long on a leafless stalk up to 14 inches high. Foamflower makes a great groundcover for the shade garden. The white flower spikes are pyramidal and float above the leaves, which are mostly clustered at the base of the plant. When planted in mass it resembles a sea of foam. This semi-evergreen perennial has great fall interest when its leaves have turned to burgundy hues. Plant it in moist shade with ferns and colorful counterparts such as cardinal flower, geranium, phlox, fire pink, celandine poppy and crested iris.

In the 1850s, country people used its leaves for healing purposes, placing them on scalds and burns. The Shakers prepared the herb for sale as a diuretic and tonic. Native Americans used the leaves in a tea as a mouthwash and treatment of eye discomforts.

The genus name is Latin for "little tiara," referring to the shape of the fruit and the species name *cordifolia* refers to the heart-shaped leaf base.

In Virginia, foamflower is well-represented in the mountain provinces and adjacent Piedmont. It has been documented only from James City Co. in the Coastal Plain, where it grows along creek banks in deep ravines. ❖

Photo: Foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*) taken by Helen Hamilton
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

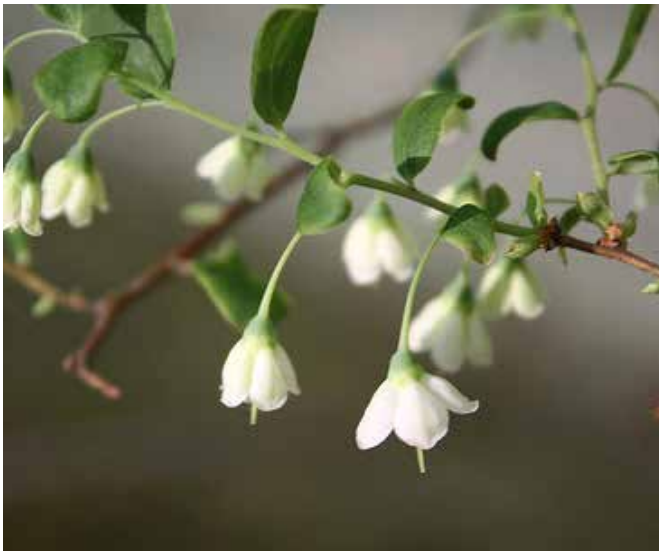
Deerberry

Vaccinium stamineum

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

Deerberry is a member of a large genus which includes blueberries, and cranberries. This species is a tall (to 10 feet) deciduous shrub with variable foliage, mostly egg-shaped. Leaves are thin and not toothed, typically whitish underneath.

Unlike the closed, tubular buds and flowers of blueberry, the flowers of deerberry are open, and dangling along the stem. The petals are flaring with the stamens and styles extending outside. Greenish-white, pink-tinged flowers appear May-June; in late summer and fall greenish-purple fruits, sometimes white-powdered**,** appear, furnishing food for birds and small mammals.



Found over eastern U.S. and Canada, Deerberry is native to all counties in Virginia, growing in dry woods. "Vaccinium" is the classic name for blueberries; "stamineum" refers to the prominent stamens. While edible, the berries are not as flavorful as those of other species. ❖

Photo: Deerberry *(Vaccinium stamineum)* taken by Phillip Merritt
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

Spiderwort

Tradescantia virginiana

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

A long-blooming native perennial like Spiderwort can fit into a lot of spaces in the home garden. Three-petaled flowers form a triangle – they are violet-blue with vivid yellow stamens growing in a 3' tall clump. Each flower is open for only a day, in the morning, but they bloom in succession from buds at the ends of stems, from April through July. The flower stems are surrounded by arching green leaves up to one foot long and one inch wide that are erect early in the season but are somewhat drooping in summer.

Spiderwort is not fussy about growing conditions – part shade, medium water, low maintenance – and tolerates clay soil, dry and wet soil. It would fit in a woodland or native garden, naturalized or as a border, along with other perennials that hide the sprawling leaves late in the season. The plant can self-seed and spread but dead-heading will prevent seed set. Spiderwort's blue-violet flowers are attractive with yellow flowers like Green and Gold (*Chrysogonum virginianum*) and Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*). Bumblebees are the principal pollinators.

Two other species of Tradescantia grow in Virginia, differing in the appearance of the leaves and flowers. *T. ohiensis* grows in Virginia Beach and the western mountainous counties; *T. subaspera* has been located in the southwestern counties. *T. virginiana* grows west of Richmond and some southeastern counties.

The plant's genus name honors John Tradescant, gardener to Charles the First of England and a subscriber to the Virginia Company. John's son traveled to Virginia in the 1630s and sent spiderwort back to England where it became part of the English cottage gardens. It is called Spiderwort because the stems when cut secrete a sticky secretion that becomes threadlike and silky as it hardens, like a spider's web. "Wort" is an old English word for plant.

Hybrids are available in the nursery trade with red-purple, pink or white flowers.❖

Photo: Spiderwort (*Tradescantia virginiana*) taken by Jan Newton
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.