

January 2023 Newsletter

SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA CHAPTER

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January Meeting Highlights

Chapter Business

It's time once again to ask chapter members to contact the PA Controlled Plant & Noxious Weed Committee in support of a vote to ban the propagation and sale of invasive ornamental plants. The plants being considered for a ban at the committee's meeting next week are Japanese honeysuckle and the bush honeysuckles. Members are also encouraged to ask the committee to consider a future ban on Norway maple, butterfly bush, porcelain berry, and heavenly bamboo (*Nandina domestica*).

Wintergreen Native Plant Propagation Program, Wintergreen, VA

Presented by Abigail and John James

Located in Nelson County, VA, in the Blue Ridge Mountains, Wintergreen is a planned community that includes residential, resort, and recreational areas. The passive recreation common areas are managed by the Wintergreen Property Owners' Association. The nonprofit Nature Foundation at Wintergreen is part of the property owners' association.

Early in its existence, the Nature Foundation was involved in rescuing hundreds of native plants that were removed from the property during the development of the active recreation areas. The Foundation is now engaged in plant propagation from natives grown on site.

Net or tulle bags are placed over maturing seed heads to prevent them from being scattered. Volunteers then remove seed from the bags and clean, dry, and store them. Seed propagation starts in mid-winter. Rather than sowing in 4" pots or milk jugs, Foundation volunteers plant in square packs made from propagation mix. One seed is planted in each square. Once the seedling has developed one or two sets of permanent leaves, it is transplanted into 4" pots. This method is not used for milkweeds because milkweed seedlings resent transplanting.

Foundation volunteers will also conduct a site visit for residents to explain the importance of native plants.

The foundation maintains three gardens on site, including a butterfly garden, as well as an oldfashioned glass greenhouse for the propagation of woody plants, and for plant storage.

Plants included in the butterfly garden are blue mist flower (*Conoclinium coelestina*), great blue lobelia (*L. syphlitica*), alum root (*Heuchera americana*), white wood aster (*Eurybia divericata*), Joe Pye weed (*Eutrochium purpureum*), ox-eye sunflower (*Heliopsis helianthoides*), black cohosh (*Acteata* racemosa), cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*), and alternate-leaf dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia*).

Another garden maintained by the Foundation is on a hilltop with a sunny exposure. Plants include mountain ash (*Sorbus americana*), white snakeroot (*Ageratina altissima*), fringe tree (*Chionanthus virginicus*), New York ironweed (*Vernonia novaboracensis*), redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), serviceberry (*Amelanchier*), fetterbush (*Pieris floribunda*), eastern ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*), obedient plant (*Physostegia virginiana*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), shrubby St. John's wort (*Hypericum prolificum*), and showy goldenrod (*Solidago speciosa*). The third garden maintained by the Foundation is in a shady location on a slope. Plants in this garden include great blue lobelia (*L. syphlitica*, closed gentian, (Gentiana *andrewsii*) interrupted fern (*Osmunda claytoniana*), goldenrods (*Solidago* & *Euthamia*), and turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*).

Behind the glass greenhouse is a space covered with shade cloth for growing shrubs that require shade. Approximately 1500 woody plants are grown in pots in this area.

In a sunny bed in front of the greenhouse, Foundation volunteers propagate plants that don't grow well from seed; for example, green and gold (*Chrysogonum virginianum*). As the plants spread, volunteers separate them and plant them out.

Canada and turk's cap lilies are grown outside the greenhouse. Inside are several ferns, including sensitive and interrupted fern.

The Foundation also works with homeowners' associations in the area looking to rewild the common areas on their properties. Once a few residents start planting natives, the neighbors become interested, and native plantings become popular.

One recommendation to stop deer from damaging native plants is called a water scarecrow. The battery-powered device connects to a water supply and includes a motion detector. A spray of water is directed across the area when the detector is triggered. The water spray is not strong enough to hurt an animal, but it causes enough annoyance to make the animals go elsewhere.

Plans are particularly vulnerable to deer damage when they're young, and during winter when other food is scarce. Evergreen plants can be fenced in winter to deter deer looking for anything green. Another tactic is to concentrate on plant species that aren't favored by deer, including goldenrods and beebalm.

Rabbits are another challenge. They eat lower down on the plant, posing a particular threat to low -growing and ground cover plants. Chicken-wire or hardware-cloth cones around small vulnerable plants are one suggestion.

Deer prefer not to walk on slopes with exposed rock, so one plan is to locate vulnerable plants on rocky, if the plants will thrive there.

Starting Native Seeds

Presented by Christopher Sohnly

These general instructions will be applicable to starting seeds of many native perennial plants.

Gallon milk jugs are readily available and easy to prepare. Sohnly uses a mycorrhizal inoculant additive. He has found this supplement to work well for seeds that don't germinate or grow on well. Sohnly uses regular potting soil. No additional fertilizer Is needed for native plants.

To prepare the jugs, remove the cap and drill three ventilation holes around the top of the jug and four drainage holes in the base of the jug. Cut through the jug horizontally just below the base of the handle, all the way around the jug except directly under the handle. The top part of the jug can now be opened up, leaving a hinge under the handle.

Soil depth is about 2" or about 5 cups of damp soil. Mix 1-1/2 tablespoons of mycorrhizal inoculant per cup into the soil. Stick a plant tag in the soil. Sprinkle seeds on the soil and cover to the depth of the seed, unless the instructions indicate the seeds need light to germinate. Use duct tape to seal the top and bottom of the jug back together.

Place the jugs outside while the weather is still cold enough to provide the freeze-thaw cycles necessary to break seed dormancy. This information is specific to each species and can be found in the seed catalog or on line.

Once the seeds sprout, don't let the soil dry out. Seedlings can be transplanted individually, or you can separate small sections of seedlings and transplant them into a larger pot.

WO-SEPA 2023 Meeting Schedule

Feb. 8 Tree Index Mar. 9 Rain Barrels Apr. __ Insect-Plant-Flower Interactions May 11 Native Edibles & Companion Planting June 7 Backyard Nature Preserve Tour Sept. 14 No More Fall Cleanup Oct. 11 Native Seed Collection Techniques Nov. 16 Chapter Native Seed Swap

Recordings of past meetings are on our <u>Youtube channel</u>.

Spring Ephemerals: Rethinking Daffodils and Tulips

Crocuses and daffodils are traditional harbingers of spring, but these non-native plants offer little benefit for our native wildlife. There are many native plants, however, which co-evolved with local wildlife to provide spring nectar and pollen resources early in the season.

Spring ephemerals emerge early in the spring to take advantage of the available sun before the leaves of trees come out and woodland perennials cover the ground. Most spring ephemerals set seed and then go dormant for the year when the weather warms up and other plants leaf out. For that reason, spring ephemerals can be interplanted with ferns and other perennials that emerge later and fill in the space.

Two of the earliest blooming plants in this category are skunk cabbage (Symplocarpus foetidus) (right) and harbinger of spring (Erigenia bulbosa) (below). Both plants poke through the leaf cover woodlands in to start blooming in February.





Next to flower are dogtooth violet (*Erythronium americanum*) (below left) and spring beauty (*Claytonia virginiana*) (below right). Both of these can create sizeable colonies in rich, moist wood-lands and are said to be deer resistant.



Bloodroot (Sanguinaria canadensis) is another

spring ephemeral that can form large colonies in rich woodland soil and is not palatable to deer or rabbits due to the toxic, bitter compounds in its foliage and roots.



Limestone bittercress (*Cardamine douglassii*) (below left) is a relatively rare woodland plant with small white to pink flowers. As the name indicates, it may prefer growing in alkaline soil.





Sharp-lobed hepatica (H. nobilis var. acuta) (above

right) sends up single white, pink, or purple flowers in early spring before the leaves emerge. The threeloved leaves often show interesting color marbling. Round-lobed hepatica (*H. nobilis var. obtusa*) is similar in appearance except the leaves' three lobes are rounded rather than pointed.

Spring Ephemerals, continued from page 3

Marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*) is one of the earliest blooming spring ephemerals in a wetland. The heartshaped foliage emerges in



March and is quickly covered with bright yellow buttercup-like flowers that can last through May. Found naturally along slow moving streams and wooded wetlands, marsh marigold is important ecologically, providing protection for many small aquatic creatures and helping to clarify water by absorbing nutrients and trapping silt.



Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*), blooming in March to April, can spread to carpet a woodland. Celandine poppy (*Stylophorum diphyllum*), although native to western Pennsylvania, is also found in our area because it's a common colonizer in recently disturbed shade.



The umbrella-like leaves of mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*) grow so thickly they resemble a miniature forest. The glossy leaves hide delicate white flowers in April and May. Ideal conditions for this spring ephemeral are moist, well-drained soils in part to full shade, which allow it to self-seed. They tolerate drier soil conditions and short periods of drought.

The golden-yellow fruit is consumed by mammals and eastern box turtles.

Common blue violet (*V. so-roria*) is found in woodlands but will also colonize sunnier locations with enough moisture. Violets are a welcome addition in many lawns, providing food for native insects in an otherwise inhospitable environment.



Rue anemone (*Thalictrum thalictroides*, below left) and early saxifrage (*S. virginiensis*, below right) are later spring bloomers.



All of these native spring wildflowers are important early sources of pollen and nectar for native insects that are emerging from winter dormancy.

Some suggestions for overplanting spring ephemerals include ferns, late-summer-flowering plants, such as white wood aster (*Eurybia divaricata*), blue wood aster (*Symphyotrichum cordifolia*), big-leaf aster (*E. macrophylla*), wreath goldenrod (*Solidago caesia*), sweet goldenrod (*S. odora*), and zig-zag goldenrod (*S. flexicaulis*).

All of these plants can be grown from seed, although some may require more than one season to germinate and probably several years to bloom. When buying seeds or plants, look for plant sales sponsored by local botanical gardens or conservancies. Before buying from a commercial source, ask whether their plants are grown on site and their seeds are responsibly sourced.

As with other natives, cultivars may be available which alter the flower color or habit of the plant. To provide maximum benefit for insects that have evolved to feed on native plants, choose the straight species rather than cultivars.

Spotlight on Plants with "Weed" in the Name

Tall thimbleweed (*Anemone virginiana*) is a good mixer in semi-shaded sites. Flowering from May until July, tall thimbleweed can be recognized by its long flower stalks topped with a single white or greenish-white flower.. Each stalk arises from a set of leaves in whorls of three. The leaf structure is whorled halfway up the stem and each individual leaf appears to be deeply cut.



The flowers are unusual in that they technically have no petals; the sepals, which are green in most flowers, are showy and petal-like in the anemones. Topping the showy sepals is a button made up of many female parts surrounded by anthers bearing pollen. The female cluster will enlarge and elongate to form a fruit the size and shape of a small thimble. This fruit gives the plant its common name

After flowering the fruits, called achenes, are produced. When ripe, they have grayish-white densely woolly styles, turning the thimbles into balls of fluff. A close look reveals that each "cottonball" consists



of many tiny dark seeds, each of which bears a cottony tuft to enhance its dispersal by the wind, giving rise to another common name for anemones -windflower.



Native to eastern North America, tall thimbleweed can be found growing in dry or open woods. The plant is very durable in different weather conditions, ranging from part shade to sun, and can tolerate both drought and cold. It prefers acidic soils but will grow in neutral to slightly alkaline soil as well.

Expect to see small bees and hoverflies visiting the flowers. Mature plants are about 3' tall in bloom with a spread of 20". A clump of tall thimbleweed can light up a shady area with its white flowers. It mixes well with other spring bloomers like columbine, bleeding heart, Jacobs ladder, and Virginia bluebell. Foliage may disappear in a dry summer, so interplant tall thimbleweed with ferns, sedges, and shade-tolerant grasses such as bottlebrush grass.



Invasive Species Alert -- Japanese Honeysuckle

As kids it was fun to pinch the ends off those yellow or white tubular flowers and sip the nectar. As gardeners, we're not so fond of Japanese honeysuckle because of its thuggy behavior. The foliage will quickly smother and kill low-growing vegetation and starve saplings and small trees of light. The vines twine around tree trunks and can girdle them. The top growth is so heavy it can weigh down tree limbs and cause them to break. Dense thickets of honeysuckle on the ground prevent the germination and growth of many native forbs, shrubs, and tree seedlings.

Japanese honeysuckle seeds are spread by birds and other wildlife. It can sprout and thrive even in deep shade.

Winter is a great time to remove Japanese honeysuckle because the leaves are among the few that are still green (or dark red) this time of year. Seedlings of Japanese honeysuckle can be pulled by hand. Vines growing into trees should be cut with clippers or a saw but not pulled down, to avoid breaking branches. Vines should be clipped below the root crown to prevent resprouting.

Winter is a great time to tackle Japanese honeysuckle because the leaves remain green after a frost. The vines are easier to see and cut with no leaves on the trees. Seedlings can be pulled as long as the ground remains unfrozen. Vines can be cut anytime.

Resources

How To Identify and Remove Japanese Honeysuckle

Blue Ridge Prism Fact Sheet

Educational Opportunities

- Jan. 18, 25 <u>Woods in Your Backyard Series</u>. PennState Extension, webinar, 7:00 p.m.
- Jan. 18 Pollinator Conservation in Working Landscapes. Ecological Landscape Alliance, webinar, noon.

Jan. 18 The Science & Solutions for Bird-Window Collisions. Audubon, webinar, 4:00 p.m.

- Jan. 18 <u>Naturescaping: Landscaping Based on Nature</u>. Native Plant Society of NJ, webinar, 7:00 p.m.
- Jan. 19/21/26/28 <u>Habitat Advocates: Building Biodiversity in our Community</u>. Lancaster Conservancy, Climbers Run Nature Center 226 Frogtown Road Pequea, PA . Various times.
- Jan. 20 Caring for Your Native Plants Garden. Virginia Cooperative Extension, webinar, 10:00 a.m.
- Jan. 21 Putting Plants To Work. Mt Cuba Center, webinar, 11:00 a.m. p.m.
- Jan. 25 Inviting Biodiversity into Our Gardens. Western Reserve Conservancy, webinar. 1:00 p.m.
- Jan. 25 <u>What's in Your Garden Today? Discovering Insect Life</u>. Northeast Ohio Pollinator Society, webinar, 7:00 p.m.
- Jan. 26 Pollinators in the Woods. Xerces Society, webinar, 1:00 p.m.
- Jan. 28 Native Seed Propagation. Jenkins Arboretum, 631 Berwyn Baptist Rd, Devon PA. 10:00 a.m.
- Feb. 1 <u>Winter Sleeps: Bees</u>. Brandywine Conservancy, webinar, 6:30 p.m.
- **Feb. 1** <u>100 Plants To Feed the Monarch Butterflies</u>. Ecological Landscape Alliance, webinar, 1:00 p.m.
- Feb. 8 <u>Home-Grown Restoration: Creating Pollinator Plots, Fields, and Strips</u>. Northeast Ohio Pollinator Society, webinar, 7:00 p.m.
- Feb. 9 Pollinator & Beneficial Insect Habitat. Xerces Society, webinar, 1:00 p.m.
- **Feb. 9** <u>Is a Native Plant Garden the Right Fit for Your Space</u>? Brandywine Conservancy, webinar, 7:00 p.m.
- Feb. 11 Planting for Pollinators in Sun and Shade. Penn State Extension, webinar, 11:00 a.m.