

THE TURK'S CAP

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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE DELAWARE NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY
WWW.DELAWARENATIVEPLANTS.ORG

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NATURAL QUOTES

"Only American natives should be used. Mt. Vernon was to be an American garden where English trees were not allowed.

"Founding Gardeners"
by Andrea Wulf

The DNPS Vision

The purpose of the Delaware Native Plant Society (DNPS) is to participate in and encourage the preservation, conservation, restoration, and propagation of Delaware's native plants and plant communities. The Society provides information to government officials, business people, educators, and the general public on the protection, management, and restoration of native plant ecosystems. The DNPS encourages the use of native plants in the landscape by homeowners, businesses, and local and state governments through an on-going distribution of information and knowledge by various means that includes periodic publications, symposia, conferences, workshops, field trips, and a growing statewide membership organized by the DNPS.

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

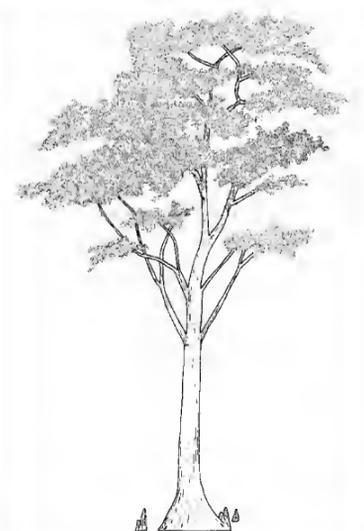
The Delaware Native Plant Society is open to everyone ranging from the novice gardener to the professional botanist. One of the primary goals of the society is to involve as many individuals as possible.

The DNPS is working on some significant projects at this time. We have completed four reforestation projects in the Prime Hook area, at Blackbird Creek in New Castle County and Cedar Creek in Sussex County where we have installed tree tubes around newly sprouted seedlings, and are performing annual management of the sites. Help is also needed at our native plant nursery at the St. Jones Reserve with the monitoring and watering of plants along with many other nursery activities.

For more information, visit our website at www.delawarenativeplants.org. Our very informative, up-to-date website has all the contact information for the Society, along with a section on native plants, volunteering, and links to other environmental and plant related organizations.



Summer at Newcroft



Notes from Newcroft

This issue is all about trees, especially sassafras. The best outing this spring was joining the Delaware Nature Society's *The Great Oak Tour* in May—part of the Copeland



Native Plant Series. Pictured above is the small group in front of the mighty London Grove oak, the second largest white oak (*Q. alba*) in PA. The tour was led by William Ryan, an ecological consultant and doctoral student at the University of Delaware, whose research is focused on the biological responses to restoration techniques in temperate eastern North American serpentine barrens. Several of the 16 oak species we saw, included *Quercus marilandica*, *Q. stellata*, *Q. ilicifolia*, and *Q. prinoides*, that are strongly associated with serpentine barrens in the Piedmont of DE, PA, and MD. A great day and a great tour.

Current reading includes Andrea Wulf's "Founding Gardeners". Benjamin Franklin from London and George Washington from Valley Forge used their horticulture interests during the search for independence of the colonies from England as a welcome distraction from the rigors of war. Letters home included directions about plantings they were thinking about. Once home Washington, thinking he would be home for good, redesigned his gardens. Included in his plantings were **sassafras** trees collected from his woods. On the bare branches clung delicate yellow flowers which Washington thought "would look very pretty" mixed with the eastern redbud.

Edwin Way Teale wrote about **sassafras** in his 1951 "North with the Spring" of his visit to The Greer Company a medicinal drug company in Lenoir, NC. "The bark goes into making perfumes as well as medicines." (See pg. 4 of this issue for Bob Edelen's column about sassafras's carcinogenic nature.) In Teale's "Autumn Across America" he remembers growing up on his grandfather's farm in the dune country of northern Indiana observing the golden mittens of the sassafras.

So, you might want to plant sassafras in your landscape for it's beauty—just don't eat it.

Cindy Albright
cindy@cindyalbright.com

Update on Trees Donated to DE Wild Lands

Last year, 2012, Jim MacKenzie, DNPS member and Octoraro Native Plant Nursery President and Operations Manager, donated over 50 native plants to Delaware Wild Lands, Inc.(DWL) and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS). The DWL staff and DNPS member Rick McCorkle visited the nursery and picked up 13 bald cypress, 4 black gums, 24 white oaks, 2 swamp white oaks, and a small number of native shrubs (e.g., sweet pepperbush, highbush blueberry). All of the trees were planted in or adjacent to Great Cypress Swamp (GCS).

Update on June , 2013

Andrew Martin amartin@dewildlands reports from DE Wild Lands that nearly all of them survived and are in the ground and doing well in the Great Cypress Swamp. Most of the Cypress were planted in a grove at the Roman Fisher Farm which serves as the base of operations in the Great Cypress swamp, and the rest of the trees were planted at various locations throughout the ~10,500 acre property.

Andrea Wulf's "[Founding Gardeners: The Revolutionary Generation, Nature, and the Shaping of the American Nation](#)", 2011.

For the Founding Fathers, gardening, agriculture, and botany were elemental passions: a conjoined interest as deeply ingrained in their characters as the battle for liberty and a belief in the greatness of their new nation.

Founding Gardeners is an exploration of that obsession, telling the story of the revolutionary generation from the unique perspective of their lives as gardeners, plant hobbyists, and farmers.



Wetlands project installed 2012



Chestnut tree sapling



Warm season grass meadow

DNPS Annual Meeting
Abbott's Mill Nature Center
June 15, 2013



Walking the Lindale Loop Trail



Jason Beale showing trails



John Harrod's "Shady Natives" talk

FROM SHADY NATIVES TO A SHADY TRAIL
By Rick Mickowski, DNPS Secretary

Saturday, June 15 turned out to be a beautiful day for the 10 DNPS members and 2 guests who made their way to the Abbott's Mill Nature Center south of Milford. President John Harrod gave an informative presentation on native plants that will grow in the shade or at least tolerate some shade. Some of the species he covered included Juneberry (also known as Serviceberry or Shadbush), native columbine, wild ginger, musclewood, American chestnut, redbud, sweet pepperbush, native dogwood, pagoda dogwood, American hazelnut, white wood aster, American strawberry bush, sweet bay magnolia, ostrich fern, native witch hazel, swamp pink, inkberry, spicebush, sensitive fern, skunk cabbage, Christmas fern, lyre leaf sage, blood root, bluestem goldenrod, maple leaf viburnum, and bellwort.

After the presentation, Jason Beale took our group on a guided hike of one of the outdoor trails across the street from the nature center. It is being developed into the Chestnut Trail. The first stop was an 11 acre meadow installed three years ago through a USDA – Natural Resource Conservation Service program. A warm season grass meadow with wildflowers was planted to serve as wildlife habitat. Nearby there was a collection of purple martin houses. We hiked through the woodland noting various fenced in American Chestnut trees that have been identified on the property. Another interesting stop was on the boardwalk wetland trail. The beavers have dammed the upper end of the Abbott's Mill pond so there is more water in areas where it used to dry up more frequently. We saw many dragonflies flitting about. The final stop was a newly created wetland project that was completed last fall. It was created from a low spot in a field adjacent to the woodlands. Over 200 trees and shrubs were planted in the open space area.

We finally made our way back to the Nature Center for a pot luck lunch out at the picnic tables where John Harrod gave a brief update on DNPS activities and the upcoming fall symposium and plant sale. A big thank you to Eric Wahl, Rick Mickowski, Rick McCorkle and Flavia Rutkosky for providing the sandwiches, deviled eggs, baked beans, pasta salad, chips, brownies and beverages for our lunch. We also thank Jason Beale for being our host for the day.

GARDENING WITH NATIVE PLANTS

SASSAFRAS (*Sassafras albidum*)

NATURAL HISTORY

My first experience with Sassafras was as a youth visiting relatives in the hills of Virginia for a family outing. One of the 'treats' prepared by my cousins was a large jug of sassafras tea made as I recall by steeping the dried root bark in boiling water. As I recall, it tasted somewhat like – sassafras, but that was a long time ago and I haven't taken the opportunity to repeat the experience! But I still manage to grasp a leaf from a sassafras tree and crush it to share its yummy fragrance with grandchildren when they come for a visit. The name 'Sassafras' applied by the Spanish botanist Monardes in the sixteenth century is said to be a corruption of the Spanish word for saxifrage with albidum, meaning white. More recently a whole slew of common names have been applied depending on geographical distribution or perhaps just the observers view or use of the sassafras! Some common name include sassafras, common sassafras, smelling stick, saloop, white sassafras, ague tree, cinnamon wood, gumbo file and mitten tree. The latter applied to the form the leaves take, all resembling mittens!

Sassafras is a small to medium-sized deciduous tree occurring from southwestern Maine west to southern Ontario and southwest to eastern Texas and east to central Florida. As a tree, sassafras can attain an average height of 40 to 60 Feet. The top three trees in the 'Big Trees of Delaware' are 59, 65 and 70 feet tall! Left to its own devices, the sassafras will spread by root suckers to form large colonies. Attractive, greenish-yellow flowers appear in clusters at the branch ends in spring. Flowers on female trees give way to small pendant clusters of bluish-black berries (drupes) which are borne in attractive scarlet cup-like receptacles on scarlet stalks. Fruits mature in the fall.

Sassafras is invaluable to wildlife! Sassafras leaves and twigs are consumed by white-tailed deer in both summer and winter. Sassafras leaf browsers include woodchucks, marsh rabbits, and black Bears, and Beavers will cut sassafras stems for winter forage. Sassafras fruits are eaten by many species of birds including bobwhite quail, eastern kingbirds, flycatchers, phoebes, wild turkeys, catbirds, flickers, woodpeckers, woodpeckers, thrushes, vireos, and mockingbirds. Some small mammals also consume the fruits and sassafras is a larval host or nectar source for Spicebush Swallowtail butterfly, Promethea silkmoth, and pale swallowtail butterfly!

For years, Sassafras was grown for the supposedly-medicinal properties of the fragrant roots and bark but it is the outstanding fall display of foliage which should bring it into the garden today. The large, multi-formed, five-inch leaves, fragrant when crushed, are bright green throughout the

summer but are transformed into magical shades of orange/pink, yellow/red, and even scarlet/purple in the cooler months of autumn, brightening the landscape wherever they are found. These colors are especially prominent when Sassafras is planted as a specimen or in a mixed shrubbery border, with a background of dark evergreens.



The flowers, which are among the earliest in spring, are very popular with honey bees and other insects. Songbirds devour the fruits as fast as they ripen. Sassafras (along with other members of the laurel family) is the host plant for the spicebush swallowtail butterfly. Sassafras foliage brightens the landscape with yellows, oranges and reds in autumn, and the winter silhouette is appealing with its horizontal branches in tiered layers.

WHERE TO GROW

Given its excellent value to wildlife, ease of care, delightful fragrance, and beautiful yellow, purple and red fall color, sassafras deserves a place in your landscape! Naturally occurring in wood margins, fence rows, fields, thickets and roadsides, sassafras is easily grown in average, medium, well-drained soil in full sun to part shade. It is excellent for naturalized plantings or screens where they are given lots of space to colonize or can be grown as a lawn specimen if root suckers are removed! Since both male and female trees are required for pollination, you will need trees of both sexes for fruit setting.

PROPAGATION AND CARE

Sassafras can be propagated from seed or root cuttings, but note that the large, deep taproot makes transplanting of established trees difficult. To propagate from seeds, collect the fruits when they are filled out and dark blue, but note they are quickly devoured by birds and other critters, so you will need to act fast! Macerate, clean and air dry the seeds briefly. The seeds may then be directly sown outdoors or cold stratified in sand over winter to break dormancy and then planted out in early spring. Sassafras freely produces root suckers which may be taken in early spring before the plan leaves out.

(Continued on next page)

Resources and Reviews

[Sibley Guide to Trees](#)

David Allan Sibley, 464 pgs.

With the same attention to detail given in his bird guides, Sibley's book offers several illustrations of flowers, leaves, bark, fruits and seed pods for each tree species

GARDENING WITH NATIVE PLANTS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

LORE

Native Americans used sassafras extensively for many purposes. Infusions were used to kill parasitic worms, to treat syphilis, colds and measles, to reduce fever, control diarrhea, and relieve constipation. A tea was made from the bark and roots and the dried leaves used as a spice to flavor foods. Early European settlers quickly adopted sassafras tea and oil of sassafras extracted from sassafras root bark was used as a food flavoring and was the basis of root beer. Filè powder, made from the ground, dried leaves of sassafras was used as a condiment and soup thickener in gumbo and other Cajun dishes. More recently, sassafras oils have been determined to contain a carcinogenic substance (safrole) and many of the former uses for the oils are now banned by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Sassafras wood has been used for cooperage, buckets, fence-posts, rails, ox yokes, cabinets, interior finish, and furniture and Native Americans used the wood for dugout canoes.

Oh, and don't forget, then next time you're out walking in the woods, grab one of the sassafras mitten shaped leaves and crush it for its delightful fragrance!

Bob Edelen, DNPS Member

Save the Dates **DNPS Native Plant Sale and** **Arts in the Estuary - 20th Anniversary** **Celebration!** **Saturday, September 28** **St. Jones Preserve** **10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.**

Join us as we celebrate the Reserve's 20th anniversary and National Estuaries Day by experiencing the estuary through the artistic viewpoint. Enjoy various artisans, performers, and authors as we join with the John Dickinson Plantation to bring you a cultural view of the estuary! Try your hand at some artwork, buy some native plants from the **Delaware Native Plant Society** during the native plant sale as you look at your landscaping artistically, and learn tips from local and regional artists. This event is open to the public and registration is not required. [Directions are here.](#)

Jennifer.Holmes@state.de.us

[St. Jones Preserve](#)

[\(302\) 739-6377](#)



Dr. Susan Yost reports that the **Big Trees of Delaware** is a **free** guide book published by the Delaware Department of Agriculture. There are some extra copies at the Claude Phillips Herbarium at Delaware State University. Also contact Delaware Forest Service Administrator, Mike Valenti.

Upcoming Events

Delaware Nature Society—Programs and Activities

Website delawarenaturesociety.org/#

Pollinator Walks

Program #: U13-105-CF May/June dates;

U13-106-CF July/ August dates

Fridays, Jul 12, 26, Noon – 2 pm, Aug 9, 23, Noon – 2 pm

Member/Non-Memb: FREE/\$5 per walk,

Leaders: Dr. Don Coats, Marty Coats, Mike Faulkner

Join our resident “pollinator monitors” on semi-weekly walks that count and record these native and non-native hard-workers along with the plants that they are foraging and fertilizing. With populations of all insect pollinators on the decline, data collected will benefit national pollinator citizen science programs. Binoculars are recommended.

Flint Woods Walk with Brian Winslow

Program #: U13-018-FW

Thursday, July 11, 6 - 8 pm

Member/Non-Member: \$10/\$15

Leader: Brian Winslow

Meeting Location: Flint Woods Preserve

Evening is a wonderful time to see wildlife, hear singing birds, and to enjoy the soft evening light among towering old trees and bubbling creeks. This is a great opportunity to experience one of the best natural areas in New Castle County.

NEW! Nature Hikes! FREE for Members!

July 20, August 17, Sept 21

First walk leaves at 8:15, second walk starts at 9:45.

Non-Members: Adult \$5, Children Ages 2+, \$3

No pre-registration required.

Join us the third Saturday of each month thru September to explore the 352-acre Coverdale Farm Preserve. Take a gentle morning walk with our staff while discovering the rolling hills, farm pond, Burrows Run Stream, warm season grass meadows, and old growth woodland

Save the Date

Delaware Coast Day

Sunday, October 6, 2013 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

College of Earth, Ocean and Environment

Lewes, DE

Includes many exhibits related to Native Plants

and their environment www.decoastday.org

Copeland Native Plant Series

Butterflies and Their Host and Nectar Plants

Saturday, July 13, 1 - 3 pm

Joe Sebastiani and Eileen Boyle, Mt. Cuba Center Director of Education and Research

Enjoy a presentation about some of the butterfly species in our area and the native host and nectar plants you can plant in your yard to entice a variety of species. Take a walk through the Mt. Cuba gardens to see and learn about some of these plant species and to find and identify butterflies. Meeting location: Mt. Cuba Center.

Medicinal Uses of Native Plants

Tuesday, August 20, 5:30 - 7:30 pm

Joe Sebastiani and Sue Bara, Professional Herbalist

Walk different habitats at Ashland Nature Center to identify native plants and discuss identification, natural history, and uses of the plant in food and medicine. Practice making some samples of various teas and poultices, and find out what you can grow in your backyard for such purposes. Meeting location: Ashland Nature Center.

Wet and Dry Meadow Wildflowers and Ecosystems

Thursday, September 5, 4 - 7 pm

Joe Sebastiani and Janet Ebert, Botanist

Explore a wet floodplain meadow and a dry upland meadow at the Bucktoe Creek Preserve to identify a variety of wildflowers in each. Learn natural history and ecology of both habitats, as well as how these areas differ floristically and get ideas to plants that you can incorporate into your backyard or natural restoration site. Both of these sites are wonderfully diverse and are prime examples to follow for replicating in other situations. Meeting location: Bucktoe Creek Preserve.

Membership Application

DELAWARE NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

WWW.DELAWARENATIVEPLANTS.ORG

Member Information

Name:

Business Name or Organization:

Address:

City and Zip Code:

Telephone (home/work):

E-mail address:

- Full-time Student \$10.00
- Individual \$15.00
- Family or Household \$18.00
- Contributing \$50.00
- Business \$100.00
- Lifetime \$500.00
- Donations are also welcome \$ _____

Membership benefits include:

- * The DNPS quarterly newsletter, The Turk's Cap
- * Native plant gardening and landscaping information
- * Speakers, field trips, native plant nursery and sales

Total Amount Enclosed: \$

**Make check payable to:
 DE Native Plant Society
 P.O. Box 369, Dover, DE 19903**

**DELAWARE NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY
 P.O. BOX 369
 DOVER, DELAWARE 19903**

