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# WILDFLOWERS

The Bulletin of the Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania • August 2001

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## The Next Meeting is September 10th

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There will be no monthly meeting in August; the next meeting will be Monday, September 10, at 8:00 p.m. Sue Seppi of the Group Against Smog and Pollution will discuss landscaping with native plants to reduce the need to mow your lawn! Look for details in the September newsletter.

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## Know Your Wildflowers: Velvet Leaf

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Soft and velvety, with no harmful attributes, is the appropriately-named Velvet Leaf. The entire above-ground plant is covered densely with clusters of very fine, soft, hairs that radiate from the surface.

This benign appearance conceals the tough, fibrous, inner bark for which the plant has been grown for centuries in northern China. The fiber is used for making bags, ropes and cordage.

During the Colonial period it was brought to North America as a possible substitute for manila and sisal. It could not compete economically so the venture was abandoned.

However, mature seeds, which remain viable for years, were in the soil so this annual plant continued to reproduce, naturalizing itself. It prefers the plowed soil of crop fields especially that of corn and soybeans. To the dismay of farmers the seeds sprout in summer after the last plowing so the plants cannot be uprooted. They grow rapidly and can reach six feet with leaves up to two feet wide. This growth uses the light, nutrients and water needed by crop plants.

The yellow  $\frac{3}{4}$ " flower is followed by a dry fruit, a cup-shaped capsule containing numerous beaked seed-pods. The beaks bend from vertical to horizontal as the fruit matures forming a crimped pattern on top of the capsule, similar to the crimped edge of a pie. This led to the common name, Pie Marker. The crimped capsule was used to imprint butter, hence the name Butter Marker.

The botanical name of Velvet Leaf is *Abutilon theophrasti*. It is from Abutilon, the name given to the plant by the renowned tenth and eleventh century Arabian physician, philosopher and scholar, Avicenna (ibn Sina). *Theophrasti* honors the distinguished Greek natural scientist, Theophrastus, who lived in the third century, B.C.

In China, poultices are made from dried leaves. Medicines are made from dried leaves, dried roots and powdered seeds. Experiments for medicinal use are being done on mice.

*Anne S. Bahl*

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## Where can one buy native plants?

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This is a simple question that has many important implications for conservation-minded gardeners. I don't think many of us would consider it ethical to dig up plants from the wild for garden use, but many of us unwittingly buy such plants.

The majority of native plants sold today are "nursery propagated," i.e., grown from seed, cuttings or divisions of nursery stock. One reason why is economics. It is easier for a nurseryman to grow a beebalm plant or a

columbine from seed or from a cutting than to collect it from the wild. Unfortunately, this is not true for slow-growing woodland species such as trilliums, orchids, bloodroots, and arbutus. Nurseries can now grow these plants, but they cost more.

A disturbing trend I've noticed lately: rather than being cheaper than nursery propagated plants, collected plants are priced at roughly the same level. They are put in pots (a practice euphemistically referred to as "nursery grown"), and the vendors—there can be many in the chain from gunnysack to shopping cart—pocket the difference.

What if the plants are legitimately rescued from land slated for development? I agree with the New England Wildflower Society: the term 'rescued plants' is too open to interpretation and abuse to be anything more than a loophole for disreputable collectors.

The key for all of us interested in the ethical garden use of natives is to ask questions. Many nurserymen simply don't know the origin of their plants because of the middlemen involved. I suggest buying only from those who do and state (in writing) that they sell only "nursery propagated" plants. I have seen how native plants in the home landscape can inspire gardeners to care about the fate of these plants in the wild. We can all help make sure we are not sending a mixed message.

*Member John Totten is the Estate Gardener at Elm Court. He has received several awards for his volunteer efforts in native plant conservation.*

*Editor's Note: Native plants are available locally from the Native Plant Center at the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania. The plants are grown from seeds taken from plants in the Allegheny Plateau and propagated at the Center at 614 Dorseyville Road, Pittsburgh, PA. John Totten was instrumental in developing the Center.*

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## Volunteers for VO<sub>2</sub>

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On Saturday, September 8, the Botanical Society will participate in Venture Outdoors 2001. We will set up a display table to sell the *Wildflowers of Pennsylvania* book.

While you are enjoying this event, please volunteer to sit at the Society's table for an hour or so. Call Loree at (412) 521-9425, or e-mail her at yoree@sgi.net, to schedule a time.

Displays and interactive presentations will take place from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Food and beverages will be available all day.

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## What is VO<sub>2</sub> – Venture Outdoors 2001?

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By increasing the number of people who participate in outdoor activities, we increase the numbers who espouse greater support of our natural environment. This is the mission of Venture Outdoors 2001.

VO<sub>2</sub> takes place Saturday, September 8, 2001, on Washington's Landing in the city of Pittsburgh from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Hands-on and feet-on activities are scheduled all day; nature walks, hikes, canoeing, sea kayaking, fishing and biking.

Interactive nature presentations take place every hour. Among the presentations are Birds of Prey with Chuck Tague, Paddling with Scott Shalaway, and Tracking with David Rohm. At 6 p.m., member Esther Allen will present "Wildflowers of Pennsylvania."

Directions: From Pittsburgh, take I-279 South to the East Street Exit. Follow signs to Route 28 North. Once on Route 28 North, pass the Heinz plant on right, continue to the next light, which is 31st Street Bridge. Turn right, then another immediate right at light, and then an immediate left onto Washington's Landing.

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## How can you get your copy of Wildflowers of Pennsylvania?

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*Wildflowers of Pennsylvania* can be purchased for \$20.00 (plus \$1.40 sales tax for PA residents). Forward your check, made payable to Botanical Society of Western PA, to Dr. Haywood at the address below.

Call or e-mail Dr. Haywood if you would like her to send book order forms to pass along to your friends or organizations.

*Dr. Mary Joy Haywood, RSM, Ph.D.*  
3333 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15213-3165  
(412) 578-6175; [mjhaywood@carlow.edu](mailto:mjhaywood@carlow.edu)

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## Field Trip Schedule

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Registration is not required. Everyone is welcome, including non-members. For questions, call the trip leader or Loree at (412) 521-9425.

**Saturday, August 11, 2001**  
**Butler-Freeport Trail, Butler County**  
**Time: 1:00 p.m.**  
**Leaders: Esther Allen (412) 366-0786**

**Directions:** From Pittsburgh, take Route 8 North, then take Route 228 east. Turn left onto Route 356. Or, from Pittsburgh, take Route 28 north to Exit 17 and continue north (right) on Route 356. After roughly 3 miles, you meet Route 228 on the left.

Where Routes 228 and 356 meet, travel a short distance and turn right onto Sarver Road (SR2018). Go down the hill and along the creek for 0.8 mile. Just after crossing the creek and passing a volunteer fire department, turn left into a parking area, where we will meet.

**Saturday, August 25, 2001**  
**Boyce/Mayview Regional Park, Upper St. Clair, Allegheny County**  
**Time: 1 p.m.**

**Leader: Chuck Tague (412) 488-8760;**  
**[bluejay@city-net.com](mailto:bluejay@city-net.com)**

With naturalist Chuck Tague, we will explore the Chartiers Creek floodplain.

**Directions:** From Pittsburgh, take I-79 south to the Exit 54 - Bridgeville/Route 50. Turn right at end of exit ramp, then turn right at the stoplight onto Washington Pike (Route 519 south). Continue 2 miles and turn left onto Boyce Road. Continue across a bridge over Chartiers Creek. Just past the bridge turn left into Ardolino's Pizza.

Or from Pittsburgh, take Route 19 south. About 3 miles beyond South Hills Village, turn right onto Boyce Road. Travel 1.1 miles to a paved turnoff into Ardolino's Pizza.

Park at the gate to the park along the driveway to the pizza shop.

**Saturday, September 1, 2001**  
**Cranesville Swamp, Preston County, West Virginia**  
**Time: 1 p.m.**  
**Leader: Mark Bowers (724) 872-5232;**  
**[4beagles@stargate.net](mailto:4beagles@stargate.net)**

A 1500-foot boardwalk allows easy exploration of this peatland bog. Cranesville Swamp, straddling both Maryland and West Virginia, is about 11 miles from the Pennsylvania line.

**Directions:** From Pittsburgh, follow I-79 south to Morgantown, WV and Route 68. Follow Route 68 east to Exit 14 to pick up Route 219 south.

Or, from Uniontown, take Route 40 east to Route 219.

Follow Route 219 south 19.5 miles to Mayhew Inn Road (3.5 miles past the Deep Creek Lake Bridge) on the right. At this intersection, there is a restaurant called Red Run Lodge on the right. We will meet in the parking lot.

**Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania – August 2001**

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**WILDFLOWERS - Bulletin of the Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania**

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WILDFLOWERS is published monthly by the Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania. We welcome short articles of botanical interest, drawings, letters to the editor, and notices of botanical events and group activities. Send to the editor at the above address. Deadline for submissions is the 20th of the previous month.

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**The Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania - Membership Information**

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The object of the Society shall be to bring together those who are interested in Botany and to encourage the study of this science and a knowledge of plants. Our members include both amateurs and professionals. Annual dues are \$10.00 for individual and \$15.00 for family. Students can join at half-rate. To join, mail your name, your address, and check payable to "Botanical Soc. of W PA" to Loree Speedy, 5837 Nicholson Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15217. Your membership includes a subscription to the monthly bulletin WILDFLOWERS.

The Society meets the second Monday of each month, September through June, at 8 p.m. sharp, at Trinity Hall or Kresge Theater, Carlow College, 3333 Fifth Avenue, Oakland. All are welcome. An informative program follows the business meeting.