
WILDFLOWERS

The Bulletin of the Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania • October / November 2003

The Next Meeting is October 13

The next meeting will be Monday, October 13, **7:15 p.m.**, at **Kresge Theater**, Carlow College, 3333 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA (Oakland). Kresge Theater is on the top floor of the Grace Library and is accessed from the upper campus.

Place a note on your dashboard saying "Botanical Society Meeting," or use your parking permit.

To commemorate the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, **Bonnie Isaac** will present "**The Plants of Lewis & Clark.**" She will discuss the plants discovered and the plants utilized by the Expedition members on their journey. Bonnie will also discuss the actual specimens collected by Lewis and Clark.

Meriwether Lewis began the 8,000-mile, 28-month expedition from Pittsburgh on August 31, 1803. One of the most remarkable legacies of the expedition is the large collection of plant specimens that they gathered along their journey and brought back to Philadelphia.

Bonnie is Collections Manager at the Section of Botany - Carnegie Museum of Natural History and an active contributor to the botany of western Pennsylvania. She received a masters degree from Youngstown State University and an International Diploma in Herbarium Techniques from the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew, England.

And Our Next Meeting is November 10

Our speaker in November will be **Terri Davin**, President of the Greene County Watershed Alliance. She will discuss how longwall mining is affecting Greene and Washington counties, especially the Enlow Fork Natural Area. She will show a video on longwall mining as part of the presentation.

Terri Davin is a biologist, mother of two young children, and an inspirational dynamo. She and her family live outside of Rutan, a tiny village in West Greene.

Mark your calendars for the annual Holiday Party, which will be held December 8, 2003, at the Atrium of the A. J. Palombo Hall. Look for details will be in the December newsletter.

Enjoy Your Wildflowers: Winter Cress

I linger by my shingly bars;
I loiter round my cresses.

from The Brook by Alfred Lord Tennyson

Cresses are among the plants mentioned by the brook as it describes its flow to the river. Most of the Cresses live in or near some form of water, even if only in moist soil. Most have pungent leaves and are related.

Winter Cress likes moist soil in fields, gardens, and along roadsides. Winter refers to the plant's staying green during the winter but quickly

growing tight clusters of glossy, bright-green leaves when not snow covered and when higher temperatures prevail for a few days. The leaves were welcomed when fresh greens were scarce. They supplied ascorbic acid needed to prevent scurvy. Cress is from the Latin, *cresco*, to grow up.

The young leaves and stems of Winter Cress resemble Dandelion in taste and were eaten fresh. They increase in bitterness as they age. Older leaves were used as a potherb after having been parboiled several times. The tight clusters of flower buds were eaten like Broccoli after similar preparation. Present medical opinion is that the plant may cause kidney problems.

Winter Cress, a short-lived, angular-stemmed, Eurasian perennial that reaches four feet, is now a familiar plant throughout Pennsylvania. Its bright yellow flowers bloom from April into August. The seedpods (siliques), up to 1 ½" inches long with a short beak, are erect to spreading. Seeds can live many years in the soil.

Its genus name is *Barbarea*, honoring St. Barbara. There are two anecdotes about this. First, the seeds of Winter Cress were sown, traditionally, on December fourth, St. Barbara's feast day. Second, the young leaves were available to eat on her feast day. Both could be correct depending upon the location. Its species name, *vulgaris*, is Latin for common.

Winter Cress is in the Mustard family, *Cruciferae*, classical name or *Brassicaceae*, updated name. *Cruciferae* is from Latin, *cruc*, cross and *ferre*, bearer, for the cross-shaped arrangement of the four petals. *Brassicaceae* is from *Brassica*, the classical Latin name of Cabbage, a relative. Familiar relatives in condiment, food, forage, and horticultural plants are Oilseed, Cauliflower, Kale, Candytuft.

Anne S. Bahl

Moss as an Alternative to Turf

For those homeowners with wooded, shady property who have tried in vain to grow a lush lawn, there is an alternative. Mosses thrive in shaded, moist areas and, once established, are very low maintenance. In the right environment, these low-growing plants form soft, green carpets that can withstand scorching summer, their leaves may shrivel in the sun, but will recover with the first rain. Mosses require a high soil humus content and a low pH.

Moss gardening is more of an art than a science, with a variety of propagation methods. The first step is to find a patch of moss already growing on your property. Mosses collected from wild areas are very sensitive and will probably die, even with extensive care. The best mosses to use for starting will be found in shady corners of urban areas. These specimens will be tolerant of urban conditions that may exist in your lawn. Moss also may be found growing on roof shingles or stones in shaded areas. Lift pieces of moss using a penknife.

If only a small amount of moss is collected, you may want to increase your starter crop indoors. Let the moss dry in a cool, dry place; moss can live for weeks in this dried state. Place 2 inches of good potting soil in a seed flat, and cover it with a layer of cheesecloth. Crumble the dried moss over the cheesecloth, and place another layer to ensure contact. Water the flat well, and place it in a shady, protected area. The flat must be kept moist until the moss grows through the cheesecloth (about six weeks later). At this point, the cheesecloth with the moss can be lifted out of the flat. Slices can be cut from the cheesecloth for planting.

Soil should be loosened in the area where the moss is to be planted. Water the area until it is soaking wet. Press a patch of moss into the muddy soil so it makes good contact. After planting, use a very dilute fish emulsion (one-fourth the dilution recommendation on the label) to fertilize the moss. Because mosses require an

acid soil (pH between 5 and 6), some suggest pouring a cup of buttermilk or milk into each gallon of water used to fertilize. (Buttermilk and milk have pH levels between 4.1 and 4.9 and provide an immediate acid environment that helps establish the moss). Soil pH can be lowered by applying aluminum sulfate, sulfur dust, or ferrous sulfate to the site before planting. However, if soil is not naturally acid, it may be difficult to lower the pH enough for the moss to thrive. The moss planting should be kept moist until established. Once established, it will need no further care – no mowing, feeding, or watering.

If you are fortunate enough to find a good-sized patch of starter moss, you may do better to start the moss directly in the ground. Moss showing a profusion of orange spores should be dried and crumbled over the ground surface after a rain. If your moss does not appear to be producing spores, some moss growers suggest mixing the moss with buttermilk in a blender and pouring the resulting slurry over shaded rocks and soil. Be sure to keep the newly planted moss (whether started from dried or blended moss) moist for a few weeks.

*Ellen S. Bennett, Information Technician
reprinted from the Virginia Gardener, Virginia
Cooperative Extension*

Field Trip Schedule

Registration is not required. Everyone is welcome, including non-members. For questions, call the trip leader or Loree at (724) 872-5232.

Saturday, October 11, 2003
Jennings Prairie, Butler County
Leader: Dr. Mary Joy Haywood /
(412) 578-6175
Time: 1:00 p.m.

Count on a Columbo Field Day!

Deceased member Virginia Phelps was carefully researching and recording her observations of a population of the American Columbo or Monument Plant (*Frasera caroliniensis*) at Jennings Prairie for almost 16 years. Dr. Haywood would like members and friends of the Botanical Society to join her for a special work day to record these observations of this interesting plant and continue this study of the life cycle of *Frasera*.

This is not a regular field trip, but should prove to be a fun day for anyone interested in native plants. Dress appropriately for the weather; long pants are recommended. If you have them available, bring a measuring stick (yard or meter), a clipboard, and a pencil.

Directions: From Pittsburgh, take I-79 North to Exit 99/Route 422/Butler/New Castle. Drive east on Route 422 roughly 5.8 miles to the Prospect Exit, and turn left (north) onto Rte. 528. Continue on Rte. 528 for about 7 miles. Turn left at a brown sign marking the entrance to Jennings Environmental Education Center – Prairie Area & Trails. We will meet in this parking lot on the left (west) side of the road.

Saturday, October 25, 2003
Nichol Road at Raccoon Creek State Park,
Beaver County
Time: 1:00 p.m.
Leader: Chuck Tague (412) 488-8780

Directions: From Pittsburgh take the Parkway West (I-279 south/US 22-30). Exit the Parkway to continue on US 22/30 West. Exit US 22 at Florence, Route 18. Drive north to the town of Frankfort Springs. At the north end of town bear left onto PA Route 168. Drive 3.6 miles to Nichol Road. The trail and parking lot is on the right side of Rt. 168 just past a small church, just beyond a green, wooden cactus.

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WILDFLOWERS is published monthly by the Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania. We welcome short articles of botanical interest, drawings, and notices of botanical events and group activities. Send to the editor at the above address. Deadline for submissions is the 23th of the previous month.

The Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania - Membership Information

The Botanical Society was founded in 1886. 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. 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, 279 Orr Road, West Newton, PA 15089. Your membership includes a subscription to the monthly bulletin WILDFLOWERS.

The Society meets the second Monday of each month, September through June, at 7:15 p.m. sharp, at Kresge Theater, Carlow College, 3333 Fifth Avenue, Oakland. All are welcome to the informative program and business meeting.

Wildflowers of Pennsylvania – Ordering Information – 400 pages of text and 612 color photographs

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. If you order by mail, add \$2 postage and handling for one book, \$3.00 for two, \$4.00 for three, \$4.50 for four. Send your request to Dr. Mary Joy Haywood, RSM, Ph.D., 3333 Fifth Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15213-3165 (412) 578-6175; mjhaywood@carlow.edu