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# WILDFLOWERS

The Bulletin of the Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania • June 2007

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## Next Meeting is June 11

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The next meeting will be Monday, **June 11**, 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.

Member **Phyllis T. Monk** will present a slide program on the **Wildflowers of Russia and Norway**. During a recent tour of this area, Phyllis and husband Bill Monk observed plants that were familiar or related to the plants seen at home, but also many plants that they had never seen before. They traveled to many habitats ranging from coastal areas, wetlands, mountains, taiga and areas bordering the tundra above the arctic circle. Her program will show these plants as well as some of the magnificent scenery of Russia and Norway.

Phyllis is Vice President of the Botanical Society and has been a member since 1969. She is coauthor of *Wildflowers of Pennsylvania*. Her hobby of wildflower photography has resulted in a working knowledge of plants and their habitats.

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## Difficulties in Using Keys

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*Enjoy this excerpt from "How To Identify Plants" by H. D. Harrington (Sage Books, 1957).*

Like the human beings that create them, botanical keys are not perfect. Listed below are some of the difficulties you can expect to

encounter in using keys. Do not be too ready to find fault with the author of your treatment, at least until you are certain you yourself have not made a blunder. An excellent way to gain sympathy for the creator of your keys is to try your own hand at making one.

The key may use characters not present on your specimen. For example the generic key to the family *Ranunculaceae* (Buttercup Family) is usually based on the type of fruit, but floral characters are necessary to key the plant to the family. If your plant does not have both flowers and fruit you have a problem.

1. The key is set up for the average plant. Your specimen may be abnormal in some way. The remedy is to select one or more average plants and avoid the unusual or freakish specimens.
2. In some keys the author may ring in more than two choices. This is especially disconcerting if the third choice happens to fall on a different page. However, few if any of the recently printed manuals have this fault.
3. The exact meaning of some terms may vary with the different manuals used. Certain terms like caespitose, canescent, elliptic, membranous, decumbent and pubescent are loosely used by some botanists. If you use one manual only, this problem should not arise.
4. The meanings of some terms vary somewhat when used for different groups. "Plants tall" may mean a few centimeters when used with *Stellaria* (Chickweed) or it may mean several meters tall when used with *Betula* (Birch tree). Similarly the size of a "large flowered"

buttercup would give you a “small flowered” rose. The remedy of course would be for your manual to use concrete measurements with the understanding that unusual specimens may fall above or below the figure given.

5. The characters given in the first category of the pair may not be all contrasted in the second. This seems to be a very common fault in key making where secondary characters are stated in one place and ignored in the other. For example, you may read “Flowers white; plants annual” as contrasted to “Flowers yellow”. Very often the duration habit of the yellow flowered plants can be puzzled out by reading further in the key.
6. Keys are in fine print and it is easy to overlook a line entirely and miss an important step. The remedy is to take your time in using a key.
7. The key may be actually ambiguous or faulty in places due to an out-and-out mistake of the author. This is unfortunate because as a student you have to trust your key. If you are on your own all you can do is to check your plant again, perhaps try other parts of the key, then if you always come back to the same place you might suspect an error in the treatment. For example, if you always arrive at two choices “Flowers red” as opposed to “Flowers white” with a yellow-flowered plant, it may be that the writer of the key inadvertently left off the “or yellow” and the last choice should have read “Flowers white or yellow.” Sometimes the “exception” is not properly provided for especially in a manual treating a large number of plants. For example, in a blue-flowered genus one species may have white flowers. This may be overlooked and the generic key may put the genus under “Flowers blue” only. The particular “knack” in using keys in a large part is in being able to sense when the key is faulty or misleading.
8. The plant you are trying to identify may not be included in the key. You may have a weedy species that has come in since the

book was written and may even have become locally abundant. Or your plant may be a rare one whose exact limits were not understood at the time the manual was written. When you come to suspect that this is the case the remedy is to try to key out the plant in manuals treating the plants of adjacent areas or send a specimen to some expert botanist for checking.

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## Virtues and Pleasures of Herbs through History at the Hunt Institute

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The Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation will present "Virtues and Pleasures of Herbs through History: Physic, Flavor, Fragrance and Dye" through June 29, 2007. The exhibition will be on display on the fifth floor of the Hunt Library building at Carnegie Mellon University. Hours: Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-noon and 1-5 p.m.; Sunday, 1-4 p.m. The exhibition is open to the public free of charge. For further information, contact the Hunt Institute at 412-268-2434 or visit the website at [www.huntbot.andrew.cmu.edu](http://www.huntbot.andrew.cmu.edu).

From the countless cultivated and wild herbs, the Hunt Institute has chosen a selection within four categories of physic, flavor, fragrance and dye. For physic—comfrey, ginger, mint, sage, and thyme—they discuss herbs considered a panacea for health in ancient medicinal texts and herbs that continue to be used for their therapeutic properties. For flavor—basil, coriander, fennel, garlic, and oregano—they discuss herbs now used to enhance our culinary pursuits that were once used symbolically. For fragrance—lavender, monarda, rosemary, scented geraniums, and southernwood—they discuss herbs that were used for the first perfumes and for protectors from the plague. For dye—bloodroot, madder, saffron, tansy, and woad—they discuss herbs that were part of the powerful Italian dye and woolen guild systems. All twenty herbs are illustrated by original watercolors and prints, rare books, or manuscript pages from the Hunt Institute's Art, Library, and Archives collections.

*More from the Hunt Institute press release...*

Ancient medicinal traditions of China, India, Egypt, and Greece held that herbs contained virtuous properties that could alleviate any health imbalance. Herbs were used not only for medicinal purposes but also to flavor and preserve food, to scent and protect household environments, and to dye or stain the skin and textiles. Records of superstitions and more provable usage in manuscript form were copied or translated into various languages and transmitted to many cultures.

With the invention of moveable type in the mid-15th century, information became more readily available. Even though the copying of earlier texts persisted, the 15th and 16th centuries brought new ideas about the use of herbs. They were cultivated in monastery and physic gardens for use and study, and later apothecaries became dispensaries of simples (or combinations of herbs) to treat particular ailments.

Through voyages of exploration and the establishment of trade routes, exotic herbs and spices became available throughout many parts of the world, and luxuries were no longer restricted to royalty or the wealthiest classes. Kitchen gardens provided households with the herbs necessary for everyday needs. Pleasure gardens were established for their beauty—emphasizing color, scent and texture—and elaborately designed knot gardens and labyrinths became popular public attractions. Herbs were used for perfumes and nosegays and as symbols in poetry and prose.

Interest in the use of herbs has waxed and waned in modern times, but in recent decades there is recognition of the importance of the role these plants play in all aspects of our lives.

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## Field Trip Schedule

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Registration is **not** required. Everyone is welcome, including non-members. Wear shoes that can get wet. Water and sun protection are

recommended for mid-summer trips. For questions, call the field trip leader or Loree at (724) 872-5232.

**Saturday, June 9, 2007**

**Titus Bog, Erie County**

**Time: 1:00 p.m.**

**Leader: Sam Stull (814) 476-1795**

**jst3415@aol.com**

This trip requires wading through the bog's moat for a short period, perhaps in water up to 2 foot deep, using shrubs and roots for balance. Old tennis shoes or waders are recommended. Plan on getting wet and climbing over tree trunks. Bring a change of clothes.

**Directions:** From Pittsburgh, take I-79 north to Exit 166 (Rt. 6N Albion Edinboro). Head east on PA 6N for 9.8 miles to its intersection with PA 19 & PA 6. Continue straight on PA6 to Union City. After taking the turn out of Union City (continuing on PA 6), drive 5.7 miles to the intersection of PA 89 and PA 6, where we will meet at a drive-in theater on the left.

**Saturday, June 23, 2007**

**Chalkhill Bog, Fayette County**

**Time: 1 p.m.**

**Leader: Loree Speedy (724) 872-5232**

**mousemapper@verizon.net**

**Directions:** From Uniontown, take Route 40 east up Chestnut Ridge. In the village of Chalk Hill (about 2 miles from the Summit Hotel), turn left onto Chalkhill-Ohiopyle Road. (You will see signs for Ohiopyle and Kentuck Knob on the right, just before this turn-off.) Shortly after this turn-off, you will reach a Y in the road; bear left.

After crossing an arm of (drained) Deer Lake, take the first left turn onto Greenbrier Road. Travel about a mile; you will enter State Game Land 51. Continue straight to a game land parking lot about 2/10 of a mile from this entrance on the right.

Prepare for wet feet and sunny conditions. We must walk about 1 mile to the bog.

## Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania – June 2007

279 Orr Road  
West Newton, PA 15089

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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 23rd of the previous month. WILDFLOWERS is printed on recycled paper.

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

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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.

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

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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. 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