



Newsletter

November 2025



Since Last Time ...

Well, it is time for the end of the year message if you can believe that! Since we are doing the newsletter every other month, the next one will come out in January. I am most excited about the Retention Rate for membership this year, which has surpassed the National average. While we welcome new members, it is equally important to retain existing members. We are grateful for your participation in your Chapter.

The chapter 3-year Strategic Plan was developed for 2024-2026. Each year the Board reviews the goals and objectives and plans for the next year. The Events Committee is well on its way to planning events for 2026. We will be meeting mid-November and will share upcoming event details soon. I can tell you the January event is the Randy Smith Seed Swap, which is a joint program with Sustain Abingdon, Washington County Master Gardeners and Wild Ones. More to come on the guest speaker for the event. Wild Ones will have a tabling event there as well.

Our fall plant swap was a lot of fun and for a change, the weather was nice. We had good attendance from existing members and new members. One thing I would like to share in advance of the spring plant swap is the chapter expectation that members will bring only Native Plants to the swap. After all it is a native plant membership. While many of us have non-natives in our gardens, we appreciate it if you don't bring them to our plant swap. During the swap we all learned new information about native plants that other members brought to share making it an educational as well as sharing experience. We look forward to the spring plant swap and hope everyone will participate whether you have plants to share or not.

There was a lot of information shared at the annual meeting. Some details are included in this newsletter, particularly the survey findings (page 6). Please take time to review that. It will be the guideline for our Strategic Plan next year.

And about the annual meeting, unfortunately I could not attend. However, a BIG thank you to Melanie, Vice President for planning and conducting the meeting. And, thanks to Dick Olson for preparing the power point, and Mendy Bechtold for preparing the survey results for distribution. And a round of applause to the Events Committee members for helping with food and setting up. Thank you to the Board, most of whom will be serving again next year.

Looking forward to an exciting 2026. Stay well and happy winter gardening.

Paula Reynolds, President

Calendar at a Glance
(Details on Pages 9-10)

November 9: Native Seed Collection with TNC
(details on page 2)

December 6: Adding Year-Round Interest and Color with Snow Ferreniea

January 24: Annual Randy Smith Seed Swap

February 12: Virginia's Grasslands: Past, Present and Future

WOAH Merch

Winter is here! Get your Christmas mugs, sweatshirts, long or short-sleeve tees available in many colors! It is the only fundraiser for our chapter.

Visit [Get wild. | Bonfire](#), or scan the QR code below with your smart phone's camera.



Native Seed Collection, November 9

Dick and Gail Olson will be hosting the following seed collecting event for The Nature Conservancy. November 9, 2025. [Please register with link below to attend.](#)



Join The Nature Conservancy and Ben Casteel of Virginia Highlands Community College for a native plant seed collection and seed exchange event. This event will highlight the importance of native plants, particularly in residential applications, as well as demonstrate collection methods, and seed starting techniques that native seeds require. Afterwards participants will have an opportunity to collect native seeds, including goldenrod, wingstem, false sunflower, aster, milkweed, and many others. To add to the plant diversity, participants are welcome to bring native seeds to share with others.

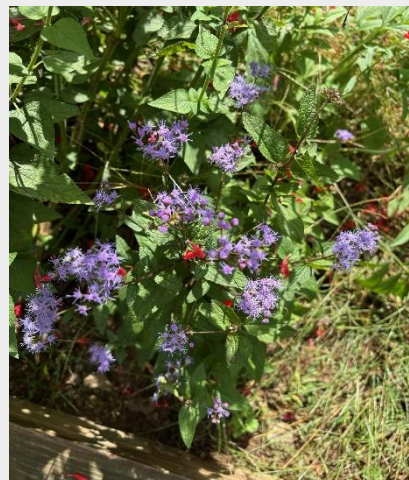
Due to limited parking at the site, we will be riding in a bus together from Virginia Highlands Community College at 1:30 and return by around 4:30.

[Pre-register to join the event by clicking this link](#)

Member's 2025 Garden Photos Celebration

We asked members to submit favorite photos of this year's native gardens and wow did we ever get some fantastic photos! Not only impressive native gardens and their visitors but also some excellent photographers. Gail Olson provided the Little bluestem photo above.

Paula Reynolds provided a couple of views behind their greenhouse that includes red sage (*Salvia coccines*) and Blue mistflower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*).



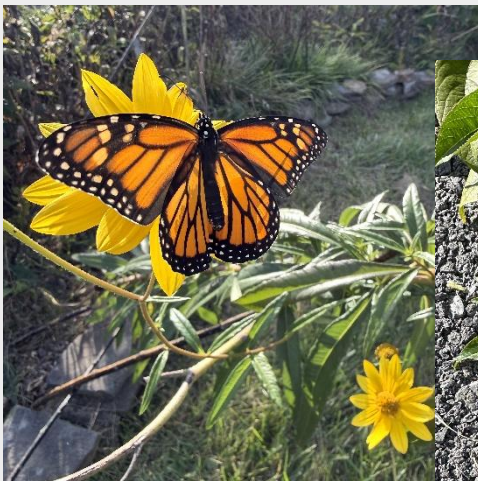
Member's Garden Photo Celebration



Josh Banks sent us a nice variety recently starring Aromatic asters (*Symphotrichum oblongifolium*) with Mountain mint; his pond area also showing Bee balm seedheads; and American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*).



Teresa Young provided photos from the Native Butterfly Garden at Steele Creek Park in Bristol. A site-born Monarch on Narrowleaf sunflower (*Helianthus angustifolius*); Passion flower (*Passiflora incarnata*); Gulf fritillary caterpillar on its host Passionflower.

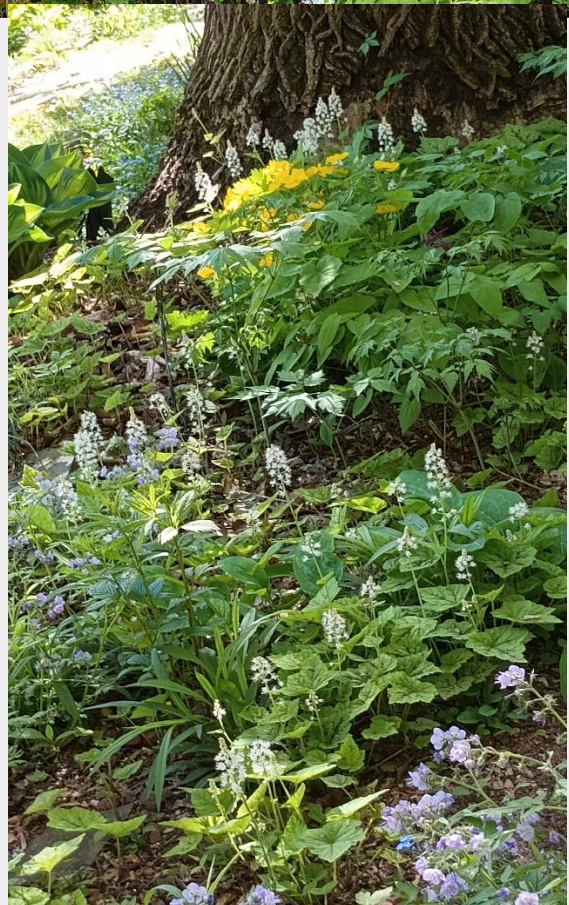
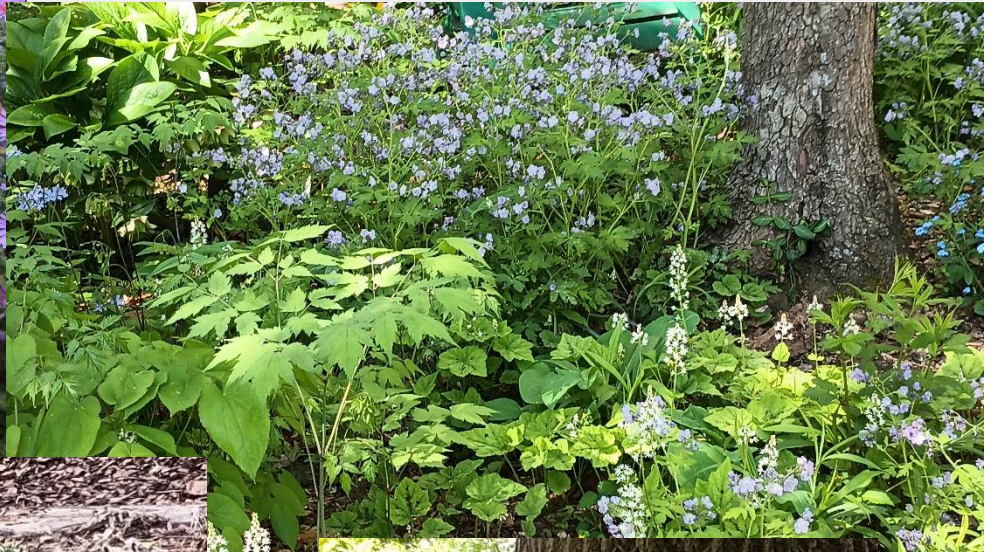


Member's Garden Photo Celebration

Snow Ferreniea sent a number of photos from her amazing woodlands garden. Showy goldenrod (*Solidago speciosa*) against Smooth aster (*Aster laevis*);



Forest Phacelia (*Phacelia bipinnatifida*) among native friends like Foamflower (*Tiarfella cordifolia*) and Black cohosh (*Actaea racemosa*); Green-and-gold (*Chrysogonum virginianum*) with Smooth phlox (*Phlox glaberrima*) .



Member's Garden Photo Celebration

The Tuckers submitted photos from their native plantings showing that some well-chewed plants serve as hosts to life other than deer such as Monarch caterpillars. Also, a Tiger swallowtail on Purple coneflower (Echinacea purpurea), with

Rattlesnake master (Eryngium Yuccifolium) and Blue vervein (Verbena hastata) and lastly the blooming 8-foot tall Whorled sunflower (Helianthus verticillatus).



Jane Mullins shared a photo of her Bottlebrush buckeye (*Aesculus parviflora*) in full bloom.

Annual Meeting, November 2025

Board election: The Wild Ones Appalachian Highlands Annual Meeting was held on November 6 at the Summit and the following officers were elected to the board.

President: Paula Reynolds

Vice President: Melanie Smith

Secretary: Jani Niner

Treasurer: Anne Tucker

Membership Chair: Terry Gaffner

Webmaster: Mendy Bechtold

Events Committee Co-chairs: Gail Olson and Beth Merz

Member-at-large: Dick Olson

Events and Goals: We celebrated 2025 with increasing membership, a full schedule of 18 events, and collaborations with Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists. One of our joint projects was establishing a native garden at the Coomes Recreation Center in Abingdon. The success of the garden was demonstrated by 20 Monarch caterpillars seen in August. Special thanks to Anne Tucker for her creative work on our new display board which has enhanced our visibility at public events and on business cards for personal contacts. We have added mugs to our collection of fund-raising merchandise.

Dick Olson also described how we are meeting goals established in our three-year strategic plan. Our challenge continues to be scheduling events such that all members throughout our area have opportunities to attend. We conducted a member survey to help with planning, including preferred times and locations to increase event accessibility. Events are planned through May next year with educational presentations, a plant swap, and tabling events to educate the public about our mission. Members are encouraged to provide suggestions regarding topics, activities, or resources for the planning process. Thanks to Mendy Bechtold who updated and maintained the web site.

Survey: The recent membership survey was summarized by Mendy Bechtold. A total of 20 of 74 non-board members responded to the membership survey with the following findings. Many members consider themselves average gardeners who are not interested in mentorship but 40% would like to have someone to call to ask questions. Five individuals indicated they would be willing to help with planning monthly events and, as we are always looking for fresh ideas and new connections to expand our knowledge and outreach, we encourage everyone to reach out to Paula or other Board members.

The primary challenges for members attendance of events are locations being too far away, availability, and schedule conflicts. Almost all members would like to go on tours of other member's or public native gardens or listen in-person to talks about how to design a native garden. Plant swaps/ social events were also important. Fewer than half would prefer using Zoom or online seminars to learn about native gardening. Members shared that WOAHP information is easily accessible through the newsletter, website and emails. About 45% indicated they were interested and 30% not interested in the various WOAHP merchandise items that help provide funds for promotional materials and speakers.

Book Reviews

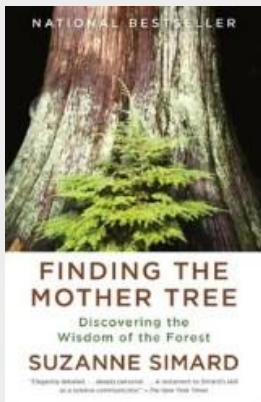
Melanie Smith - *Raising Hare*, by Chloe Dalton, is one of those books that sticks with you long after you put it down. For one thing, you're going to learn a lot about hares. The author suddenly finds herself the custodian of a newborn leveret, a baby hare, and must learn how to help it survive while preparing it to return to the wild. The descriptive language, astute observations involving all the senses, and the impacts on her emotions and daily life really make the reader slow down and take notice. Which is what nature needs us to do, right?



There have been several animal relationship books that are truly remarkable. *Marley and Me* by Jim Grogan, *H is for Hawk* by Helen McDonald and *How to Be a Good Creature* by Sy Montgomery come to mind (and I recommend them all!). But what makes *Raising Hare* “WOAH worthy?” It is Dalton’s immediate realization that interactions with the natural world are inevitable, but can be minimized with careful consideration of the relevance of habitat availability and natural community.

Dalton tries her utmost, and I think succeeds, in minimizing her impact on the hare and lets the hare take the lead in their relationship. As a result, the hare remains wild and brings to Dalton important life lessons, such as awe for nature, hope for the future, and the wisdom of conforming to natural rhythms and states of being. From traffic concerns to noisy farm machinery to lighting at night to gardening practices, it all has an impact. What is amazing is how adaptable this hare really is, to the point that the animal incorporates Dalton’s house and garden (and Dalton herself) as part of its daily wild routine

As WOAHA members, we are all concerned with our impact on the natural world. Why else would we want to create native habitat with native plantings? *Raising Hare* gives you a carefully considered look at the benefits of bringing the natural world closer to us, so that we can learn and benefit, too!



Mark Merz - *Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest* By Suzanne Simard

Beth, my wife, added this to our bookshelf quite a while back, and out of curiosity I picked it up. It wasn't exactly what I thought it would be, but I'm glad I spent time with this book. I thought the author would be writing about general principles around how dominant trees in any forest setting influence their surroundings. That would be important knowledge for people like us, people who live in and choose to care for our native habitat, the vast Eastern Deciduous Forest. Simard's book is more specific than that, though, in that it is a retrospective of her career

researching how life forms interact and connect in British Columbia's mountain forests in ways that surprised traditional forestry. She also weaves memoir into the story of what she learned about the ways that western montane forests are better characterized and shaped by *cooperation* among species than by competition between them. It's a finding that truly is revolutionizing modern forestry.

Forestry in the Pacific Northwest may sound like a pretty dry topic, but did you ever see James Cameron's film *Avatar*? If you did, you probably finished as intrigued as I about some of the ideas embodied in *The Tree of Souls* (see the image at the top right), which depicted life forms in highly connected, mutually supportive relationships. It represents a holistic vision of how ecosystems function in complex webs of relationships. You might have wondered whether *The Tree of Souls* has any credibility as a realistic portrayal of how things work in nature. Its basis in science turns out to be Suzanne Simard's work as a researcher in B.C. She was even a consultant for the film.



Her initial research was a project to determine why massive plantings of tree seedlings were failing in British Columbia's heavily herbicided clearcut forests. This work stimulated her lifetime's work of establishing how soil fungi work like a nervous system in the forest, mediating the transfer of nutrients and water within and even *between* species. She showed that species like alder, which traditional forestry treated as an unwanted competitor of species like Douglas-fir, actually *contributed* to the success of the Douglas-fir. The expensive, intensive efforts to simplify the forest by eliminating species were wasted and resulted in forests with compromised sustainability.

You will encounter some technical language; *mycorrhiza* is a word you will learn, and you may even learn why *arbuscular* and *endo-* and *ectomycorrhizal* are meaningful for understanding the fungal role in facilitating healthy, sustainable life in a forest. You will get some detailed descriptions of her experiments and findings, too. But don't be intimidated; Simard grows the reader's understanding little by little, allowing it to grow while recounting the ways her own understanding grew.

Finding the Mother Tree becomes compellingly readable as the author wraps her own memoir into her career retrospective. Her love for the forest is grounded in her family heritage. She persists in her research despite pushback from institutional forestry. She navigates marriage and its eventual breakup, child raising, and breast cancer while pursuing work that is deeply meaningful. Through all this, she arrives at a highly integrated understanding of the natural world and her place in it.

I'll share a sample from near the end of the book:

The wind whipped through the needles of the Mother Tree, but she stood steadfast. She had seen nature in countless forms: hot summer days when mosquitoes swarmed; rain that came in sheets for weeks; snow so heavy some of her branches snapped; periods of drought followed by long damp spells. The sky turned scarlet, her limbs on fire, blood rising to a battle cry. She would be here for hundreds more years, guiding the recovery, giving it her all, long after I was gone.

What does this have to do with the Eastern Deciduous Forest again? Well, the same processes occur in our own backyards. Reading *Mother Tree* is a perfect way to build understanding before approaching some of the findings for eastern forests. Here's an online book from the Hubbard Brook Ecosystem Study in Vermont: <https://hubbardbrook.org/online-book/>. There's a chapter entitled "Roots and Mycorrhizae" that is particularly germane, but be sure to look at other chapters and the rest of the website. Seek out other resources, too. That's what I'm planning to do!

Community Events of Interest

The November SAPS (Southern Appalachian Plant Society) November meeting will feature Ian Caton, Owner of Woodthrush Native Nursery

Date: November 20, 7:00 P.M.

Location: BrightRidge Auditorium, 2600 Boones Creek Rd (Hwy 354, Johnson City, TN)

Topic: Native Species Diversity; the Practical Implications of Genetic Variation for Nurseries, Landscapes and Gardens. We often hear that local ecotypes are best. We often hear that straight species are best. But what do these terms mean for design, especially when the nursery trade is not set up to account for these differences? Our opinions of a plant are often colored by our experience with what genetic type is available in the trade, but the truth is that many of our plants are so much more than that. This lecture will explore the practical implications of genetic variations, ecotypes, and cultivars, and the real impact this can have on our expectations for how a plant will look, how it will behave in the landscape, and in some cases how it has the potential to cause harm to the broader landscape.

Woodthrushnatives@gmail.com

Sunday with Friends: Leigh Ann Henion

November 9, 3:00 PM

Location: 205 Oak Street, Abingdon VA

Meet Leigh Ann Henion, author of **“Night Magic: Adventures Among Glowworms, Moon Gardens, and Other Marvels of the Dark”**. Henion lives in Boone. In “Night Magic” Henion explores the nocturnal world surrounding her, making the reader ponder what rare and precious joys we are missing in nature, even while we sleep- and how we can foster and protect this delicate balance that survives, sometimes precariously, under the cover of darkness.

Melanie Smith reviewed this book in our June, 2025 WOAHS newsletter.

Sponsored by the Friends of the Washington County Public Library, free and open to the public.

There will be refreshments, book sales and signings following the program.



Upcoming 2025-2026 Event Details

November 9: Native Seed Collection

Details see page 2

December 6: Adding Year-Round Interest and Color to your Garden Snow Ferrenia

We tend to think that gardening happens in spring and summer. Our view of fall is all about the striking colors of trees, mostly maples. However, fall offers an abundance of garden interest in the form of flowers and foliage colors, along with displays from berries and seed heads that overflow into the winter season. With the addition of attractive bark and silhouettes from woody plants, we will explore these attributes that are overlooked during the other seasons.

Snow Ferrenia is English, learning initially about plants and gardening from her parents, both of whom were avid gardeners. She received her formal education in horticulture in England. Coming to America in the 70's, she continued to pursue her passion for plants, especially native ones, as a professional horticulturist. Snow was director of horticulture at Garden in the Woods. She has also worked at the New York Botanical Garden, Holden Arboretum and Wayside Gardens.

The Wild Ones Appalachian Highlands Chapter and the Washington County Master Gardeners are cosponsoring this talk.

Time: Saturday, December 6th, 11:00 am- 12:00 pm

Location: The Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center

January 24: Randy Smith Seed Swap

Many local gardeners, organizations, and farms will have seed to share. Feel free to bring your own seeds to swap with others, although this is not a requirement. This event is co-sponsored by Sustain Abingdon, Washington County Master Gardeners, and Wild Ones Appalachian Highlands.

Time: 1:00 pm

Location: Abingdon Higher Education Center, One Partnership Circle,
Abingdon, VA

Event Details continued

February 12: Title: Virginia's Grasslands: Past, Present, and Future

Grassland loss is one of the greatest conservation issues currently facing the Southeastern United States. Of the nearly 6,000 plant species native to the Southeast, 60% of these require or prefer grasslands. Despite this, grasslands across this region are being lost at an alarming rate. The Southeastern Grasslands Institute (SGI) is an organization dedicated to studying, conserving, and restoring grasslands in the Southeastern United States. Alaina Krakowiak serves as SGI's Central Appalachian Grasslands Coordinator. In this presentation, she will discuss the history of grasslands in Virginia: what might these have looked like, and where would they have been found? She will also discuss the current state of Virginia's grasslands: what do we have left, and what is threatening them? Lastly, she will talk about what SGI is doing to restore grasslands, including some actions you can take at your own home.

Time: 7:00 PM via Zoom (details to be released at a later date)