



Newsletter

January 2026



Since Last Time ...

It seems appropriate to wish everyone a happy, prosperous and healthy new year. Here's to spreading the knowledge about native plants, as well as improving our own personal landscape.

We have so many great events planned for 2026, as well as many events that we are doing in collaboration with other like-minded organizations. Please check out the newsletter for event details. We will also continue to email details of upcoming events to members.

The Board met for a dinner gathering in December and we have a Board meeting planned for January 8th. In the event you have not kept up with current events in the chapter, the following Board members will be serving in 2026:

President – Paula Reynolds; Vice President – Melanie Smith; Secretary – Jani Niner; Treasurer – Anne Tucker; Event Committee co-chairs – Gail Olson and Beth Merz; Membership Chair – Terry Gaffner; Website Chair – Mendy Bechtold; Member-at-large – Dick Olson. Cecilia Boyd has volunteered to be the Zoom Coordinator and joined the Events Committee to help us spread the word in Johnson City and surrounding areas. The Board will vote to add her to the Board allowing access to the WO Zoom account. Not on the Board, but a big thank you to Stan Tucker our newsletter editor for 2025 who will continue in 2026.

So, it is time for us to proceed with winter sowing and getting ready for spring. If you are not sure about this, please see details in the newsletter about the Winter Sowing workshop Gail Olson is doing at Hungry Mother Park January 17, 2026.

Wild Ones Appalachian Highlands chapter worked with Planting SWVA Natives, Nicole Hersch and Casie Martinez, Librarian at Washington County Public Libraries and several Master Gardeners for a seed packing event in December. Anyone can obtain native seeds free of charge from the Washington County Public Libraries. All the seeds we packaged are staying in our area!

And lastly, we have changed our email address to : appalachianhighlands@wildoneschapters.org. The email address is offered by Wild Ones national office to facilitate access by various Board members. We will retain Gmail address until further notice.

Wishing you the best in 2026,
Paula Reynolds, President

Calendar at a Glance

(Details on Pages 6-9)

- January 15: SAPS zoom, The Humane Gardener**
- January 17: Winter Seed Sowing Workshop**
- January 24: Annual Randy Smith Seed Swap & "The Plot Thickens!"**
- January 29: Methods for Ecological Restoration**
- February 12: Virginia's Grasslands: Past, Present and Future**
- February 19: SAPS zoom, Beyond Monarchs & HnBees**
- Jan.-April: VTech Invasive Species Spring Series**

WOAH Merch

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

Visit [Get wild. | Bonfire](https://www.getwild.org/bonfire), or scan the QR code below with your smart phone's camera.



Winter Garden Interest

We asked members if they had a few thoughts and photos to share about their favorite spots in their gardens during the winter months. While we all appreciate the blooms, greenery and wildlife our wildflowers, shrubs and trees provide during the other seasons, winter can be just as interesting albeit sometimes more challenging to get out to enjoy. There is still plenty of hidden life in the structures and habitat that you leave during the winter. Steele Creek Park and the Damascus Trail Center mentioned here are free public spaces available for you to enjoy.

Gail Olson:

Habitat can be very visible in winter. Non-migratory birds are using the meadows for both food and shelter. Our pond is a great place to look for tracks. Everyone still needs water. But it is also beautiful to notice how the snow collects around the plants and the trees to become more architectural.

I enjoy going out in the winter landscape where all I hear is the sound of my boots crunching in snow, my camera clicking and the birds chattering in the meadow.



Winter Garden Interest

Robin Feierabend:

"And don't think the garden loses its ecstasy in winter. It's quiet, but the roots are down there riotous." [Rumi, 13th century Sufi mystic]

Just before Christmas I took a short walk through the native plants garden at **The Nature Center at Steele Creek Park**. Though, from a distance, it all looked rather bleak and uninviting, it didn't take long for me to appreciate the beauty and wonder contained in that small space.

Evidence of the recent growing season was all around. Telltale goldenrod galls provided evidence of previously thriving insect life, now gone dormant. While the bright red berries and green foliage of holly bushes (*Ilex*) served as emblems of the season, the decaying fruit of coralberry (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*) and beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) bushes reflected the reality of surviving the harshly cold early December weather.

Seedheads of purple coneflowers (*Echinacea purpurea*), mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum*), milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*), and tall goldenrod (*Solidago altissima*) served as lovely reminders nature is preparing for a new generation of life next spring.



Even more inspiring to me were the many hardy perennials still revealing green foliage, though not with the splendor that they will display in the coming months. Cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), golden ragwort (*Packera aurea*), broad-leaved toothwort (*Cardamine diphylla*), violets (*Viola*), foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*), little brown jug (*Asarum arifolium*), and Allegheny spurge (*Pachysandra procumbens*) all caught my eye. And not to be outdone by these other

signs of life, one hardy little aromatic aster (*Symphyotrichum oblongifolium*) was still in bloom.

This short stroll on a chilly December afternoon served to remind me that, even as we experience the apparent bleakness of winter, life goes on and we can anticipate the beauty and bounty of the coming year.



In the words of the hymnist Natalie Sleeth*,
*"In the cold and snow of winter
 There's a spring that waits to be.
 Unrevealed until its season,
 Something God alone can see."*

* Natalie Sleeth, © 1986 Hope Publishing Co.



Winter Garden Interest

Josh Banks:

I've learned that gardening for winter interest is gardening on "hard mode." It's relatively easy to have a beautiful garden in July, but January presents a tougher challenge. However, consider that winter is a solid quarter of the year, and that's a lot of time our gardens are in their cold weather mode.

I try to incorporate five types of winter interest into my garden: stems, seed heads, evergreens, berries, and structure. For stems, I usually think of Red-twig Dogwood, *Cornus sericea*. Additionally, some willows can have beautifully colored winter stems. For seed heads, I try to incorporate several shapes like balls, spikes, and umbels. Monardas/Bee Balms, Carolina Lupine (*Thermopsis villosa*), grasses like switchgrass or bluestems, and vernonias all often have interesting seed heads in my opinion. Evergreens are the classic winter interest. Of course, conifers are the go-to plants, but also consider plants like *Yucca filamentosa*, evergreen hollies, and evergreen magnolias, rhododendrons, mountain laurels, carex species, or even a hardy cactus (*Opuntia* sp). Berries are another wonder winter interest. Consider Hawthorns, viburnums, and deciduous hollies, like *Ilex verticillata*. The final (and potentially most important in my opinion!) way to add winter interest is through structure. Consider a beautifully windy path, a tree with interesting branching, benches, pergolas, stone work, etc. The structures are the "bones" of the garden; if you get that right, you can practically get away with murder when comes to everything else!

- Stems
- Seed Heads
- Evergreens
- Berries
- Water/Paths/Structure



Winter Garden Interest



In mid-December Stan Tucker stopped at the **Damascus Trail Center**, that was designed by Gail Olson, to find berries of *Viburnum nudum* in the fresh fallen snow and an abundance of interesting seedheads such as the goldenrod and friends shown here. Fresh snow on big bluestem at his home makes graceful arches that can serve

as overwintering places for a variety of creatures.

Revel in the beauty of winter shapes, subtle colors and changes that wind and snow make to your natives.

Then take a closeup photo or take an interesting seedhead home and look under magnification to see the amazing engineering details that went into forming the minute structure of the flowers and seedheads.

Winter is a Good Time to Catch Up on Reading !

This edition does not have new book reviews but below is the link to past WOAHP book reviews and to books on the National Wild Ones list. [Books - Wild Ones Appalachian Highlands Chapter](#).

Many of last year's newsletters contained additional book reviews and are available on the website at the [Newsletter Archive - Wild Ones Appalachian Highlands Chapter](#). Some of these are available on-line through Libby or Hoopla as described in the 2025 May newsletter. Recently reviewed books available on-line include: *Night Magic: Raising Hare* and *Finding the Mother Tree*, via Washington County, VA Libby or *Firefly Experience* on Hoopla.

Our Web pages also include resources for Native Plants. Take a look at the many resources under the tools and resources tabs in the [WOAH web site](#). As you plan for spring, don't forget there is a list of native plants for our area under the Tools Tab.

[Native Species List for Our Region - Wild Ones Appalachian Highlands Chapter Native](#)

Upcoming 2026 Event Details

January 15: SAPS (Southern Appalachian Plant Society) ZOOM presentation

The Humane Gardener: Nurturing a Backyard Habitat for Wildlife and Wildscape

Nancy Lawson, a nature writer, habitat consultant, and founder of the Humane Gardner, LLC.

Learn about creative wildlife-friendly landscaping methods and the scientific discoveries Nancy made in her own garden.

By Zoom: The link to register will be sent by email to members or will be on the SAPS web site www.saps.us

January 17: Winter Seed Sowing Workshop with Gail Olson

Time: 11:00 AM

Location: Hungry Mother State Park, Ferrell Hall

Directions:

From the park Headquarters on Route 16, turn Right on E Hungry Mother Dr. and then Left on Hemlock Haven Ln.

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

WINTER SEED SOWING WORKSHOP

January 17



INSTRUCTOR

GAIL OLSON

Member of local Wild Ones Appalachian Highlands Chapter

All materials, including native seeds, will be provided.

INSIGHTS ON:

- How and why this method works.
- How to create these containers out of everyday materials.
- What to do with the emerging plants in the spring.

Join Gail to learn about winter sowing. Winter sowing is a method of starting seeds in winter. It involves sowing seeds in an enclosed container to be kept outside during winter, allowing them to germinate in spring.

Meet at Ferrell Hall at 11 a.m.

Native seeds are being sown to increase beneficial wildlife habitat.

VIRGINIA STATE PARKS 800-933-PARK (7275) | www.virginiastateparks.gov

Event Details continued

January 17: 36th Annual Winter Garden Seminar – *From Native Seeds to Native Plants*

Rosanna Chisson

Expert Naturalist and Native Plant expert Rosanna Chisson will teach us how to start native wildflowers from seed, and how to keep them thriving in our yards and gardens.

Time: 10:00 – Noon

Location: Warriors Path State Park

For more information and to register, click the link to Warriors Path SP below:

[Tennessee State Parks – Tennessee State Parks](#)

January 24: Randy Smith Seed Swap

Many local gardeners, organizations, and farms will have seeds 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.

Presentation: *The Plot Thickens! Solving the Mystery of How to Use Your Yard to Help the Environment!*

Join volunteers from Washington County Master Gardeners, Wild Ones of Appalachian Highlands, and Holston Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists to hear a success story about a small garden plot in the town of Abingdon that is already having a big impact on the environment. You'll hear about partners, processes, and plans for what's next. You'll also learn how you can make big differences in small ways to develop critical native habitats with your own plots at home.

Time: 1:00 pm

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

Event Details continued

January 29: Piedmont Discovery Center: Methods for Ecological Restoration at Home **Joanna Currey and David Bellangue**

Join Joanna Currey (Senior Field Technician) and David Bellangue (Conservation Nursery Manager) as they share Piedmont Discovery Center's approach to ecological restoration, along with resources and step-by-step instructions for adapting that approach to your own back yard. Take your native plant garden to the next level and start practicing ecological restoration for more resilient, biodiverse, and bountiful landscapes! To learn about the variety of services, educational programs, and resources offered by the Center, follow the link: [Piedmont Discovery Center](#).

Time: 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm (Eastern Time)

Join Zoom Meeting: <https://wildones-org.zoom.us/j/83789030716?pwd=FyhWcQ3GYRcMWiiRNpmDzKW3CtPbCW.1>

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

Alaina Krakowiak -- Central Appalachian Grasslands Coordinator for the Southeastern Grasslands Institute

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. To learn about Southeastern Grasslands Institute, follow the link: [Southeastern Grasslands Institute](#)

Time: 7:00 PM **via Zoom** [Virginia's Grasslands: Past, Present, and Future - Wild Ones Appalachian Highlands Chapter](#)

Event Details continued

February 15: SAPS (Southern Appalachian Plant Society) ZOOM presentation

On Beyond Monarchs and Honeybees – the Case for Diversity!

Randi Eckel is a life-long naturalist, lover of nature, entomologist, and plant and ecology nerd.

Monarch butterflies and honeybees have been getting a lot of press recently – and a lot of folks have stepped up to help them, which is good. But with more than 10,000 species of native butterflies, moths, bees and many other creatures that depend upon native plants, it is critical that we look beyond just two species.

By Zoom: The link to register will be sent by email to members or will be on the SAPS web site www.saps.us

Virginia Tech Invasive Species Spring Webinar Series

Virginia Tech is hosting a webinar series on invasive management. **It's FREE but you do need to register using link below.** You can sign up for each of the four listed or individually.

Invasive Species Spring Webinar Series

The Invasive Species Collaborative (ISC) at Virginia Tech is excited to host a spring webinar series that highlights our partners and affiliates. The webinars will be held monthly from **11:00 AM to 12:30 PM**.

January 27 - Invasive Species Management & State Agencies Speakers: Virginia Department of Forestry and Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources

February 24 - Mobilizing Volunteers & Communities Speakers: Virginia Master Naturalists, Town of Blacksburg, and Loudoun Invasive Removal Alliance

March 24 - Restoring Invaded Landscapes Speakers: Wetland Studies and Solutions, Inc. and Plant SWVA Natives

April 28 - Invasion Pathways & Agricultural Biosecurity Speakers: Schmale Lab at Virginia Tech and Lieurance Lab at Penn State

<https://virginiatech.zoom.us/j/G1Xuv0EqTfWl6v0f4SNWig...>