

Cataloging 3,500 Species

The most recent comprehensive guide to plant life here was published in 1762. Now, thanks to many dedicated Piedmont people, the *Flora of Virginia* Project is publishing an update.

By BLAND CROWDER



Claytonia virginica (Spring-beauty) is used in the logo of the Flora of Virginia Project. Its name honors John Clayton, a Colonial Virginia botanist and clerk of Gloucester County. Clayton's plant collections and descriptions formed the basis of much of *Flora Virginica*, the latest edition of which was published in 1762. Courtesy of Lara Call Gaster, *Flora of Virginia*



Whether barreling along the interstate or poking about on a shaded back road, you always notice how luxuriant the plant life is in the Virginia Piedmont. It should come as no surprise, then, to learn that many of the team behind the Flora of Virginia Project have at least one foot planted firmly in the region. They are doing what many would only dream of doing: dovetailing a deep love of plants with the creation of the *Flora of Virginia*, the first statewide manual of our plants in 250 years.

The *Flora*, to be published in 2012 by BRIT Press, won't be a field guide or a coffee-table book. This one's brass tacks, in 1,400 pages describing more than 3,500 species of plants native to or naturalized in Virginia. The book will include keys and illustrations to help in identifying plants, each species entry presenting information on habitat, blooming time, status, and whether it's a native or not. And this flora will be in English.

Latin was the language of learning in 1762, when the second edition of *Flora Virginica*—our most recent edition!—was published in Holland, based in large part on plants collected and described by Colonial Virginia botanist John Clayton. Since then, not only has the state been explored much more fully, but plant classification has become a highly sophisticated science: what's what today is a far cry from what was what just 25 years ago.

Meanwhile, Virginia botanists and plant aficionados have made do with floras written for other places: West Virginia, the Carolinas, the Northeast. But these don't do us justice: Virginia has more species than many other regions its size, situated as it is at the northern range of many southern plant species and at the southern range of many northern ones, and boasting a phenomenal spectrum of habitats between Tidewater and the Blue Ridge.

"Creating the *Flora* is a labor of love for all of us," said Chris Ludwig, a co-author of the *Flora* and executive director of the Flora Project. "And no board of directors could be more dedicated than ours." Ludwig is chief biologist with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation's Division of Natural Heritage. The other co-authors are Alan Weakley, curator of the University of North Carolina Herbarium, and Johnny Townsend, botanist with the Virginia Natural Heritage Program. The team includes other botanists, as well as illustrators, writers, educators, and fund-raisers. "Everyone on the Project has some kind of deep connection to the plant world, and it comes across every single day that we work on this book."

"I don't think the importance of the *Flora* can be overestimated," says board member Nancy Ross Hugo. "It's not just important for research—it's important as a physical symbol that Virginia cares about its plants."

Meet her and some of the others behind the *Flora of Virginia*. Their enthusiasm for the Commonwealth's plant life is sure to be catching—if you haven't already been bitten!



JOSLIN GALLATIN

Acting treasurer of the Flora Project board, Arlington resident Gallatin has both professional and family ties to the Piedmont. A master gardener and a landscape designer, she's a past president of the Foundation of the State Arboretum at the University of Virginia's Blandy Experimental Farm, in Boyce—just up the road from her family's farm “in the shadow of the Blue Ridge.”

What's the best plant spot in the Piedmont?

Definitely Blandy! I spent many years there getting to know its habitats, designing landscape projects, from small, teaching gardens to developing the master plan, and helping it grow financially. But another favorite is the G. Richard Thompson Wildlife Management Area [in Fauquier County, operated by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries] with its millions of trilliums, lakes full of fish and surrounded by wildflowers, and the serenity of the Shenandoah River. For a city girl to have this opportunity so nearby is sometimes sanity itself.

What's your favorite plant?

It's too difficult to choose. But as I step out my back door today and smell the *Clethra alnifolia* [sweet pepperbush] in full bloom and attracting butterflies, that may be my favorite this week! New (to me) plants are particularly exciting and become instant favorites when I'm introduced to them.

What are the most interesting experiences you've had on the Flora Project?

Working with people with such diverse backgrounds involved in the Project, and taking the most amazing field trips with the Flora authors and staff.

What will you do with your copy of the Flora?

I will cherish it as the finest book on the plant life of Virginia and disseminate it widely to friends and associates. And I'll carry a copy in my car for periodic reference.

tanical artist. The growing season provides so many inspirational specimens, from the ephemerals in the spring to the goldenrods in the fall.

How has your life intersected with the plant world?

I always wanted to unite botany and art. I tried this in the design realm first, with landscape architecture but missed being in the field. Thus, I went to grad school for plant ecology to complete my master's degree. At this point, I heard about the Flora Project and knew that it would be a perfect combination

What's your favorite plant?

I would have to say the milkweeds. I love the big colorful heads of flowers that, individually, are so architecturally exquisite. In the fall, the seed pods open and reveal the most beautiful seeds.

What will you do with your copy of the Flora?

Carry it around with me proudly. And get an extra copy for my children to color in and mark the plants that they find.

What are the most interesting experiences you've had on the Flora Project?

One thing I did early on was go into the field to collect plants with the botanists. It was very memorable to me to see an abundant population of *Echinacea laevigata* [the endangered smooth purple coneflower]. And I have been able to draw some amazing plants that I would never otherwise have come across.



MARION BLOIS LOBSTEIN

A professor of biology at Northern Virginia Community College since 1974, Lobstein will retire at the end of the year. Chair of the Flora Project's audit and finance committee, she has taught botany at Blandy Experimental Farm, is a past vice president of the

Virginia Academy of Science and a founding member of the Virginia Native Plant Society.

How has your life intersected with the plant world?

As a child, I loved playing outdoors in the small town of Stanley, North Carolina, where I grew up. One of my favorite plants was “elephant ears,” or the bigleaf magnolia [*Magnolia macrophylla*]. Only recently I learned that André Michaux, the botanical explorer of the 18th century, discovered this plant near Stanley! My Girl Scout camping trips and nature badges certainly encouraged me to know more about plants and nature.

Later in college, graduate school, and my teaching, plants came to play a larger and more important role. The work I did developing checklists of our flora of Northern Virginia and as a co-author of the book *Finding Wildflowers in the Washington–Baltimore Area* deepened my knowledge of Virginia's plants. And the honor of helping support development of the Flora of Virginia is a highlight of my life.

What will you do with your copy of the Flora?

Use it in teaching courses on identifying the plants of Virginia! One of my first questions when I moved to Northern Virginia from



LARA CALL GASTERINGER

Chief illustrator of the *Flora*, Gasteringer has a B.A. in biology from the University of Virginia and an M.S. in plant ecology from Virginia Tech. Drawings for the *Flora* are pen-and-ink, but her preferred medium is watercolor. She has exhibited widely and received the gold medal for botanical art at

the Royal Horticultural Society's February London Flower Show in 2007. She lives in Charlottesville.

What's the best plant spot in the Piedmont?

For me, with kids, it's the shady woodlands along the Rivanna River in early spring. Living in the Piedmont is wonderful for a bo-

Chapel Hill in 1974 was Where can I get a flora for Virginia? Finally in 2012 we will have one! My husband and I hope to move to Warrenton, where life is a little less hectic than in Arlington, and we plan to travel more, with the Flora always handy for reference, or for a good read. Yes, I read floras as if they were novels!



CHIP MORGAN

Vice president of the Flora Project's board, Morgan is a retired Petersburg ophthalmologist who moved with wife Dahne to Wintergreen in 1996 and to Charlottesville in 2008. A master naturalist, Morgan serves

on the science and education advisory board of the Wintergreen Nature Foundation and as a volunteer leads field trips in geology and botany. He is the *Flora's* go-to guy for ferns.

What are the most interesting experiences you've had on the Flora Project?

Mo Stevens [Charlottesville native and stockbroker-turned-botanist, on the advisory board of the Flora Project] introduced me to nearly all the ferns in the state. We collected and then passed them on to Roy Fuller to illustrate for the *Flora*. More recently, Tom Dierauf [a retired research forester with the Virginia Department of Forestry, also on the advisory board] has helped me collect plants for Lara Gastinger.

How has your life intersected with the plant world?

Botany is something Dahne and I can share. We were looking for a second home where we did not have to be confined to an air-conditioned existence. Wintergreen worked. Dahne dragged me out on a few hikes, and I finally learned to look around and appreciate the botanical world around me. Doug Coleman [executive director of the Wintergreen Nature Foundation] got me started with woody plants. Marion Lobstein took it from there. I hesitated to leave Wintergreen and move to Charlottesville but have found much to do here—and no shortage of botanical stimulation.

What's your favorite plant?

Clearly ferns must be at the top of my list—thanks to Mo Stevens. Our travels expanded from Virginia to neighboring states and then to New England and Ohio. We went to Maine to take a course taught by Robbin Moran [a fern specialist with the New York Botanical Garden], one of the best in the field.

What will you do with your copy of the Flora?

It will be used! Hopefully it will replace, to a large degree, the large number of floras that I use today. I also anticipate proudly sharing it with others and claiming some small part in its genesis.



MICHAEL LIPFORD

A member of the Flora Project's board, Michael Lipford has been executive director of The Nature Conservancy in Virginia since 1991 and is vice president in the Conservancy's eastern region. From 1986 to 1991 he was director of the Virginia Natural Heritage Program. He received the Erchul Environmental Leadership Award from Virginia Military

Institute's Environment Virginia Symposium in 2010.

What are your favorite natural spots in the Piedmont?

One of my favorite places is the old-growth forest at James Madison's Montpelier. It is one of the, if not the oldest forests left in the Piedmont and inspired Madison to write Thomas Jefferson about forest succession and forest management. The Conservancy worked with the National Trust for Historic Preservation to purchase an easement on the forest. I also like Wildcat Mountain in Fauquier County, which was the first Nature Conservancy Preserve in Virginia. One more—Fortune's Cove in Nelson County, where chestnut restoration is under way. I am partial to forests.

Latin was the language of learning in 1762, when the second edition of *Flora Virginica* — the most recent edition! — was published in Holland. The newest edition will be ready next year.

What is most interesting about working on the Flora Project?

Most of my contributions to the *Flora* are in a supportive role and a fundraising role. It is interesting to mention to donors that the first flora in America was done by John Clayton, and it was really a Virginia flora. As a student and ecologist, I had to use the floras from surrounding states, primarily West Virginia and North Carolina, to key plants. Soon we'll have a flora of our own again, that is state-of-the-art.

How has your life intersected with the plant world?

My grandfather was a farmer who lived close to the land. When I was a boy, he would teach me the names of trees and their utility, as well as herbs and their uses. It is one of the reasons I became an ecologist. I guess that has stuck with me through my whole life.

What are you going to do with your Flora of Virginia once you get it?

Marvel at its creation for a while and then put it to use.

Working at least some of the time in Charlottesville must feel like a reward, to be in such a fine place where so many respect the land.

I consider myself fortunate indeed to be able to make a living protecting and restoring the landscapes and watersheds of my home state.



NICKY STAUNTON

A botanist, illustrator and photographer, Staunton is a vice president and a past president of the Virginia Native Plant Society. She was a partner in the botanical survey (1993–96) of the Woodbridge, Va., U.S. Army base, now

known as Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge. On the Flora Project board, she co-chairs the development committee. She lives in Culpeper County.

What's the best plant spot in the Piedmont?

My 10 acres of old woodland at Rocks Edge. As my goal for this land is to preserve it with a light touch, I make no plant introductions to the natural area. Plants from friends are only near the house in the disturbed areas.

How has your life intersected with the plant world?

When I was an energetic and solitary country child of 5 in Maryland, plants were my playmates and trees, my friends. When told to go outside and play, I found my way to a large red oak in the front yard and visited with the tree, which in return furnished me with a wood ant community, busy at work, to observe. In high school biology, I discovered botany by stippling drawings of specimens to meet the teacher's exacting standards. Many years later, wildflower identification courses with Marion Lobstein taught me to key a plant to its family and species.

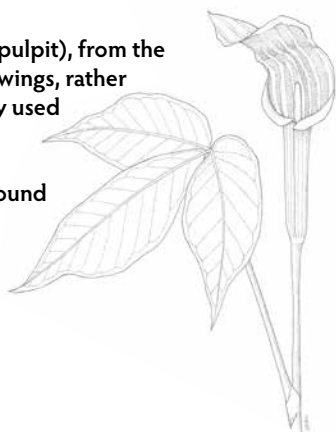
What's your favorite plant?

Virginia bluebell, *Mertensia virginica*. When I see a floodplain forest floor covered in spring with acres of nodding pastel blue bells, growing above solid white woodland floor of spring-beauty, *Claytonia virginica*, by a river that reflects the blue sky and clouds, all I can think of is heaven come to earth, praising the Creator, and pleading for protection of their place on earth.

What will you do with your copy of the Flora?

Use it—daily! I will have at my fingertips, in one volume, current information on all the plants in Virginia. And when I want to introduce a plant to my landscape and have it survive, I prefer to match it to the right place. I'll have the Flora's description to tell me where the plant grows naturally—region, soil, moisture, light, neighboring plants.

Arisaema triphyllum (Jack-in-the-pulpit), from the *Flora of Virginia*. Pen-and-ink drawings, rather than photographs, are commonly used in floras because they can show traits important to identification without the confusion of background and other structural details of the plant. Courtesy of Lara Call Gastering, *Flora of Virginia*



NANCY ROSS HUGO

With fellow board member Donna Ware, former curator of the William and Mary Herbarium, Hugo is writing the Flora chapter on the history of botanical exploration in Virginia. Following her popular Remarkable Trees of Virginia, co-written with Jeffrey Kirwan and featuring the photography of Robert Llewellyn (University of Virginia Press, 2008), she recently completed Seeing Trees: Up Close, scheduled for publication next August by Timber Press. She is director of Flower Camp in Buckingham County, which melds creativity and nature in a range of offerings.

What's the best plant spot in the Piedmont?

The Flower Camp hillside in Buckingham, overlooking Nelson County across the river. I can't tell you how wonderful it is to get to offer workshops in everything you want to learn yourself—nature journaling, floral design, botanical art. Flower Camp has definitely tied us to the region, but it was my travels for the Remarkable Tree Project that made me really appreciate Piedmont Virginia. I remember riding around Nelson County (looking for the white oak at the Oak Ridge estate) and thinking, This gorgeous countryside.

What are the most interesting experiences you've had on the Flora Project?

Reading Fernald's reports of his Virginia explorations in the 1930s and 1940s. [Merritt Lyndon Fernald, of Harvard, wrote the eighth edition of Gray's Manual of Botany (1950).] Fernald was such a character. You can feel the chigger bites and smell the mud in his reports. And interacting with Chris, Donna, Johnny and the other incredibly knowledgeable people on the board has been a privilege. I'm also thrilled to have shared historical time with Lara—I think her work will last and may someday be considered as artistically valuable as Catesby's. [Mark Catesby was an English naturalist who studied and painted in Virginia and Carolina in the 1700s and probably encouraged John Clayton's work as a botanist.]

What will you do with your copy of the Flora?

I'll use it all the time! I needed it the other day when I was trying to figure out the difference between a black oak and a northern red oak leaf. I had sort of an epiphany the other day when I realized I needed to replace my Manual of Woody Landscape Plants [by Michael A. Dirr] because it had fallen apart from use. What a great life it would be if I lived long enough to wear out the new Flora!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Bland Crowder is associate director of the Flora of Virginia Project. For more information about the Flora Project, visit www.floraofvirginia.org.

PHOTO BY LARK GARGES SMITH