



Self-Guided Walk at Merrimac Farm

September 2020



Take our “flagged walk” to discover some of the plants that grow here and bloom in the early fall. The numbers on the pink flags begin at the Stone House and continue to the North Parking Area. You can start at either end of the walk, but please note that the walk was laid out from the Stone House so plants that were already identified are not (usually) identified later in the walk. Be sure to visit the wildlife garden behind the Stone House.

1. **Northern White Cedar or Arborvitae** (*Thuja occidentalis*) Virginia Native. This tree, also known as eastern white cedar or eastern arborvitae, is an evergreen in the cypress family that grows in Virginia’s mountains. Its name is Latin for "tree of life," so named because of the supposed medicinal properties of the sap, bark, and twigs. Specimens from Ontario, Canada are reputed to have lived for more than 1,650 years.

These trees were planted as landscaping for the house.
2. **Common Hackberry Tree** (*Celtis occidentalis*) Native. Its fleshy, purple-brown berries ripen in late summer and persist through winter. They are edible, but contain little flesh around the seed. The tree grows in sun or part shade and has a characteristic “warty” bark. It is the caterpillar host for 47 butterflies and moths including the Hackberry & Tawny Emperors, Mourning Cloak, Eastern Comma, and American Snout.
3. **Elephant’s Foot** (*Elephantopus carolinia* or *E. tomentosus*) Native. The small flowers attract butterflies and other pollinators. The name comes from the basal (ground-level) leaves that are said to resemble an elephant’s foot. The flowers are attractive to butterflies and pollinators.
4. **Blue Mistflower** (*Conoclinium coelestinum*) Native. The ageratum-like blossoms of this hardy perennial are carried atop purplish stems and attract impressive numbers of bees and butterflies. This species is native to eastern and central North America, from Ontario south as far as Florida and Texas.
5. **Tick Trefoil** (*Desmodium sp*) Native. There are many species of Trefoils with these purple-pink flowers. They are perennial native legumes, members of the pea family. They are a valuable wildlife food source and are also known as "stick-tights" and "beggar ticks" because their seeds cling to animals and clothing.
6. **Coralberry** (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*) Native status not confirmed. Also known as buckbrush or Indian currant, it is a member of the honeysuckle family. The heart of its range is west of the Appalachians, but it is now common in our area. Many birds, including chickadees, robins, and cardinals, eat the small, spongy, purplish-red berry-like fruits that persist through winter.

7. **Thistle** (*Cirsium sp*) Native and Nonnative and **Spotted Knapweed** (*Centaurea maculosa*) Nonnative. A characteristic that can differ between native and non-native Thistles is the thick, white pubescence (layer of fine hairs) found on the leaf underside of many native thistles which contrasts the hairless or gray haired leaf undersides of the widespread non-native thistles. **Thistles** are enjoyed by bees, butterflies, and birds. Nonnative thistles can spread widely and displace native species. **Spotted Knapweed** is an invasive species native to Eurasia with roots that exude allelopathic chemicals (compounds that inhibit the growth of other vegetation). It is an aggressive species that can quickly infest large areas.

8. **Late-flowering Thoroughwort** (*Eupatorium serotinum*) Native. This white flower attracts butterflies and other insects to its nectar and birds to its seeds. It is considered deer resistant.

In addition, the short pink flower is Wild Basil (*Clinopodium vulgare*) Native. Its leaves can be used as an aromatic herb in the preparation of food dishes and to make a herbal tea. They can also be used in the preparation of both a brown and a yellow dye.

8a. **Pawpaw** (*Asimina triloba*) Native. This understory tree with long leaves forms patches with its roots. It produces our largest native fruit, the pawpaw, that some people describe as a combination between a mango and a banana with a custard-like consistency. George Washington enjoyed chilled pawpaws as a late summer dessert. These trees did not produce fruits, but other specimens along Cedar Run may have some. Pawpaws are the larval host plant for the beautiful Zebra Swallowtail butterfly.

9. **Goldenrod** (*Solidago sp.*) and Thoroughwort (see #8). Native. Our area has many species of Goldenrods for a variety of habitats: sun, shade, wet, and dry. They are an important source of nectar for butterflies, especially migrating Monarchs. Goldenrods are insect pollinated and are NOT the cause of fall allergies. Goldenrod pollen is heavy and is not carried by the wind. One of the main sources of fall allergies is native Common Ragweed (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*) (#36) because it is wind pollinated.
10. **Thoroughwort** (*Eupatorium sp.*) Native. There are many species of Eupatoriums that bloom in the fall. They all attracts butterflies and other insects to its nectar and birds to its seeds. It is considered deer resistant.
11. **Indian Grass** (*Sorghastrum nutans*) Native. Indian Grass is a warm-season perennial bunchgrass. Most nonnative lawn grasses, like Kentucky Bluegrass or Fescue, are considered cool-season grasses. With its gorgeous seedheads that last into the winter, Indian Grass can be planted as a lovely ornamental. It is excellent for livestock. Numerous songbirds and small mammals eat the seeds, and plants provide excellent nesting and security cover.
12. **Rattlesnake Fern** (*Botrypus virginianus*) Native. This fern prefers moist, rich woods and shade, and it is one of first ferns to begin growth in spring. The tapered tip of the fertile blade is said to resemble a rattlesnake tail.

13. **Asiatic Dayflower** (*Commelina communis*) Nonnative. The name refers to the fact that the flower petals typically last only one day. Flowers have two blue, circular petals that have been compared to Mickey Mouse ears. A third, much smaller white petal is found under the two blue petals. It is native throughout much of East Asia and northern parts of Southeast Asia.
14. **Japanese Stiltgrass** (*Microstegium vimenium*) Nonnative. This invasive plant forms a dense groundcover that smothers native plants and prevents regeneration of forests and fields. It destroys biodiversity and natural habitat for animals, birds, and insects. Stiltgrass also poses a threat of intense forest fire due to the thick mats of dried leaves and stems it leaves behind on the forest floor in autumn. It found its way into America in 1919 as dried grass used as a packing material for imported porcelain.
15. **Agrimony** (*Agrimonia sp*) This perennial herb with tiny yellow flowers has a variety of interesting names including sticklewort, cocklebur, liverwort, church steeples, philanthropos, and garclive.
16. **Wingstem** (*Verbesia alternifolia*) Native. You will pass a lot of this yellow flower before finding its flag next to the trail. The common name of this plant comes from the distinctive stem, which has vertical ridges that are sometimes described as “wings.” Alternifolia in the botanical name refers to the alternating leaf structure. Contrast this with the very similar Crownbeard (#44) that has opposite leaves. Pollinators and Goldfinches love both plants.
17. **Foxtail Grass** (*Alopecurus sp*) Nonnative. This common meadow grass is native to Europe. It’s wide curving seedhead is said to resemble a fox’s tail.
18. **Box Elder Tree** (*Acer negundo*) Native. This tree is a type of maple (*Acer*) that usually grows near streams and shelters wildlife and stabilizes streambanks. Its seeds come in winged samaras and germinate easily. Many box elder seedlings emerge grow along Cedar Run amidst the Virginia Bluebells and resemble poison ivy with their “leaves of three.”

There are also Trefoils (*Desmodium*) (See #5) and Brambles (*Rubus sp*) near this flag. Beware of the thorns!

19. **Purpletop Grass** (*Tridens flavus*) and **Common Milkweed** (*Asclepias syriaca*) Native.

Purpletop is a tall native warm season bunchgrass also known as Purpletop Tridens, Red Top, or Greasegrass. The latter name refers to the greasy feeling of the stem. It is adapted to poor soils and grazed by livestock. Clumps of Purpletop make a lovely, lacy, purple haze.

Milkweeds (*Asclepias spp.*) have an almost mystical relationship with the orange and black Monarch Butterfly that migrates to Mexico. Through a complex evolution, the caterpillars of Monarchs have adapted to eat milkweeds, a plant that is toxic to many other species. This specialization makes them vulnerable if milkweeds are unavailable. The caterpillars generally

feed from the undersides of the leaves and prefer tender, young leaves. Milkweeds produce nectar-rich flowers that attract adult butterflies and pollinators.

- 19a. **Autumn Olive** (*Elaeagnus umbellata*) Nonnative. This small invasive tree was brought to the US from Asia in the 1800s and, in a misguided effort, planted widely in the 1950s for erosion control and wildlife. Autumn olive is now a problem because it outcompetes and displaces native plants. It does this by shading them out and by changing the chemistry of the soil around it, a process called allelopathy. You will see Autumn Olive throughout Merrimac Farm. This silvery tree produces berries that are edible; eat up!
20. **Creeping Charlie** (*Glechoma hederacea*) Nonnative. This evergreen groundcover in the mint family is known by many names including ground-ivy, gill-over-the-ground, creeping charlie, alehoof, tunhoof, catsfoot, field balm, and run-away-robin. It thrives in moist, shady areas such as the floodplain along Cedar Run. This aggressive weed forms a dense mat, smothering native vegetation.
21. **American Sycamore** (*Platanus occidentalis*) Native. This young specimen can grow into a giant 75-90-foot-tall tree. It is often found along riverbanks where the bark of older trees peels off in patches revealing a ghostly white inner bark. Its fruit is a fuzzy, long-stalked, spherical ball that ripens to brown in the fall and persists into early winter. Each ball contains many seed-like fruits called achenes that are eaten by songbirds in the winter.
22. **Eastern Red Cedar** (*Juniperus virginiana*) Native. This common tree is a type of juniper and is one of the early succession trees when fields revert to forest. Colonists used its aromatic wood for fences and furniture. Its fleshy, blue cones that develop on the female trees resemble berries and are beloved by Cedar Waxwings, a songbird named for the tree. Birds seek its evergreen shelter for nests and the tree is the larval host for the Juniper/Olive Hairstreak butterfly.
23. **Paulownia** (*Paulownia tomentosa*) Nonnative. This invasive tree is native to China and known by common names such as royal paulownia, princess tree, empress tree, or foxglove-tree. Young trees develop huge leaves that have been observed as long as 3 feet! Compare the leaf size with those of the Sycamore (#21). This aggressive tree grows rapidly and is often found in disturbed sites.
24. **Beggarticks** (*Bidens sp*) Native. This plant has only disk flowers, with no ray petals traditionally associated with members of the composite/aster family. The barbed awns of the achenes can cling to the fur of animals and the clothing of humans so they can be carried considerable distances to new locations. Botanically, achenes are the small, dry, hard, one-seeded, fruit that does not open upon maturity.
25. **Sweetgum** (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) Native. Sweetgum is an early successional tree with star-shaped leaves that turn a stunning array of reds, oranges, and yellows in autumn. It produces a hard, spiked fruit/seedhead that can be painful to bare feet. It is the larval host plant for the

Luna Moth and several other moths. Its fruits are eaten through the winter by many birds including the Brown Thrasher, Wild Turkey, Eastern Towhee, and Dark-eyed Junco.

26. **Virginia Pine** (*Pinus virginiana*) Native. This evergreen can be identified by its relatively short needles that are twisted and come in bunches of two. Think of the needles as forming a V for Virginia. An important tree for lumber, the Virginia Pine is the larval host for many butterflies and moths including the Eastern Tailed Blue, Clouded Sulfur, Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, and Luna & Promethea moths. Its seeds and sap are eaten by many birds including Brown Creepers, Chickadees, Nuthatches, Warblers, and Wild Turkeys.
27. **Shrubby Bush Clover** (*Lespedeza bicolor*) Nonnative. This is a rapid-growing shrub that spreads in openings and under forest canopies. This invasive shrub was introduced for soil stabilization and in wildlife food plots. The plant can form dense stands that limit forest regeneration.
28. **Ebony Spleenwort** (*Asplenium platyneuron*) and **Christmas Fern** (*Polystichum acrostichoides*) Native. Both of these ferns have fertile fronds, which die off in the winter, that are darker green and stand upright, while the sterile fronds are evergreen and generally lie flat on the ground. **Ebony Spleenwort** could be confused with **Christmas Fern**, but the stem of **Christmas Fern** is green and scaly, and its spores cover the back of a leaflet. In contrast, **Ebony Spleenwort** has a shiny, dark reddish-brown stem and the sori (the yellowish or brownish mass on the edge or underside of a fertile frond) are linear, alternately arranged along the mid-vein.
29. **Partridge-berry** (*Mitchella repens*) Native. Tiny white flowers form in pairs in April and May and, if pollinated, fuse to form one red berry. Partridge-berry is a common groundcover found throughout Virginia. The berries are edible, but flavorless.
30. **Wineberry** (*Rubus phoenicolasius*) Nonnative. Wineberry is a spiny invasive shrub from Japan related to raspberries and blackberries. With a sweet summer fruit, it was introduced to North America in the 1890s as breeding stock for raspberries. It was found invading natural areas by the 1970s and has spread far and wide in the East. It is differentiated from other berry-producing canes by its reddish stems (caused by a dense coat of red hairs) and a silvery appearance on the underside of its leaves.
31. **Oriental Lady's Thumb** (*Persicaria longisetata*) Nonnative. Also known as Asiatic Smartweed and Bristly Lady's Thumb, this invasive plant is native to Asia and is a member of the knotweed family. It is usually found in disturbed or moist habitats.
32. **American Holly** (*Ilex opaca*) Native. This evergreen tree provides cover and nesting sites for wildlife and has sharp-tipped leaves that are often used for holiday decorations. Its red berries attract many bird and small mammal species, but they are poisonous to humans. Only female trees produce the berries and a male tree must be nearby for pollination. American Holly is the larval host plant for Henrys Elfin butterfly.

33. **Indian Tobacco** (*Lobelia inflata*) Native. It is used in herbal and homeopathic medicine. Its name comes from the fact that the base of its small violet-pinkish flowers "inflates" to form the seed capsule. One of its many common names is Pukeweed.
34. **Chinese Bushclover/Chinese Lespedeza** (*Lespedeza cuneate*) Nonnative. With its long taproot, this plant was introduced in the late 1800s by federal and state agencies for use in bank stabilization, erosion control, soil improvement, mine reclamation, and other purposes. Since then it has spread widely as an invasive plant. Once established, it outcompetes and displaces native plants, forms extensive monocultures, and develops an extensive seed bank in the soil, thus making it difficult to eradicate. Its high tannin content makes it distasteful to livestock and most native wildlife.
35. **Poison Ivy** (*Toxicodendron radicans*) Native. This vine is best known for the human allergic reaction to its oily resin called urushiol. All parts of the plant, leaves, stems, berries, and roots, contain this oil. Identification is key because the plant can look different at different ages and stages. These rhymes help: "Leaflets three, let them be," "Longer middle stem, don't touch them," and "hairy vine, no friend of mine." While poison ivy can be a bane to humans, it is an important wildlife plant and turns a lovely shade of red in autumn. Many birds, including woodpeckers, depend on poison ivy berries in the late fall and winter.
36. **Common Ragweed** (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*) Native. This plant with insignificant-looking greenish flowers is the cause of "hay fever" for many fall allergy sufferers, NOT Goldenrod that blooms at the same time. A single plant may produce about a billion tiny grains of pollen per season, and the pollen is carried by the wind. However, ragweed is highly valued for wildlife food and cover, with seeds rich in oil. These seeds persist on the plant well into winter providing a critical winter food source for bobwhite quail, mourning doves, ring-necked pheasants, red-winged blackbirds, and song, white-crowned, and white-throated sparrows
37. **Trumpetvine/Trumpet-Creeper** (*Campsis radicans*) Native. This vigorous vine produces large orange-red trumpet-shaped flowers that attract hummingbirds with its nectar. It can grow to 35 feet and climbs by aerial rootlets. Unlike English Ivy (#38) this vine is deciduous. It produces large seed pods that resemble beans.
38. **English Ivy** (*Hedera helix*) Nonnative. This vine is very invasive in urban and disturbed forests, covering all life in the understory and climbing to the tops of the canopy trees. Once in the canopy, it produces berries that birds consume and spread far and wide. These heavy evergreen vines leave the bark of the supporting tree moist and the trunk susceptible to collapse.
39. **Pokeweed** (*Phytolacca americana*) Native. This large plant has red stems and clusters of white flowers that develop into dark purple berries. Its leaves have a tropical appearance. The plant is considered poisonous, but old-timers used to harvest the young leaves in the spring, boiling them in at least two changes of water to release the toxins. The berries contain toxic seeds, but colonists used their rich color for dyes. Pokeweed is an important wildlife plant because

pollinators are attracted to the flowers, and birds such as gray catbirds, northern mockingbirds, northern cardinals, and brown thrashers, devour the berries.

40. **American Burnweed/Pilewort** (*Erechtites hieraciifolius*) Native. Burnweed is an extremely fast-growing annual plant with a short taproot. Its common name refers to its colonization of sites after a fire. To the casual observer, the flowers lack petals and never appear to fully bloom, but they are pollinated by wasps and honeybees.
41. **Sweet Autumn Clematis** (*Clematis terniflora*). Non-native. While the native species *Clematis virginiana* or Virgin's Bower is also a last summer-early fall bloomer, Sweet Autumn Clematis is non-native vine and a vigorous grower often choking out other plants in the vicinity.
42. **Green Headed Coneflower or Sochan** (*Rudbeckia laciniata*). Native. Young leaves of this plant are sought after by anyone interested in wild foraging. Collect the edible leaves in the spring, when the leaves are tender for a nutritious punch beyond what even kale or spinach can offer.
43. **Common Mullein** (*Verbascum thapsus*). Non-native. Common Mullein is not native to the United States, but was imported for medicinal purposes and is now well-established across the continent. It is still used as an herbal remedy for skin, throat and lung ailments (astringent and emollient properties).
44. **Crownbeard** (*Verbesina occidentalis*). Native. This plant has special value to honeybees and bumblebees, which are important native pollinators. Crownbeard resembles Wingstem (*Verbesina alternifolia*) (#16) since they both have "wings" and yellow flowers blooming now. One way to tell them a part is by looking at the leaf arrangement - Crownbeard has opposite leaves; Wingstem has alternate leaves.
45. **Striped/spotted wintergreen, Pipsissewa** (*Chimaphila maculata*). Native. This plant was used by Native Americans by steeping leaves and roots for infusions to drink or apply topically, its use treated pain, urinary infections, fever, rheumatism and other maladies.

Prince William Conservation Alliance, www.pwconserve.org

Prince William Wildflower Society, a chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society, www.vnps.org