

A publication of the VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY
Conserving wild flowers and wild places

www.vnps.org

Earth, wind, & fire: restoring native grasslands

It is a brittle November morning, just breaking out of frost. As she tracks the field for remnants of last night's visitors, Lily's snuffs and pants dangle on the air in front of her like spider webs caught up in the wind. The glazed bronze and copper grasses glistening in the low light rattle with her passing.

Taking my pleasure much as Lily takes hers, I study the sights and sounds of this now familiar landscape and a quiet contentment settles over me. What used to be a stand of fescue fit only for voles and groundhogs is now teeming with ripened native grasses. There are birds everywhere.

Our restoration is entering its fourth year of establishment. In the next month or two we'll mark its induction into the membership of native wildlife habitats in Virginia by what must surely seem to the uninitiated a giant leap backward. We're going to burn it to the ground.

This will be our second burn. The first, mesmerizing to watch as the flames dripped, then flowed in ribbons of orange, red, and blue from the foresters'

torches as they coaxed it along behind them, was sluggish and low in profile. Back then, the tinder consisted only of the stubble of fescue remaining from an application of herbicide.

With undisguised relish I am told

by those who know that the next burn will erupt in an explosion of light and sound befitting the cycle of resurrection it promises to launch. For three successive years the grasses have attained an

(See Restoration, page 6)



Burning off the meadow lands

'Where the Water Meets the Land'

The 2007 VNPS Annual Meeting/Conference will be co-hosted by the John Clayton Chapter and the College of William and Mary's Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) and will take place at the VIMS campus in Gloucester Point.

Teta Kain will lead daily paddle trips down Dragon Run, a unique river in Eastern Virginia. Lined with massive bald cypress trees and deep swamps, it is one of the most pristine waterways to be found anywhere in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Forming the boundary lines of four counties of the Middle

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From the president

Know where plants and habitats fit into your world

The busy time of spring passed quickly - so many wonderful walks and lots of wildflowers sighted. As I write, preparations for the VNPS Bruce Peninsula trip are being finalized. That will be one glorious week of plant exploration. Our state field trips have been fairly successful, and we hope to have another series for next year. Plan to spend time on one of these trips next spring if possible. For an out-of-state trip we are considering possibilities including tall grass prairies and Gulf Coast habitats.

Often I hear myself and others voice the complaint that plants are excluded when people talk about wildlife, or that the plant world is a fuzzy green background to most people. But plant people sometimes have a similar bias. I used Google to search for a specific plant recently, and what I really wanted to know was what wildlife it supported. I got description after description, list after list, plant after plant for sale, but only one website with information on who it fed, hid or for whom it provided housing material. And from another angle, I got a question via email wondering whether it was more important to clear away all invasive plants immediately, or to remove them more gradually so that birds and other wildlife might have cover until they

can be replaced by natives. I think that answer might be as variable as the plants we wish to remove, but I really don't know the answer.

As we commemorate 400 years of settlement on the Jamestown anniversary, I'd like to quote Gary Snyder from **The Real Work: Interviews and Talks 1964-1979** (New Directions Books, 1980, p. 69). Snyder is a west coast poet, often mentioned with the Beats, and an environmental activist. He says "... we haven't discovered North America yet. People live on it without knowing what it is or where they are. They live on it literally like invaders. You know whether or not a person knows where he is by whether or not he knows the plants. By whether or not he knows what the soils and waters do." And, "... erase arbitrary and nonexistent political boundaries from your mind and look at what the land really is. . ." Of course, I think more of our society members than that - I'm sure most of you know where you are, but there are still people who do not. Our Virginia Native Plant Society was formed in 1982, after these lines were spoken, so perhaps our educational efforts are helping to change the way we see our world.

Your President, Sally Anderson

Douglas receives conservation award

On April 5, the Albemarle Chapter of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (NSDAR) awarded VNPS member Dr. Ruth Douglas a conservation medal for her work on behalf of native plants and her work as the VNPS state coordinator for the Invasive Alien Plant Program. Dr. Douglas, a VNPS state director-at-large, is a retired professor from Piedmont Virginia Community College. She is an avid hiker and an expert on Virginia's forests. She has worked tirelessly to educate people about the threat to the Commonwealth's natural habitats posed by invasive species. She is also an instructor in the Virginia Master Naturalist Program. Standing with Dr. Douglas in the photograph are Albemarle Chapter Conservation Chair Martha Orton (center) and Carolina Fox, State Conservation Chair of the Virginia DAR.



Project Budburst looks at global warming

Early in April, the National Wildlife Federation began a pilot project for a new nationwide citizen science project focused in large part on native plants and global warming. Called Project BudBurst, this collaborative effort uses the science of phenology to track key developmental stages in the growth of a large number of native plant species across the country. By recording the timing of the leafing and flowering of native species each year, scientists can learn about the prevailing climatic characteristics in a region over time. With your help, they will be compiling valuable environmental information that can be compared to historical records to illustrate the effects of climate change. Why not share your observations in an online report? In 2008, Project BudBurst will begin in January.

Mark your calendars

Hemlock woolly adelgid conference to feature new information

The Fourth Symposium on the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) will take place on February 11-15, 2008, in Hartford, Connecticut. Over 20 years ago, Connecticut was the first state to express concern about the spread and impacts of HWA. Since then, much has been learned about HWA, and that information will be shared through presentations and posters. The Hartford Hilton (135 Trumbull Street) is the conference site.

The focus of the 2008 symposium will be new information acquired since the February 2005 symposium that was held in Asheville, N.C. HWA and elongate hemlock scale will be highlighted. The program will include biology, biological control, chemical control, survey and monitoring, hemlock impacts, hemlock management, and hemlock resistance.

The symposium program organizers are Dennis Souto (USDA Forest Service, 603-868-7717, dsouto@fs.fed.us) and Vicki Smith (Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, 203-974-8474, victoria.smith@po.state.ct.us). Kathy McManus (USDA Forest Service, 203-230-4330, kmcmanus@fs.fed.us) is the local arrangements coordinator. Please feel free to contact any of those individuals if you have questions or would like additional information.

Green development featured

Conservationists and landscape designers should save the date of Friday, November 9 for the second annual Chesapeake Conservation Landscaping Council Conference to be held at Northern Virginia Community College in Annandale, Virginia. The conference, "Turning a New Leaf," is designed to promote and educate about sustainable landscaping and development practices that will improve or restore water quality and wildlife habitats.

The conference is designed for landscaping professionals as well as the general public. Conference tracks include: The Green in Green Development, Creative Stormwater and Shoreline Management, How-to for Nursery and Landscape Businesses, and Designing and Maintaining Native Landscapes.

To learn more about the conference, visit the Chesapeake Conservation Landscaping Council's website at www.ChesapeakeLandscape.org or call 410-634-2847, x24.

•Annual Meeting

(Continued from page 1)

Peninsula, it stretches 35 to 40 miles from King & Queen and Essex Counties to the Piankatank River. The entire length of the river is privately owned and only a few roads cross the river making it almost completely inaccessible to canoe and kayak enthusiasts. Friends of Dragon Run owns several parcels of property along the middle reaches of the river, and it is from this area that the kayak trips will be conducted for the purpose of showing people first-hand how unique this waterway is and why the Friends of Dragon Run organization is dedicated to preserving it in its unspoiled state. For more information about Dragon paddle trips, including what to bring, wear and expect, visit www.claytonvnps.org and click on "2007 State Conference" and then click on "Dragon Run Info."

To help commemorate the 400th Anniversary of Jamestown, a trip to Jamestown Island has been scheduled on Friday afternoon. Botanist Donna Ware will lead a walk to Black

Point, where coastal grass species, swamp plants, and several oak species, including cherrybark oak (*Quercus pagoda*), will be identified. A Jamestown interpreter will also tell about the use of native plants by the colonists.

Friday afternoon will also feature three presentations given by speakers from VIMS: "Living Shorelines," "Current Phragmites Research," and "Wetlands Research at VIMS." In addition, Wesley Greene, Colonial Interpreter and Garden Historian with the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, will give a talk titled "John Custis and the Transatlantic Plant Trade." At 7:30 p.m. on Friday evening keynote speaker Dr. Jim Perry will present "Coastal Shorelines: Conservation and Erosion Control."

Saturday morning will begin with walking tours of VIMS Teaching Marsh, Coastal Forest Walkway, and Shoreline Management Structures. The Teaching Marsh is a small freshwater and tidal saltmarsh demonstration wetland constructed for water quality and educational purposes.

The Coastal Forest Walkway is a short boardwalk through the plant community surrounding a small freshwater pond. The tour will also include a look at a living shoreline treatment of the boat basin entrance canal.

Rebecca Wilson, the Chesapeake Bay Region Steward for the Department of Conservation and Recreation, will lead a trip to the Grafton Ponds Natural Area Preserve on Saturday morning. Grafton Ponds represents Virginia's best remaining example of a coastal plain pond complex. The many ponds here were formed by dissolution of the underlying calcareous marine deposits of the Yorktown Formation. This wetland complex supports several rare plants and animals for Virginia including Harper's fimbriatilis, pond spice, Cuthbert turtlehead, Mabee's salamander and barking treefrog.

Also on Saturday, a tour and chance to buy plants at Sassafras Farm native plant nursery and trips to Mary Berg's properties in Gloucester County will be offered. Mary's morning tour on her

(See *Field trips, page 7*)

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Celebrate Virginia's Native Plants and Habitats



Rattlesnake weed flower, above left, and yellow lady-slipper, above right, were both seen by these VNPSers on a trip led by Donna Ware (center) at York River State Park. All three photos were snapped by Jan Newton.

State Field Trips



Jan Newton found this perfoliate bellwort flower at York River State Park.



Rod Simmons, VNPS Registry Co-chair, leads a trip on Difficult Run in the Potomac Gorge. Photo by Sally Anderson.



*Jan Newton shot this photo, above, of bird's foot violet at York River State Park, while spiderwort (*Tradescantia virginiana*), above middle was, found at Difficult run in the Potomac Gorge by Sally Anderson. Spiderwort is the VNPS Wildflower of the Year for 2008. At right, Dr. James Perry explains tidal marsh ecology to a group of canoeists on Taskinas Creek. The photo was by Sally Anderson.*



VNPS President Sally Anderson caught VNPS Director Stan Shetler, top, leading a state field trip at Turkey Run, while below Shirley Gay, Clifford Gay, and Donna Ware compare notes at York River in this photo by Jan Newton.



Virginia's Flora: A project worthy of our support

The *Flora of Virginia*, first edition, is to be published in 2011 by the University of Virginia Press. For any native plant organization, a state Flora is the most important book supporting its mission to conserve native plants in their natural habitats.

Many VNPS members and chapters are subscribers for this historic publication. Every gift is appreciated and has been used to produce written descriptions, including examination of herbarium specimen, and illustrations for our 3,800 native and naturalized plant taxa. To meet the copy deadline by 2009, editor-in-chief Chris Ludwig has added necessary staff. John Townsend, Department of Conservation and Recreation-Division of Natural Heritage, has been named the third author and illustration editor; Michael Terry, botanist, is assistant for the editor and is writing as well as illustrating the graminoids; Bland Crowder is working on family and genus descriptions.

Our *Flora of Virginia* staff is creating an historically important botanical volume of scientific substance that it is an honor to support. Virginians did not fund or directly participate in the first

edition of *Flora Virginica* (1743), published in the Netherlands by Gronovius using the herbarium of John Clayton, Gloucester, Virginia. At that time, Linnaeus was actively organizing taxa. There has been no other *Flora* for Virginia until now.

Books in the 1700s were published with funds from individuals whose names were printed in the first edition of those books as subscribers.

A modern-day subscription opportunity is available for our current *Flora of Virginia 2011* by a generous donation to support the work of Virginia botanists, students, natural resource managers, gardeners and our native plant society members. It is impossible to save a plant or community if you know nothing about it and how important each one is to the other, but a *Flora* provides that information.

VNPS focuses on Virginia's highly diverse flora and ecosystems. This is an opportunity of *your* lifetime to be

recognized for supporting a *Flora*. The first edition of the *Flora of Virginia* will reflect for all time, the importance you place on Virginia's high flora biological diversity.

Flora of Virginia Donor Categories

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If you have supported the *Flora* and would like to add to that donation, continuing gifts will be added to your donor record. Make checks to: *The Flora of Virginia Project* and mail to: *The Flora of Virginia Project*, P.O. Box 512, Richmond, VA 23218-0512.

You can track the progress of the *Flora* by visiting the *Flora Project* website at http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural_heritage/vaflora.shtml.
Nicky Staunton, VNPS 2nd VP and a Director on the Board of the *Flora of Virginia*

Everyone knows about the birds and the bees, but how about the mites?

In the classic sex-ed story of the birds and the bees, insects flit from daisy to daisy, fertilizing girl blossoms with pollen rubbed off from boy buds. This activity has long been thought to have originated with plants that flower. But new research in the September 2006 issue of *Science* (<http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/abstract/313/5791/1255>) indicates that mites and other soil-dwelling arthropods, called springtails, ferry sperm from male to female mosses.

Ferns and mosses use swimming sperm to procreate, and biologists had assumed they didn't need a pollinator's services. Yet sperm can only swim a couple of centimeters before tuckering out, and botanists have long wondered how female plants can produce their version of seeds—sporophytes—with the closest guy 10 to 20 centimeters away.

So botanist Nils Cronberg of Lund University in Sweden and colleagues embarked on a kind of moss Sex Ed 101 in the lab. They put male and female clusters of silver moss (*Bryum argenteum* Hedwig) on dishes coated with plaster of Paris to trap any sperm trying to making a run for it. The clusters were either allowed to touch or were placed two or four centimeters apart. Without mites or springtails, the females only made sporophytes when in contact with the males. When the animals had their run of the dishes for twenty hours, however, female plants produced offspring both two and four centimeters away.

To determine whether the mites and springtails were just poking around or whether they visited the plants for a reason, the researchers compared how many bugs camped out

on fertile plants versus sterile plants. At least five times as many animals hunkered on the fertile plants than the barren ones. The researchers don't yet know whether the creatures get a reward for their work, much as bees get nectar.

It's "a beautiful little experiment," says paleobotanist Peter Wilf of Pennsylvania State University in State College, who notes that the strategy gives mosses a way to propagate in dry places. Also, considering that mites, springtails, and mosses predate flowering plants by about 300 million years, the results extend terrestrial plant-animal interactions "quite a bit" back in time, says bryologist Jon Shaw of Duke University in Durham, North Carolina.

By Mary Beckman *ScienceNOW Daily News*

• Restoration means hard work

(Continued from page 1)

average height of six feet or more before laying down their layers of winter thatch. Torches should hardly be needed.

I suspect I have a predilection for pyromania. I can't wait.

My part of the Shenandoah Valley is semi-arid, a region in which average annual rainfall is the lowest in the state. Here in the rain shadow of the Blue Ridge and Allegheny Mountains, native warm season grasses reach deep down and spread out into the soil for water and nutrients, preventing erosion while keeping the land porous, fertile and productive.

Their more open habit supports plants and birds the imported fescue crowds out: plants like beggars' ticks and ragweed that are important to quail, dove, turkey and meadowlark populations. Attracted and supported by the nature of the grasses, these birds reduce potentially damaging insect populations as they scatter seed for regeneration; through the primordial process of give and take they maintain the diversity that is the measure of health of any geographic area.

With so much to offer, it should come as no surprise that native grasses can be difficult to establish. As those of us who have come through the process in one whole piece are fond of saying, meadow restorations are not for the faint of heart. They require and respond in equal measure to sufficient preparation, patience and raw grit.

Does this mean you shouldn't try? No. It's just our way of countering the slew of marketers who would have you believe that wildlife habitat can be had for the price of a prettily packaged can of seed with holes in the lid. Presumably, one need only scratch and shake. While their goal is a bird in hand, ours is more long-term. We want the bird in the bush.

What then are the basics?

My first counsel to anyone undertaking a restoration is to find someone who has done one successfully, preferably within your community. There will be times when all that sustains you is the assurance from an old hand that what

looks like disaster to you is what's to be expected.

Because we participated in Virginia's Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) we were assigned a Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) advisor, Mike Liskey, who proved an invaluable and patient resource. Through a feature article in our local newspaper I also found James Allen Hepner. Jim, who lives just 12 miles away, has been nurturing and farming fields of native grasses that have been in his family for five generations. A visit to the Orland E. White Arboretum put me in contact with its curator, David Carr, who just one year before planted native grasses in the meadow plantings at the University of Virginia's Blandy Experimental Farm. David still held the memory of things he didn't know to expect and cautioned me to be prepared for them. Their expertise was the optimal combination of life-long learning and recent first time experience.

It's important to become familiar with what you have. What you don't know can hurt you. Different species of grasses require different growing conditions. Is your landscape upland dry or lowland moist, or a combination of the two? Existing patches of native grasses provide clues to soil preference. If there is a stream in the restoration area, you'll need to use herbicides and grasses specific to stream-side buffers.

Native grasses require a PH from five to eight, with six as optimal. For less than twenty dollars you can invest in a PH test kit, or run by Southern States for a packet that guides you through the collection of soil samples to send to Virginia Tech for analysis.

At its most elemental, a meadow restoration is a party you throw for the wildlife in your neighborhood. Who would you like to invite? Butterflies will come for milkweed, dragonflies for the reedy grasses; quail, meadowlarks, turkeys and doves will come for the high protein and oils found in forbs, and the insects attracted by them. The most stable field restorations include grasses, wildflowers, forbs and legumes.

To maintain a field with prescribed burns there must be room for buffers. You'll need 15 feet along shrub and lawn

borders, 30 beside existing woods. Buffers are created by disking or planting fire resistant grasses such as orchard grass and clover. If burning is not an option, you can lightly disc every three to five years to break up ground litter and disrupt the roots of woody vegetation.

To be effective, hedgerows require a minimum width of 30 feet, though something is better than nothing. In addition to providing food, shelter, and escape cover for wildlife, hedgerows create aesthetic transitions from domesticated to wilder landscapes.

Once you've considered your options, draw a plan. It doesn't have to be elaborate. If you are part of a state assisted program, the agency will do this for you. Stretch your plans. We expanded on the WHIP proposal by increasing the diversity of the plantings. When ready, run it by your sources; adjust if necessary.

Begin in early to mid-September by mowing to 8 to 10 inches. When the mowed area recovers to 12 to 18 inches and is actively growing, apply Round-Up at a rate of 2 quarts per acre. Then contact your local department of forestry to schedule a burn. Ask to be put on their list for the following spring. Remember that you can and need to be flexible. A moratorium on prescribed burns delayed us until the first of May.

In January order your seed. Specify when ordering your grasses that you want six pounds of Pure Live Seed per acre. Eastern Gamma, unless planted in the winter, requires stratification and a corn drill. Because we were unable to find anyone to stratify the seed, I hand sowed the kernels over melting snow.

I learned from Jim Hepner, whose pockets are always bulging with seed and berries, to gather my own. Wild asparagus, milkweed and many wildflower seeds and berries are easy to collect in late summer and early fall. Come winter, toss them out over melting snow.

Also in January, call the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) to reserve their warm season grasses drill. There is no charge for the use of the drill if you are a Virginia landowner. You'll need a tractor capable of handling the drill, so ask for the speci-

(See Final result, page 8)

• Field trips

(Continued from page 3)

homestead "Summerfield" will feature many native plants. This conservation habitat is an upland mixed hardwood forest with sandy soil. The afternoon trip to "Tripetala" features a disjunct species, *Magnolia tripetala*. The 14-acre site is a ridge leading more than 30 feet in elevation down a calcareous ravine to a seep area with a slow moving stream. Fossil shells from the Yorktown Formation are exposed in this ravine. Expect to see a wide variety of native plants, including shadow witch orchid (*Pontheiva racemosa*), which is expected to be in bloom.

Saturday afternoon will include a trip to both the water-wise garden at the Human Services Building and to the Ellipse Garden, a demonstration garden of the Williamsburg Botanical Garden,

both in James City County. A canoe trip to the Catlett Islands Reserve will be led by marine science field educators from the Chesapeake Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve in Virginia. The Catlett Islands encompass 690 acres of salt marshes, shrub wetlands, forested high ground, tidal creeks, and beaches on the north side of the York River in Gloucester County. In Donna Ware's words, "the trip is a great opportunity to see a hard-to-get-to place!"

Informative talks will be presented on Saturday, concurrently with field trips and tours. These include the following topics: "Coastal Plain Wildflowers" featuring slides by Hal Horwitz (Pat Baldwin), "Strategies to Promote More Native Plants in the Landscape" (Carol Heiser, Department of Game and Inland Fisheries), "Water-wise and Conservation Gardening with Native Plants" (Sue Voigt), "Distribution of

Mountain Plants in the Coastal Plain" (Donna Ware), "The Archaeological Quest For John Clayton" (Bob and Lisa Harper), "Native Ornamental Grasses in the Home Landscape" (Helen Hamilton), and "Native Trees for the Landscape" (Linda Johnson).

A party Saturday evening will celebrate the 25th anniversary of the VNPS at the Freight Shed, on the York River waterfront. Included will be a plant walk along the Riverwalk, a buffet dinner, the VNPS annual meeting, and a silent auction of native plant related items.

The conference closes on Sunday with the VNPS board meeting in the morning, and more great fieldtrips, including a native plant and bird walk at Beaverdam Park in Gloucester County with another chance to see shadow witch orchid, another trip down the Dragon, a native tree and shrub walk at Colonial Williamsburg and another tour of Sassafras Farm. There is a discounted rate for registration forms postmarked by August 14. Register early as space on most fieldtrips is extremely limited. Specific details are in the registration information and can also be obtained by visiting www.claytonvnps.org and clicking on "2007 State Conference" or by calling Jan Newton at 757-566-3646.

Jan Newton, John Clayton Chapter

Be properly attired at the VNPS meeting

John Clayton Chapter member Jan Newton, with the help of members Lucile Kossodo and Helen Hamilton, has designed a T-shirt, featuring photos of coral honeysuckle, passionflower vine, Virginia bluebells, and swamp (narrow-leaved) sunflower. The photos were taken by chapter members Felice Bond, Helen Hamilton and Jan Newton. The heading below the pictures says "Virginia Native Plants" and the John Clayton Chapter logo designed by Lucile Kossodo is on the back of the shirt in small print near the neck line. Pictures of the T-shirt are on-line at www.claytonvnps.org; it is available with a \$15 donation to the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS. Adult sizes S-2XL and children sizes S-XL are available. Contact Jan Newton at 757-566-3646 or jnewton110@cox.net if interested in owning a T-shirt.

See the address label for your membership expiration date

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Name(s) _____

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*Please designate one person as delegate for Associate membership

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I wish to make an additional contribution to ___VNPS or _____ Chapter in the amount of ___\$10 ___\$25 ___\$50 ___\$100 ___\$(Other) _____

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Make check payable to VNPS and mail to:

VNPS Membership Chair, Blandly Experimental Farm, 400 Blandly Farm Lane, Unit 2, Boyce, VA 22620

Membership dues are tax deductible in the amount they exceed \$5. Contributions are tax deductible in accordance with IRS regulations.

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The deadline for the next issue is **Sept. 1**.

• Final result worth the effort

(Continued from page 6)

fications. They will schedule your planting with others in your area. If you prefer to have a drill for an exact day, check local farm services for a source. Ask for a no-till drill. If you cannot obtain a drill, for smaller plantings clean seed (75% PLS or up) can be broadcast or drop seeded (cultipack seeder) onto a firm seedbed.

After the burn when weeds are actively growing spray again. If you are planting seed resistant to Plateau (check the label), apply at a rate of 4 ounces per acre. Plateau has a six to eight week residual weed inhibiting effect that gets grasses off to a clean start. However, if your seed is sensitive to Plateau use Round-Up at a rate of one quart per acre.

Plant your seed as soon after spraying as weather permits. Grasses should be planted no deeper than ¼ inch. Begin in late morning when dew has had time to burn off. Otherwise the colters clog up and seeds stick to the dampened wheels that are supposed to firm them into the soil. You can plant up until late June - the sooner the better. Partridge pea and some legumes require an inoculant 24 hours in advance, or according to package directions. Be certain to use fresh inoculant available at your local farm service.

When weeds reach 12 to 18 inches, mow them back if they appear to be competing with the grasses. Unlike fescue, warm season grasses are high jointed. They must be cut above the joint if they are to grow back and seed, so mow no lower than 10 inches. If it is too wet and you are delayed until mid-summer, spray with 1½ to 2 ounces per acre of Plateau.

Monitor for trouble spots through the growing season. Most undesirable weeds are easier to control in their early stages. Learn what's undesirable. To control heavy infestations of thistle that have broken bloom you can spray with Ally; but you'll lose most, if not all, of your wildflowers.

By the end of the third season your meadow should be well established. Afterward, burning or disking lightly every three to five years keeps thatch in check as it controls woody growth and encourages a diversity of wildflowers. If you burn in the spring, burn before April 15 to avoid peak nesting season.



A field of native grasses such as this one in the Shenandoah Valley make all the effort worthwhile

There is current evidence that the usual prescription of dormant season (winter/early spring) burns may not be as effective in promoting fire dependent species as burning in early fall.

Can it possibly be worth the effort? It occurred to me this morning as Lily and I broke into the field to begin our daily round of inventory, that to walk through this habitat we've enabled is like coming home. Still, no matter how often I walk it I can hardly believe my eyes. I suspect if Lily could talk she'd tell you she can hardly believe her nose.

Rosemary Wallinger is a writer, lecturer and photographer who lives in Shenandoah County, Virginia. For questions contact dragnfly@shentel.net. David Carr can be reached at blandy@virginia.edu.