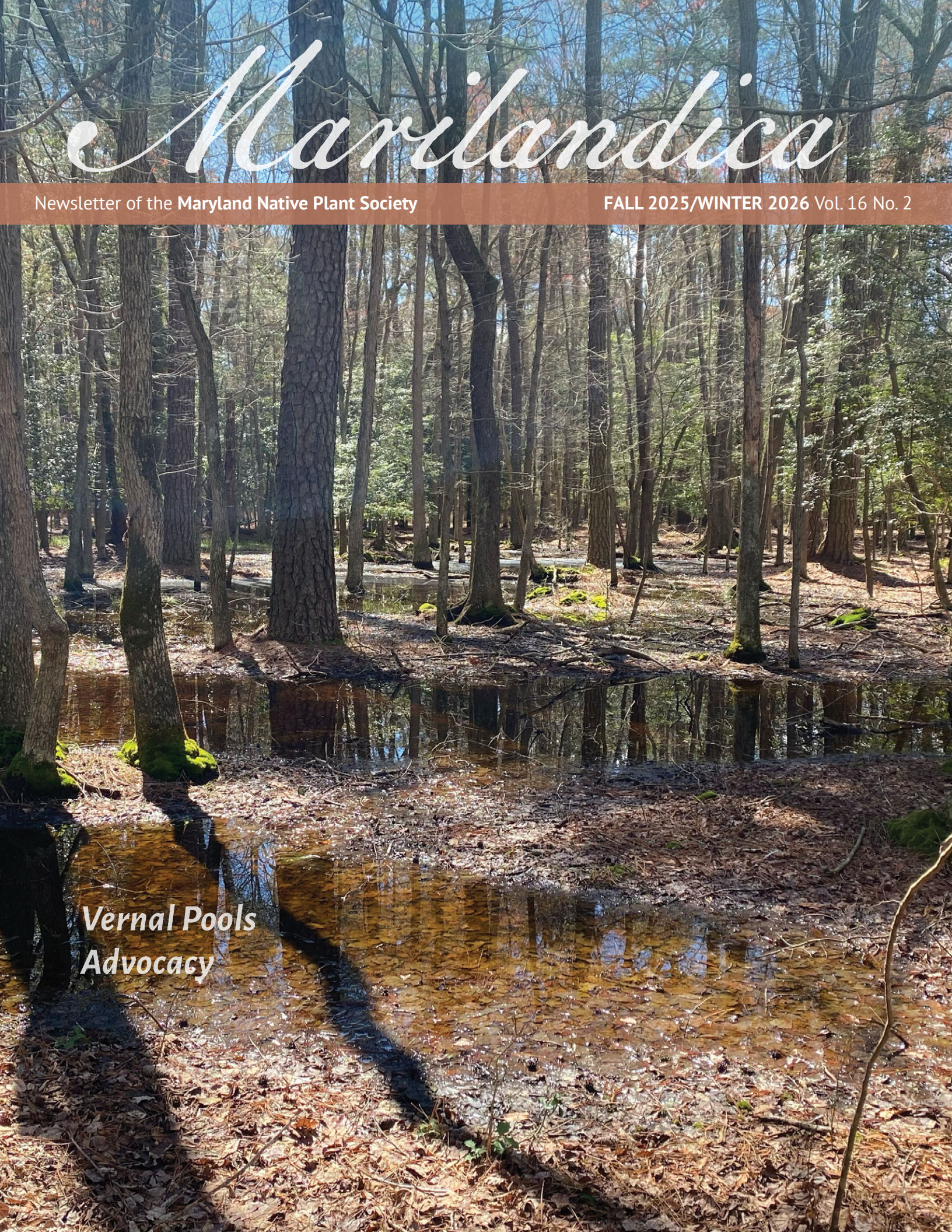


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Newsletter of the Maryland Native Plant Society

FALL 2025/WINTER 2026 Vol. 16 No. 2



*Vernal Pools
Advocacy*



MDFlora.org

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Niciporciukas.

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Spotted bee balm
(*Monarda punctata*)
and blue mistflower
(*Conoclinium coelestinum*)
at a home garden in
Montgomery County.
Photo by Pru Foster

Shout-out to Outgoing President, Lauren Hubbard

The board extends its heartfelt gratitude to outgoing President Lauren Hubbard, who served for four years (2022-2025). Lauren fostered an excellent atmosphere in the society, for instance, by highlighting individuals who are making a difference in her "Member Spotlight" in *Marilandica*. She also increased the board in number and diversity, updated our policies, and organized our financial systems. Well done and thank you! She remains on the board and will continue to have a positive and energizing impact on the Society.

ADVOCACY NOTICE - MNPS MEMBERS IN ACTION

How to Support Maryland Bills

Training Sessions and Email Alerts

Each of us can make a difference in Maryland legislation by calling our representatives and/or giving testimony on bills. Our actions can strengthen the text of bills, influence whether bills are passed into law, and lend support to national conservation bill efforts. To help our membership support native plant legislation, the MNPS will offer the following three 10-minute training sessions on effective advocacy during our monthly programs:

October 28 (7.00 pm) *An Introduction to Legislative Advocacy*

November 18 (7.00 pm) *A Training Session on Legislative Advocacy*

January 27 (7.00 pm) *Update on Native Plant Bills under Consideration*

To attend the training, register for the appropriate monthly meeting (mdflora.org). During the upcoming Maryland legislative session, MNPS will send out a few email action alerts for bills relevant to MNPS' mission of protecting native plants.

Mark Southerland, author of the article on page 4, testifying before the Maryland General Assembly House Environment and Transportation Committee for the Vernal Pool Wetlands Protection Act of 2024. Photo courtesy of Julie Dunlap.



New MNPS President Maps Out Her Goals for the Society

As the recently elected President of the Maryland Native Plant Society (MNPS), I am looking forward to helping make the organization even more welcoming and effective. In consultation with the other Board members, I have decided to focus on four interrelated goals for protecting and promoting interest in native plants and ecosystems:

1. Continue to grow MNPS membership to reach additional people and expand our footprint across the state through initiatives such as new chapters.
2. Strengthen MNPS operations and promote equity by increasing diversity and inclusivity within our organization.
3. Advocate for protection of Maryland's flora, natural areas, and biodiversity, including through state and local legislation.
4. Offer more events for our members across the state, such as field trips, talks, and workshops.

In support of MNPS and these goals, the Board is pleased to introduce the following three new Board members.



Jill Fonda Allen serves on the Maryland Orchid Society Board of Directors and volunteers as a Weed Warrior for Montgomery Parks, often at Rachel Carson Conservation Park. As a lifelong nature and art lover, she enjoys spending time at family farms in upstate New York. At home, Jill is busy restoring her property in the upper Patuxent River watershed. During her professional career, she was a genetic counselor at Children's National and George Washington University Medical Centers in DC, after earning a bachelor's in biology and a master's in genetics from Penn State.

Jorge Bogantes Montero is a Natural Resources Program Manager at the Anacostia Watershed Society in Bladensburg, MD. He leads conservation and ecological restoration efforts on public parklands in the Anacostia River watershed in DC and MD. On June 24, 2025, Jorge gave a talk to the Society on his project using wild rice to restore the Anacostia River. Jorge is a native of Costa



Rica and earned a bachelor's degree in Natural Resource Management and Protection from Universidad Estatal a Distancia in San José, Costa Rica. Before moving to the U.S., he worked in Costa Rica on tropical biodiversity conservation issues.

Cristina Niciporciukas serves as Chair of the recently revived MNPS Eastern Shore Chapter, and was co-chair of our highly successful annual conference "Extraordinary Ecosystems of Maryland's Eastern Shore", held at Washington College on September 6-7. The conference showcased the unique natural habitats of the Eastern Shore and the conservation efforts underway to protect these special areas. Cristina is a strong advocate for native plant conservation and restoration, and she documents the state's native flora via iNaturalist for the Maryland Biodiversity Project. Cristina previously worked as a pharmaceutical and healthcare professional.



Consistent with the goal of advocacy, two articles in this issue of Marilandica show how individuals can make an impact on Maryland legislation. Mark Southerland's article (Don't Let Our Magical Vernal Pools Disappear, p. 4), discusses a proposed MD bill regarding protection of vernal ponds. Janette Rosenbaum's article (Laws About Lawns Are Changing and You Can Help, p. 8), explores the history of legislation on lawns and highlights a 2021 MD law that prevents Homeowners Associations (HOAs) from requiring manicured lawns instead of allowing native plantings. In addition, we plan to hold several short training sessions on advocacy to help people effectively address proposed legislation (see page 2 for details).

During my tenure, I plan to leverage my work with native plants and invasive species, my legislative advocacy experience, and my connections with like-minded non-profits. Together with the Board and other MNPS members, I hope to make the Society an increasingly vibrant organization and a stronger voice for native plants and ecosystems. Above all, I am interested in hearing your ideas and partnering with you to achieve our shared goals.

Judy Fulton, President

2025 MNPS
Fall Conference
attendees showing
love for the Eastern Shore.
Photo by C. Niciporciukas.

Don't Let Our Magical Vernal Pools Disappear

By MARK SOUTHERLAND

When does a puddle become an important biological entity?

By any other name—seasonal pools, temporary ponds, geographically isolated wetlands—vernal pools are extraordinary ecosystems that can be found as easily in your backyard as in a national park. Vernal pools are depressions in the landscape that hold water only part of the year and do not support fish. These depressions have an impermeable layer of hardened clay or bedrock, which prevents rapid draining of the source water (typically rain or melting snow), but also have no permanent water connections, so that they dry up during the high evaporation of summer months.

This wet-dry cycle leads to vernal pool ecosystems having three life zones:

- **Vernal pool depression:** standing water, where breeding occurs,
- **Vernal pool envelope:** typically a 100-foot radius, which may retain more soil moisture and support wetland plants, and
- **Vernal pool terrestrial habitat:** typically a 1000-foot radius of surrounding terrain that supports adult amphibians, mostly underground, when they are not breeding.

This landscape structure can lead to distinctive rings of vegetation surrounding



A Woodland Vernal Pool at Royce Hanson Conservation Park at Broad Run, Montgomery County. Photo courtesy of Rachel Gauza.

a pool and “hoops” of blooming plants. In addition, the water isolation of vernal pools can lead to unique growing conditions resulting from the fluctuating water levels, little to no water flow, lower concentrations of dissolved minerals, and geographic isolation.

What makes vernal pools so ecologically special?

Without the dominant effects of predatory fish, vernal pools support species that can breed nowhere else—specifically wood frogs, spotted and other mole salamanders, and fairy shrimp. In addition to these “obligate species”, there are many noteworthy “facultative users”

of vernal pools, such as spotted turtles and rusty blackbirds. The 2015 Maryland's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) lists the following “Species of Greatest Conservation Need” (i.e., rare, endemic, and declining species for which Maryland harbors a significant portion of the overall population) associated with vernal pools, including American Mink, 12 bat species, Southeastern Star-nosed Mole, Box Turtles, Spotted Turtles, Eastern Kingsnake and Rainbow Snake, Carpenter Frog, Eastern Narrow-mouthed Toad, Eastern Tiger Salamander, Jefferson Salamander, Mountain Frog, Upland Chorus Frogs, Seth Forest Water Scavenger Beetle, Digger Crayfish, and a whopping 10 species of dragonflies and damselflies.

What about plants?

While providing habitat for unique suites of animals, vernal pools tend to support very few rare plants. An exception is the globally rare Upland Depression Swamp, a subcategory of vernal pools, which does harbor state rare plants. The lack of rare plants at Maryland's more common vernal pools may be because the basin substrate of submerged leaf litter and coarse woody debris is not conducive to herbaceous vegetation. A dense shrub layer may occur along the shoreline or in small patches within the basin, especially on the Coastal Plain, but many pools lack a well-developed shrub layer. The tree layer is typically semi-open to closed forest canopy. While it is difficult



Mark's Pond, a treasured vernal pool at Jug Bay Wetland Sanctuary, Anne Arundel County (courtesy of Rachel Gauza)



An Upland Depression Swamp, a globally rare subset of vernal pools, at Travilah Serpentine Barrens. Photo by Rod Simmons.



Early spring bloomer, *Lindera benzoin*, at a vernal pond near High Banks Audubon Sanctuary in Talbot County. Photo by Cristina Niciporciukas.

to generalize about vernal pool plant communities, typical plant types include club mosses, sphagnum moss, floating or submerged plants, ferns, forbs, grasses, sedges, and rushes. *Carex* species are abundant, and the False Hop Sedge (*Carex lupuliformis*), an S2 state rare plant, might be considered the poster child plant of Maryland's vernal pools, as it occurs at many sites (pers. comm. Rod Simmons). Other common *Carex* species include *C. vesicaria* (S1), *C. straminea*, *C. gigantea* (RTE Plants of Maryland), *C. pelita*, *C. buxbaumii*, *C. descompositae*, *C. straminea*, and *C. vestita*. Other sedges like *Cyperus lancastris* (S2S3) and *Eleocharis wolfii* are also found at vernal pools.

Where do vernal pools occur?

Vernal pools occur across Maryland and are typically situated in low areas in a forest, but they can also occur in floodplain forests as isolated floodwaters, among backwaters of old beaver impoundments, old sinkholes, or as perched spring- or seep-fed basins along mountain slope benches, or at the base of slopes. Vernal pools may persist, but are usually degraded in cleared areas such as cropland, pastures, and clearcuts. Vernal pools are classified as a state rare natural community in the Maryland SWAP.

What other ecological functions do vernal pools serve?

While vernal pools are critical for the continued survival of obligate amphibians and support of many facultative species in specific locations, they also provide ecological stepping stones across the landscape, supporting extensive food webs and metapopulations. At the same time, the abundance and distribution of vernal pools in the landscape provide important services for people, including stormwater retention and pollution removal, groundwater replenishment, natural mosquito control, and the connection to nature that increases human health and well-being.

Why are vernal pools in danger?

Like most natural ecosystems in Maryland, vernal pools are disappearing and being degraded through habitat destruction, pollution, and climate change. What's more, vernal pools lost their federal protection in the 2023 Supreme Court case, *Sackett vs. EPA*, which redefined "Waters of the US" to exclude seasonal ponds. It is now even more urgent that lovers of nature do what they can to preserve, protect, and restore vernal pools. An effective strategy for vernal pool conservation involves:

- *Education* about vernal pools (like this article in *Marilandica*),
- *Inventorying* vernal pools to inform better management,
- *Restoring and creating* vernal pools wherever possible, and
- *Advocating* for regulatory protections of vernal pools.

Advocates for vernal pools

Vernal Pool Partners has led advocacy for the Vernal Pool Protection Act in the last two sessions of the Maryland General Assembly. It is currently working with the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to develop language that will pass in the 2026 session and be implemented by MDE in 2027. This strengthening of protection is needed because many, if not most, vernal pools do not meet the federal criteria for designation as a nontidal wetland (hydrology, hydric soils, wetland vegetation) and therefore are not currently protected in Maryland.

If you are interested in helping with this legislation, visit our website (vernal-poolpartners.org) and look for timely alerts to urge your state delegates and senators to support the Vernal Pool Protection Act of 2026.

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The Sedge Family (Cyperaceae) in Maryland: A Teaser

By WILLIAM A. MCAVOY

The Cyperaceae, or Sedge family, is a large group of plants that is often overlooked or even avoided because they can be challenging to identify. Technical manuals and a familiarity with sedge-specific botanical terminology used to describe their morphological features are needed for identification. The Maryland Native Plant Society (MNPS) chose the Sedges as its Featured Family for 2026. I hope this article will encourage you to learn more about Maryland's sedges and their diversity, ecological importance, and enticing hidden beauty.

What ecological roles do sedges play?

Sedges are an important component of Maryland's ecosystems and native habitats and provide many critical ecological functions. Sedges serve as a food source for waterfowl, birds, and small mammals. And many sedges are host plants for a wide variety of butterflies, skippers, moths, wasps, and beetles. Sedges provide cover and nesting sites for wildlife, such as the federally listed Bog Turtle (*Glyptemys muhlenbergii*), who lays its eggs on tufts of the Tussock Sedge (*Carex stricta*). Another ecological function of sedges is their ability to prevent soil



Rhynchospora inundata (Narrowfruit Horned Beaksedge) is a highly state rare S1-ranked species, found in just a handful of sites in Dorchester and Wicomico Counties. It inhabits seasonally flooded wetlands known as Delmarva Bays. Photo by Ronald Wilson

erosion along streams, rivers and in wetlands. Their fibrous root system binds the soil and helps to anchor it in place.

Sedge Diversity in Maryland

In Maryland, sedges can be found growing in both wetland and upland

environments. The diversity of sedges in the state is largely the result of the diversity of habitat found within the state's five physiographic provinces: Appalachian Plateaus, Ridge and Valley, Blue Ridge, Piedmont, and the Atlantic Coastal Plain.

Maryland supports an impressive diversity of sedges, representing 32% of the overall native flora of Maryland, with 288 taxa (e.g., species, subspecies, varieties), of which 264 are native and 24 are non-native (Knapp & Naczi 2021). This makes the Cyperaceae the third largest family of vascular plants in the state: the Grass family (Poaceae) has 323 taxa and the Aster family (Asteraceae) has 310.

Sixteen genera of sedges occur in Maryland, including: *Bolboschoenus*, *Bulbostylis*, *Carex*, *Cladium*, *Cyperus*, *Dulichium*, *Eleocharis*, *Eriophorum*, *Fimbristylis*, *Fuirena*, *Rhynchospora*, *Schoenoplectiella*, *Schoenoplectus*, *Scirpus*, *Scleria*, and *Tricophorum*. *Carex* has the most species and is the largest genus of vascular plants in Maryland's flora (Frye & Lea 2001; Knapp & Naczi 2021). A few notable invasive sedge species include Japanese Sedge (*Carex kobomugi*), Smallflower Umbrella Sedge (*Cyperus difformis*), and Bog Bulrush (*Schoenoplectiella mucronata*).



Mostly a coastal species, *Bolboschoenus robustus* (Saltmarsh Bulrush) thrives in brackish and saltwater wetlands. Their rhizomes play a key role in anchoring soil and reducing erosion in intertidal zones. Photo by Cristina Niciporciukas.



The *Carex intumescens* (Bladder Sedge) inflorescence features the distinctive swollen perigynia that enclose the achenes, a hallmark of the genus *Carex*. Photo by Cristina Niciporciukas.



Clump-forming and a spreader, *Carex stricta* (Tussock Sedge) offers both structural and ecological benefits. Its thick clumps create safe havens for wildlife. Beneath the surface, its robust root network stabilizes soil and acts as a natural filter. Photo by Sean Sipple.

More than 82 species of Maryland's sedges are rare, according to the Maryland Natural Heritage Program (2021a, 2021b). Two examples include Narrowfruit Horned Beaksedge (*Rhynchospora inundata*), known from only a few locations in Dorchester and Wicomico Counties, where it grows in seasonally flooded freshwater depression wetlands called Delmarva Bays; and Richardson's Sedge (*Carex richardsonii*), which is restricted to serpentine barrens in Baltimore and Cecil Counties.

Coming to Terms (with Sedge Terms)

The following characteristics help define members of the Sedge Family and are crucial to identification of species.

- Sedges are typically perennial (live for many years) or seldom annual (complete their life cycle in one year) herbaceous plants.
- Sedges are either caespitose (growing in dense tufts) or rhizomatous (spreading by rhizomes).
- Sedge stems are called culms. Culms are usually trigonous (three-angled) but are sometimes terete (round)—so, sedges have edges, except when they're round!
- Sedge leaves are basal (emerging from the plant base) and/or cauline (along the stems).
- Sedge flowers are assembled in spikes (unbranched, elongated inflorescence), or spikelets (smaller, or secondary spikes), and are usually subtended by foliaceous bracts (leaflike structures at the base of a flower). The spikes are

composed of spirally arranged, usually appressed or ascending scales, that enclose one to many perfect or unisexual flowers that are wind pollinated. The stigma (tip of the female reproductive organ that is receptive to pollen) is either 2 or 3-forked.

- *Carex* species are characterized by a specialized, sac-like structure known as the perigynium (plural = perigynia), which encloses the ovary during early development and later surrounds the mature achene.
- Sedge fruits (achenes), are usually trigonous (three angled) or flattened biconvex (convex on both sides).

Looking Ahead—2026 Year of the Sedges

The MNPS is planning field trips, workshops, and talks on the Cyperaceae in 2026, and additional articles about Maryland's amazing sedges and their ecological importance. Board member Jorge Bogantes Montero is already planning to run sessions on sedge identification for MNPS members. We hope you share our enthusiasm and will join us as we dive deeper into this important and challenging group of plants!

For a complete list of Maryland's sedges, scan the QR code:



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Cyperus echinatus (Globe Flatsedge) is readily recognized by its tight, nearly spheric spikes. Photo by Cristina Niciporciukas.



Eleocharis obtusa (Blunt Spike-rush) is an annual sedge that has round culms that are soft and erect, with leaves reduced at its base giving the appearance of being leafless. Photo by William McAvoy.



Although its common name suggests otherwise, *Eriophorum virginicum*—Tawny Cottongrass—is actually a sedge, not a true grass. The many bristles on the achene are elongate and extend beyond the scales, creating a cotton-like appearance. Photo by William McAvoy.



The wetland species *Fuirena squarrosa* is called Hairy Umbrella-sedge because its flowers feature bristly perianth structures with tiny backwardfacing barbs, giving the plant a distinctly hairy or rough appearance. Photo by William McAvoy

Laws About Lawns Are Changing— And You Can Help

This garden hosts a great diversity of beneficial pollinators that come to visit the Spotted bee balm (*Monarda punctata*), Blue mistflower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*), Wrinkleleaf goldenrod (*Solidago rugosa*), and Blunt mountainmint (*Pycnanthemum muticum*). Photo by Pru Foster

As society is shifting from valuing uniformity to embracing diversity, so too is our approach to lawn care changing. Indeed, the laws about home landscaping in the US can be seen as a case study of changing values and illustrate how our choices impact broader society—human and non-human.

How do these shifts happen? As Margaret Mead said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” A small group of neighbors can insist that everyone else in the community fill their yard with a mowed, pesticide-soaked lawn. Or a small group of advocates can empower more people to choose gardening practices that respect the natural world, protect clean water, and provide safe spaces for wildlife. Both kinds of groups have played a role in the evolution of landscaping practices in America. Here, we trace that evolution and show how you can become part of the proverbial small group (really, a growing movement) driving change towards more sustainable suburban ecosystems.

By JANETTE ROSENBAUM

It all started with Home Owners Associations

Following World War II, America’s rising middle class was expanding into the growing suburbs. In the hopes of creating a “harmonious” community, the developers of Levittown, NY, required aspiring homeowners to sign an agreement to mow their lawn at least once a week between April 15 and November 15. Over the next several decades, such agreements became common in neighborhoods all over the country, and Home Owners Associations (HOAs) were created to enforce these community rules. HOAs became so ubiquitous that towns, cities, and eventually states chose to simplify matters by adopting equivalent requirements at the municipal level. By the 1970s, lawn mowing was the law everywhere in the United States.

And then things began to change.

In 1978, the city of Madison, Wisconsin—which had already made history by inventing the field of restoration ecology and establishing what may

have been the world’s first prairie restoration—became the first municipality in the country to legalize alternatives to lawns. The ordinance that enabled lawn alternatives gave property owners the option to replace their lawns with gardens full of native plants, including native grasses growing at their natural heights.

As the ordinance proposal worked its way through the revision process, Madison city leaders added a permit requirement for tall grasses. Lawn dominance in suburban landscapes had reached such a point that people were no longer familiar with native plants, and folks wanted to know that their neighbors’ native plant gardens were being regulated by experts.

Other cities subsequently adopted similar ordinances, surpassing Madison’s pioneering, pro-native stance by abandoning the permitting process, observing that permit applications were never rejected by reviewers or challenged by neighbors. Other cities joined the transition, moving towards greater acceptance of native plants. Madison’s neighboring suburb, Verona, moved to actively reward sustainable landscaping

practices by providing reimbursements for rain gardens. The entire state of California began offering cash rewards to property owners who shrank their lawns, a program so popular that the associated fund ran out of money. Many Maryland counties also developed rain garden rebate schemes.

In recent years, California has gone even further and now mandates reduced lawn area.

At the end of 2015, America's most populous state passed a law prohibiting large lawns on newly developed residential properties: no more than 25% of the property's landscaped area could be turf. And eight years later, the Golden State decided that even that was not enough. Under a law that goes into effect over the next several years, commercial, industrial, and institutional properties, as well as multi-family housing and similar communities, cannot use potable water to irrigate grass that doesn't serve any functional purpose. In a region increasingly plagued by drought, this means that most properties—including HOAs—can no longer have any lawn at all.

Other states are also overruling HOA agreements that require lawns and ban native plants. In the spring of 2021, thanks to the efforts of a determined homeowner, Maryland passed a law stating that HOAs cannot unreasonably bar their residents from gardening with native plants. That came about the same way all such laws do—from the homeowner standing her ground when the HOA challenged her native plant garden. The homeowner's sister documented the battle in a blog: <https://www.humanegardener.com/butterflies-1-hoa-bullies-0/>

Coincidentally, the author of the article on Page 4 of this issue (Mark Southerland) gave testimony when this new law came before the Maryland General Assembly.



A front lawn, as seen from the house, where grass was replaced with the following natives two years ago: Obedient plant (*Physostegia virginiana*), Blunt mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum muticum*), Late boneset (*Eupatorium serotinum*), Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), and Silky dogwood (*Cornus amomum*). Photo by Pru Foster.

Illinois passed a similar law in the summer of 2024.

How, exactly, does a single determined homeowner change a state law?

Part of the answer is that you don't actually do it alone. Identify your allies. Think creatively about who else likes native plants—even if they don't like them for the same reasons you do. Below are some suggestions for impacting state laws.

Attend meetings where decisions are being made, make your stance known.

- Bring your allies!
- Have T-shirts, stickers, or signs, so decision-makers know where you stand even when it isn't your turn to speak.
- Always use your opportunity to give public comments. You can submit written comments, call your representatives, or give verbal testimony.
- Tell decision-makers something they don't already know. For example, maybe they don't know what you just learned: other cities and states are banning lawns

and encouraging native plant gardens.

- Decision-makers like to hear about successful examples of the changes they're considering—and they hate to fall behind other jurisdictions.

Public meetings are not your only opportunity to advocate.

- Request private meetings with legislators—especially the ones who represent you and your neighborhood. Invite them to see a native plant garden.
- Try to anticipate questions and be prepared with answers—but you don't need to know everything! Your passion and lived experiences are persuasive as well. So tell your own story.
- It's also helpful to let legislators know how many people share your point of view. All elected officials want to know that their decisions will be popular.
- Finally, don't forget to vote. This is especially important in local elections.

Want to try your advocacy skills right now?

The Montgomery County Council is debating an ordinance that would require new developments to include 50% native plants in the landscaping. The Council is actively deciding which plant species would count as native, how 50% would be measured, and whether the requirement should be even higher than 50%. These are decisions that you can help influence.

The Maryland Native Plant Society will be offering advocacy training and sending email alerts to our membership. See the "Advocacy" note on page 2.

The author wrote their master's thesis on the environmental impacts of lawns, the history of Madison's laws related to native plant gardens, and how people can effectively get involved in such legislative processes at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

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Telling Good Devils from Bad Angels

By JIL M. SWEARINGEN

In the unlikely case that you forgot, Araliaceae—the Ginseng family, is the 2025 MNPS featured taxa (see *Marilandica* Fall 2024, p. 10). In Maryland, there are 16 species, including 10 natives and 6 non-native invasives. Two species, one native and one invasive, are very similar looking and are described here.

***Aralia spinosa*, or Devil's Walking Stick (DWS)**, is a small native tree with spiny stems, large compound and spiny leaves, and a large terminal inflorescence. DWS occurs in all 23 Maryland counties and is a common component of the forest understory. It is an attractive woody plant that sustains native insects, pollinators, and wildlife (Image 1).

***Aralia elata*, or Japanese Angelica Tree (JAT)**, is native to China, Korea, Japan, and the Far Eastern Russian Federation and was introduced to the U.S. as an ornamental in 1830. JAT is reported to be invasive in 3 counties in Maryland: Baltimore, Frederick, and Montgomery (EDDMapS 2025). JAT competes with native plants and can alter plant communities. It is essential to learn how to identify it, to report it on apps like EDDMapS and iNaturalist, and to alert land managers so that it can be removed (Image 2).

Identification: The Devil is in the Details

Both DWS and JAT have spiny stems, large twice-pinnate compound leaves, similarly shaped leaflets with toothed margins, and can reach about 30 feet in height. However, the leaflet venation and inflorescences are distinctive, as described below.

LEAFLET VENATION

DWS: Main lateral veins curve away from the leaflet margin; smaller branching veins extend into marginal teeth (Image 3).

JAT: Main lateral veins and smaller branching veins continue into marginal teeth (Image 4).

**Tip: To see the veins better, flip a leaflet over and use a hand lens to examine closely.*

INFLORESCENCE

Both species have large showy terminal umbels of tiny white, 5-petaled flowers and they bloom July-August. The differences are:

DWS: Inflorescence is *stalked*, *taller than wide*, up to 4 ft. tall (Image 5).

JAT: Inflorescence is *stalkless*, *broadier than tall*, up to 2 ft. across, and often overtopped by foliage (Images 6, 7).



Image 1. DWS habit.



Image 2. JAT habit.



Image 3. DWS main lateral veins curve away from margin; smaller veins enter teeth.



Image 4. JAT main lateral and smaller veins continue into marginal teeth.



Image 5. DWS inflorescence is stalked.



Image 6. JAT inflorescence lacks a stalk.



Image 7. A dense patch of flowering Japanese Angelica Tree.

REFERENCES

Maryland Biodiversity Project, Devil's Walking Stick (*Aralia spinosa*).

Sarver, M.J., A. Treher, L. Wilson, R. Naczi, and F.B. Kuehn. 2008. *Mistaken Identity? Invasive Plants and Their Native Look-alikes: An Identification Guide for the Mid-Atlantic*. Dover, DE. Delaware Department of Agriculture and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. 68 pp.

University of Georgia Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health, Early Detection and Distribution Mapping Service: Japanese Angelica Tree (*Aralia elata*).

Do You Love an Aster?

Then, this game is for you! All the images in this plant match are species in the astronomically large Aster Family or Asteraceae—see the Spring 2023 Marilandica for a list of over 300 species occurring in Maryland. Taxonomists have grouped the members of this family into tribes and sometimes further into subtribes based on similar features and genetic characteristics. The Flora of North America defines a tribe to be a taxonomic rank above genus and below family, and is designated by the suffix “-eae”; the suffix for family is “-aceae”. We invite you to match each species to its image.

Extra Credit Bonus. Select the tribe associated with each species. A-Aster Tribe (Astereae); B-Boneset Tribe (Eupatorieae); C-Thistle Tribe (Cardueae); D-Ironweed Tribe (Vernonieae); E-Sunflower Tribe (Heliantheae).



1. *Bidens polylepis*, **Bearded Beggarticks**. Flowers with yellow ray florets and a yellow central disk; outer phyllaries curly, inner phyllaries clear; leaves divided.
2. *Cirsium discolor*, **Field Thistle**. Flowers pink, disc florets only; phyllaries have white stripes and spines; underside of leaves is white.
3. *Conoclinium coelestinum*, **Blue mistflower**. Flowers blue, disc florets only; leaves opposite, egg-shaped to triangular.
4. *Elephantopus carolinianus*, **Carolina Elephants-foot**. Flowers violet; 5-lobed disc florets that resemble ray florets; stem leaves present.
5. *Eupatorium perfoliatum*, **Common Boneset**. Flowers white, disc florets only; leaves opposite, encircle stem.
6. *Eurybia divaricata*, **White Wood Aster**. Flowers with 5-12 white ray florets and a smallish yellow central disk; leaves alternate, heart-shaped, stalked; stems dark.
7. *Helenium autumnale*, **Sneezeweed**. Flowers with 13-21 yellow, wedge-shaped, 3-lobed ray florets; dark yellow central disk; leaves alternate, stems winged.

8. *Heliopsis helianthoides*, **Oxeye Sunflower**. Flowers with 8-12 yellow 3-toothed ray florets surrounding a raised brownish-yellow center of disk florets; phyllaries green, 2 lengths; leaves opposite and toothed.
9. *Solidago ulmifolia*, **Elmleaf Goldenrod**. Flowers yellow with 3-6 ray florets and 4-7 disk florets in arching one-sided sprays; basal and stem leaves; stem leaves elliptic to lance-shaped.
10. *Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*, **New England Aster**. Flowers with 40-100 narrow purple ray florets and a yellow center of disk florets; leaves lance-shaped with auricles that hug the stem.
11. *Vernonia noveboracensis*, **New York Ironweed**. Flowers purple, disc florets only; phyllaries long, filamentous, and stick out.
12. *Verbesina alternifolia*, **Wingstem**. Flowers with 2-10 yellow ray florets, globular center of numerous yellow to green disk florets; leaves alternate, stems winged.

Plant Match was created by Jil Swearingen with inspiration from Clare Walker's fantastic Nature Forward Asters class.



Marilandica

Maryland Native Plant Society
PO Box 4877
Silver Spring, MD 20914

OUR MISSION

Promote awareness, appreciation and conservation of Maryland's native plants and their habitats. We pursue our mission through education, research, advocacy, and service activities.

Become a member.

**Join online:
mdflora.org**

UPCOMING EVENTS (OCTOBER 2025 - MARCH 2026)

MNPS Field Trips

Registration is required. Field trips are listed on the website: mdflora.org

*If you are interested in leading a field trip, or have a suggestion for a field trip, send email to: fieldtrips@mdflora.org.

MNPS Monthly Programs (Usually on Last Tuesdays 7:00-9:00 pm)

Registration is required. Talks start at 7:30pm. 7:00 to 7:30 pm
Board update and member Q&A. To register, go to mdflora.org.
Talks are recorded and made available on mdflora.org soon after each program.

October 28. Stacy Small-Lorenz. *Bay-Wise 2.0: Expanding the Role of Native Plants in Creating Climate-Resilient Maryland Communities* (Hybrid).

November 18. Maddie Bright. *Plant Communities and Plant Selection: an evening at Woodend Nature Sanctuary* (Hybrid).

December. Happy Holidays. No monthly meeting.

January 27. Clara Thiel. *Exploring the Frostburg State University Herbarium* (Zoom only).

February 24. Sarah F. Jayne. *Nature's Action Guide: How to Support Biodiversity and Your Local Ecosystem* (Zoom only).

March 24. Clark Riley. *Native Orchids of Maryland* (Hybrid).

Keep an eye out for upcoming
legislative action training and alerts
as well as our 2026 sedge program.



First time MNPS field trip leaders, Kevin Speray and Jessica Klotz, led a wonderful field trip to Carey Run Bird Sanctuary in August, 2025. Kevin is shown here discussing asters. Photo by Liz McDowell.