October 2024

ORGANIZATIONAL UPDATES

Member meeting & Chapter Elections

by Charles Pannell on 31 October

Happy Halloween WildOnes! I hope you are all enjoying the changing of the colors this season. Unfortunately, it has been one of the driest Octobers in 100(!) years in North Alabama, so let's hope there's a break this evening. While the Presidential election looms on the horizon, and everyone waits in anticipation for a trick or treat next Tuesday, WildOnes hosted its own election and member meeting to elect new Board members, discuss the progress of the organization, and strategize for the upcoming year during our October meeting. The annual membership meeting is a requirement for our non-profit, and the following members were (re-)elected as officers on the Board of Directors during the meeting:

President - Charles Pannell (2nd Term)

Vice President - Kelly Cody (2nd Term)

Secretary - Lauren Linder

Treasurer - Lyn Weir (2nd Term)

Membership Chair - Rhonda Zook (2nd Term)

In addition to our new Board, members discussed the need to delegate some of the planning to committee heads, and the following members agreed to chair committees to spread the native plant love:

Weed Wrangle - Chairs Lynne Weninegar & Denise Woodring (lweninegar@gmail.com, denise.woodring@gmail.com)

Education Outreach - Chairs Lara Nance & Kelly Cody (larasnance@gmail.com, rose5727@gmail.com)

Plant Sale - Chairs Lyn Weir & Gloria Stover (thelyn@gmail.com, glostesto@aol.com)

If you were not at the Board meeting and would like to support one of the committees, please reach out to the committee chairs for information on how best to support their efforts.

Lewis Outback Garden Tour (member only)

Members of WONA listen to Harold and Cathy Zappe explain their garden design, water features and garden rooms during the September member-only native garden tour.

WildOnes North Alabama's second member-only garden tour is coming up on Saturday, November 16th, from 10-11 AM at the Lewis residence. As many of our members may remember, Herb Lewis came to speak to WildOnes in May about "Gardening for the Birds." Herb is an energetic speaker who has applied his considerable knowledge of gardening for the birds not only in his own "Outback Garden" but also as a

volunteer with the Land Trust of North Alabama (check out the bird blind and water features he helped design at Chapman Mountain). WONA is thrilled to be invited to tour the Lewis garden, and there is still space for more members who want to attend. Contact wildonesnorthal@gmail.com with the subject line "Lewis Garden Tour" if you'd like to be added to the roster.

WONA's 1st Weed Wrangle!

WONA is organizing our first Weed Wrangle at the Mountain Gap Trail in South Huntsville on Saturday, Nov 23rd from 9 AM - noon. This trail is badly overgrown with invasive species, and we have received permission from the City of Huntsville to begin the process of clearing invasives from the trail. A Weed Wrangle® is a one-day, area-wide, volunteer effort to help rescue our public parks and green spaces from non-native invasive species through hands-on removal of especially harmful trees, vines, and flowering plants. While there are many invasive species on the Mountain Gap Trail (bush honeysuckle, privet, nandina, kudzu, English Ivy, Liriope, et al.) the focus will be on removing woody invasives - principally bush honeysuckle. This activity will be moderately strenuous and will involve the application of herbicides on cut stumps. If you would like to attend, please email wildonesnorthal@gmail.com with the subject "Weed Wrangle." We will meet in the parking lot of Weatherly Elementary at 9 AM for a brief orientation before carpooling to the site at ~9:15 AM. If you live in the vicinity of the Mountain Gap Trail, you can walk to meet us at the terminus of Hemlock Dr. SE at 9:15 AM. More details will be provided to the attendees. Things to bring include: water, loppers and handsaws, bugspray, heavy duty gardening gloves, long sleeves and pants, sturdy shoes, hat and eye protection. The required training (safety, identification and control) will be provided to Weed Wrangle participants and a trained botanist will be present to supervise the work. If you don't have gardening tools, reach out to me at wildonesnorthal@gmail.com, and we'll try to accommodate you.

Facebook member chat

As a reminder, if you'd like to join our members-only Facebook group, please search for WildOnes North Alabama Member Chat, where you can post gardening and landscaping questions, coordinate on volunteer efforts, request seeds or plants, or ask for help to identify native and invasive plants.

Wild Ones North AL Member Chat

Our new member-only Facebook group was created to improve communication and coordination for all our educational and volunteering opportunities.

NATIVE PLANT SPOTLIGHT

American persimmon is a relatively common and widespread native, edible fruit that ripens September-November. Photo courtesy of iNaturalist contributor georgezimmer. Many persimmons in my direct area have already fallen and been gobbled up by local wildlife (or people).

American persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*)

American persimmon (*Disopyros virginiana*) is a relatively common tree from the Ebony family that is one of two native persimmon species found in the continental United States (the other being *Diospyros texana*, which is found near the Texas-Mexico border and has purple-black fruit). These two persimmon species are the ONLY representatives of the ebony family native to the Eastern United States (there are additional species native to Hawaii and Puerto Rico). True ebony trees, which were once used to make piano keys, musical instruments, fine furniture and inlay derive primarily from the related *Diospyros ebenum* and related Diospyros species from tropical Asia and Africa. The heartwood of the native persimmon has occasionally been used as a substitute for exotic ebony, but it takes a very long time to produce enough heartwood for fine woodworking. The wood is reported to be termite-resistant, but is otherwise not particularly rot-resistant. Globally, there are more than 700 species of shrubs and trees in the genus *Disopyros,* concentrated primarily in the tropical regions of the world.

On a recent trip to Austin, TX, and Big Bend National Park, I encountered many native Texas persimmons (*Diospyros texana*) for the first time. As you can see, these persimmons are much smaller than the American persimmon, and the growth form and bark is reminiscent of a crepe myrtle. When ripe, the fruits have a smoky-sweet flavor and chocolate brown fruit pulp.

American persimmon grows (variably) from 30-80’ tall and about 20-35’ wide. The trees are generally dioecious, meaning that some trees produce male flowers (and pollen) while other trees produce female

flowers (and fruit); however, monoecious native persimmons are not unknown, and some trees apparently produce male flowers one year and female flowers in other years - very strange behavior indeed! For dioecious specimens, “male” trees are generally taller than “female” trees.

The leaves of American persimmon are untoothed, ovate, alternately arranged, and have acuminate tips. Compare with *Nyssa sylvatica* and *Viburnum rufidulum*. The photo at right is courtesy of iNaturalist contributor heynizar.

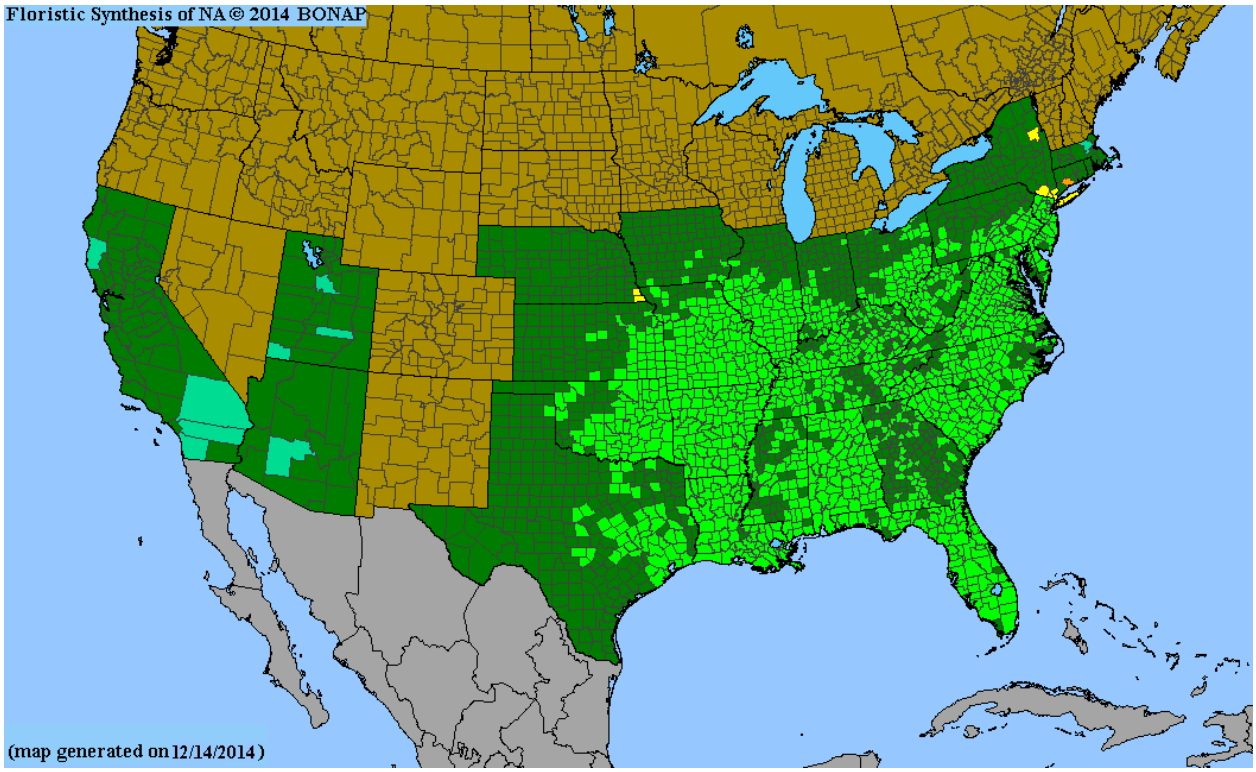
The bark of persimmons is distinctively dark and blocky, often compared to alligator skin. The creamy flowers, borne in Spring, have a fused corolla with 4-5 lobes and are pollinated by native bees (I could find no specific information on which native bees pollinate them) and honeybees. The deciduous glossy leaves are simple, ovate, alternate and lack teeth.

The distinctive, dark gray, deeply furrowed, blocky bark of American persimmon has led some to call it “alligator bark.”

There are at least 2 genetically incompatible “races” of American persimmons and possibly a few ecological varieties across their range. The persimmon races include a “taller” 60 chromosome tetraploid (4n) population common throughout Tennessee, the Carolinas and Florida, and a “shorter” 90 chromosome hexaploid (6n) population common throughout the rest of the geographic range. In Kentucky and Georgia (and probably Alabama) both tetraploid and hexaploid races can be found. Tetraploid and hexaploid persimmons are sexually incompatible, and where they interbreed, they produce seedless fruit. The vast majority of named persimmon cultivars derive from hexaploid populations, but there are also a handful of cultivars from the tetraploid populations and interest in developing tasty seedless fruit. Persimmons trees typically produce fruit in 4-9 years, although grafted trees can fruit in 3 years. American persimmons are adaptable on a wide variety of soils and hydrologies and, while slow to grow, are often quick to colonize old, depleted farm fields.

The name “persimmon” derives from Algonquin *putchamin*, which means “a dry fruit,” while the genus Diospyros literally means “wheat of Zeus” or “divine fruit.” These two names reflect the dual nature of the fruit - astringent and puckering before properly ripening - but a delicious wild foraged fruit when the

time is right. Tannins are found in all fruit of the Ebony family and cause the puckering response when eating unripe fruit. Persimmon fruits reportedly exceed all other fruits in the temperate world in food value - producing 19 out of the 20 required amino acids for humans and are also high in vitamin C. The seeds of American persimmon have reportedly been used as a coffee substitute, and the leaves have antioxidant properties and have been used as teas.



Range of American persimmon Disopyros virginiana. Map courtesy of BONAP.

Both mammals and birds eat the fruit and disperse the seeds, and it is not uncommon in South Huntsville to see coyote scat loaded with persimmon seeds in the Fall. While information is limited, the American persimmon is a host plant for at least seven lepidoptera, including the Luna moth, Cecropia moth, Royal Walnut moth, and Hickory Horned devil (all generalist moth species).

In case you missed it, you can learn much more about growing native persimmons and the available cultivars derived from the native species from Extension agent Holt-Akers Campbell's WildOnes talk. A recording is available on our YouTube channel for your viewing pleasure.

Sources: NC State University, Diospyros virginiana: The American Persimmon, Ploidy level in American persimmon cultivars, NC Extension, A preliminary survey of the native persimmon, Flora of the Southeastern United States, USDA

INVASIVE SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Landscapes covered in English Ivy are common sites in urban (and increasingly wild) parts of the Southeast. This is a picture of the author's landscape before invasive eradication started.

English Ivy / Atlantic Ivy (Hedera helix / Hedera hibernica)

Unlike most of Alabama's invasive species, this week's spotlight will focus on a weed of European origin - English / Atlantic Ivy. There are actually four invasive ivy species in the U.S., and Atlantic Ivy is reported to be even more invasive than English Ivy, but henceforward, all will be referred to as "English Ivy." The difference between the species lies in their number of chromosomes - English Ivy is the diploid species, while Atlantic and Algerian Ivy are tetraploid species (4 chromosome copies) and Persian Ivy is octoploid (8 chromosome copies). Interestingly polyploidy has been reported as one contributing factor to species invasiveness. While kudzu may be "the vine that ate the South," English Ivy is the vine that's eaten Southern gardens - and is spreading rapidly in wild areas.

English Ivy is readily identifiable with its 3-5 lobed, palmate, glossy, evergreen, mottled leaves, smothering habit and propensity to climb up trees. No other native plant remotely resembles it.

English ivy is in the Ginseng family (Araliaceae), which it shares with ginseng, wild Sarsparilla and Devil's walking stick. Like most other invasive plants, it was introduced (and continues to be introduced) as a garden ornamental. Immature plants grow on the ground, and mature plants climb up trees and walls - damaging their supporting structures and toppling small trees. After growing up a support (up to 90 ft!), the plants flower and produce berries that are spread by birds.

English Ivy grew over this juvenile juniper “eastern red cedar” (*Juniperus virginiana*), toppling it in the process, replacing a productive native plant with an unproductive invasive one.

English Ivy is highly adaptable to soil pH and exposure but generally does not thrive in wet or extremely moist soils. It is one of a few invasive species that will thrive in deep shade. Its dense growth harbors rats and slugs that have an adverse impact on human health and surrounding vegetation; anecdotally (and in the author’s experience), English Ivy also hides stagnant water pools and lots of tiger mosquitoes.

Control:

Hand pulling English Ivy is very effective, but the plant will resprout from any roots left in the soil; I used this method in my yard, and it was VERY labor intensive to remove, but I also had virtually no resprouting. Frequent mowing is also reported to be effective, but will take many mowings to starve the roots. When growing around trees, it is best to cut the vine around the base of the tree (all parts above the cut should die) and remove the vine from a 6’ radius around the base of the tree. While herbicide application reportedly can be effective, the timing and formulation details are VERY important. See NC Extension’s website for more detailed information. Further information on identification and control can be found on the USDA’s website.

Some recommended native alternatives:

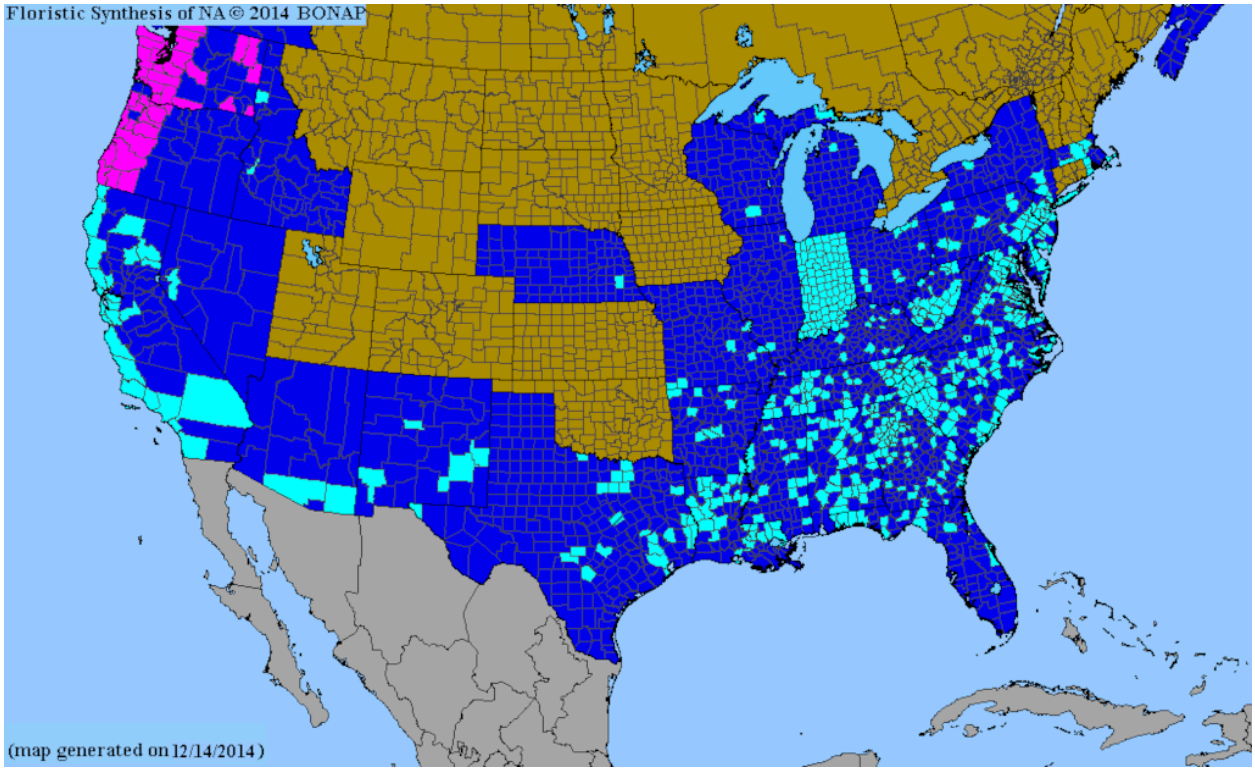
Evergreen to semi-evergreen ground covers: *Mitchella repens* (partridge berry), *Senecio aureus* (Golden ragwort), *Tiarella cordifolia* (Foamflower), *Pachysandra procumbens* (Allegheny spurge) - note, this plant did not survive in my dry, calcareous garden in 2024, *Hexastylis arifolia* and *Hexastylis*

shuttleworthii (Little brown jugs), *Erigeron pulchellus* (Robin's plantain), *Chrysogonum virginianum* (Green and gold), *Sedum ternatum* (woodland stonecrop), *Antennaria plantaginifolia* (Plantain leaf pussytoes), *Polystichum acrostichoides* (Christmas fern)

Vines: *Bignonia capreolata (*Crossvine) - evergreen to semi-evergreen, *Parthenocissus quinquifolia* (Virginia creeper), *Gelsemium sempervirens* (Carolina jessamine) - evergreen, *Decumaria barbara* (climbing hydrangea), and others

If you have additional input on native alternatives to English Ivy that do well in Alabama (or any corrections to the content of the newsletter), please post them to the member chat!

Select sources: UTExtension, Invasive Species Info, Tennessee Native Alternatives, Virginia Native Alternatives, USDA, English Ivy Factsheet, The role of polyploidy in facilitating plant invasions



Map showing the distribution of English Ivy (*Hedera helix*). Its range is almost certainly larger than this map reflects. Image courtesy of BONAP. Maps showing more comprehensive reports from Georgia can be found on EDDMaps.

UPCOMING EVENTS

WILD ONES NORTH ALABAMA

Please see our Events Calendar on the website for a listing of all upcoming events.

Saturday, November 16th (10-11 AM): Our last member-only garden tour for 2024 is the Lewis "Outback" garden tour. Read more on WONA's Events page and contact wildonesnorthal@gmail.com to participate.

Saturday, November 23rd (9 AM - noon): WildOnes first Weed Wrangle is planned to take place on the Mountain Gap trail. Read more on WONA's Events page and contact wildonesnorthal@gmail.com to participate.

We will take a hiatus from our Third Thursday meetings in November and December to make way for the holiday season before reconvening for our next seminar in January.

Thursday, January 16th (6-7:30 PM): Our first monthly Seminar in 2025 will feature Sara Johnson's presentation on "Gardening for Wildlife: Plant-Insect Interactions." We hope to see you there!

READ MORE ON OUR WEBSITE

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