

STATE OF NATURE

Cataloging 3,500
Species

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

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

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

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

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

In the Piedmont Virginian's spring issue, you'll meet her and others from the region who are behind the *Flora of Virginia*. Their enthusiasm for the Commonwealth's plant life is sure to be catching—if you haven't already been bitten!

—Bland Crowder



Claytonia virginica, Eastern Spring-beauty, the "mascot" plant of the Flora Project, named after John Clayton, Colonial botanist; it's seen in the logo and will be on the cover of the newest edition of *Flora*.