

## Flower of the Week at Sopchoppy Depot Park

### Carolina Jessamine

By Lynn Artz, David Roddenberry, & Sandy Tedder

Carolina jessamine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*) is an ever-green twining vine that signals winter's end with its showy daffodil-yellow blooms. The fragrant trumpet-shaped flowers appear in great cascades in late February and early March. The nectar-rich blooms attract hummingbirds, large bees, and butterflies. The seed pods contain flat winged seeds that are relished by warblers, grosbeaks, cardinals, mockinbirds, titmice, chickadees, and thrashers. The shiny green leaves turn purplish in winter. Also called yellow jessamine, this beautiful vine is very adaptable but flowers best in full sun. In the wild, Carolina jessamine grows high into trees. In a yard, it does well on trellises, arbors, and fences. Refrain from planting next to a house, as it is flammable. It is highly deer resistant. Carolina jessamine is blooming now at Sopchoppy Depot Park.



*The different flowering periods among the fabulous suite of Florida native plants used in the Native Gardens of Sopchoppy Depot Park present flowers in nearly all seasons. From the flowering of the Walter's viburnum shrubs beginning in February, through the mid-summer flowering of the Florida-endemic scareweed, through the late fall flowering of Florida tickseed in the pond, visitors can expect to find color. Enjoy a "scroll through the garden" with these Depot Gardens Flowers-of-the-Week as they appeared in a local publication.*



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### Flatwoods Plum

By Lynn Artz, David Roddenberry, & Sandy Tedder

Flatwoods plum (*Prunus umbellata*) is a small deciduous tree with a spectacular display of early spring blooms. The entire crown is covered with delightful white flowers arranged in umbrella-shaped clusters. The half-inch flowers have prominent yellow anthers and may turn pinkish as they age. They attract many pollinators, especially bees. One-inch-long purple fruits, important for birds and other wildlife, follow the blooms. Though edible for humans, the fruit is best used for jelly. Another common name, hog plum, reflects past use as livestock food. This plum grows 12-20 feet tall and nearly as wide in dry to moist, well-drained soil in full to part sun. Unlike its cousin Chickasaw plum (*Prunus angustifolia*), it does not sucker or form thickets. Flatwoods plum is in full bloom now at Sopchoppy Depot Park.



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### Red Maple

By Lynn Artz, David Roddenberry, & Sandy Tedder

Red maple (*Acer rubrum*) is one of the earliest trees to flower and fruit. Hanging clusters of small red flowers appear in January. Clusters of bright-red, two-winged fruit called samaras follow. Each papery wing has an enclosed seed at one end. Samaras spin like whirlybirds when they fall. Red maples are prized for their fall foliage. Yet the early red flowers and samaras bring color – and food – to the gray winter landscape. Their leaves feed the caterpillars of many moths. Red maples prefer moist soil. They grow 40-60' tall with wide shallow roots. Plant far from drain fields, foundations, and driveways. Fast growers, they have weak wood vulnerable to storms. Keep only branches with wide angles from the trunk to reduce breakage. A mature red maple resides at Sopchoppy Depot Park.

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### Snags for Wildlife

By Lynn Artz, David Roddenberry, & Sandy Tedder

Snags are upright dead or dying trees. Leave a dead tree standing if it doesn't threaten your or your neighbor's home, and you will help hundreds of woodland creatures. Many animals make nests in hollow cavities in standing deadwood. Raptors perch on top to spot prey. Snags offer a feast for insect-eating birds like woodpeckers that help to control unwanted insect pests. The cavities woodpeckers make for their own nests later become homes for cavity-nesting birds like chickadees, nuthatches, and titmice that cannot make cavities. When removing a large hazardous tree, consider removing the top and leaving at least 10' of trunk standing. Or simply create a snag from an extra live tree. Keep felled logs on your land to provide habitat and enrich the soil. You'll save money, too.



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### Resurrection Fern

By Lynn Artz, David Roddenberry, & Sandy Tedder

Resurrection fern (*Pleopeltis michauxiana*) is an epiphyte or air plant. Attached to a tree, it gets water and nutrients from the air but does the tree no harm. It is common on live oaks and cabbage palms. This remarkable fern seems to come back to life after appearing dead. During drought, each fern frond curls up on itself exposing scales on the underside that slow dehydration. It can lose up to 97% of its water content and survive. Most plants die after losing 10%. The cell walls of resurrection fern can deform and reform, without rupturing. Further, it can turn off photosynthesis, a recent evolutionary adaptation to drought. When fully hydrated, the unfurled emerald green fronds are about 4" long and provide habitat for insects, spiders, and such. Birds forage among the fronds.



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### Eastern Red Cedar

By Lynn Artz, David Roddenberry, & Sandy Tedder



Eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) is a long-lived evergreen conifer with blue green, overlapping, scale-like leaves. It typically grows 40' tall and 20' wide with a pyramidal to oval shape. The bark matures to cinnamon-red and peels. Like hollies, red cedars have male and female trees. They reach sexual maturity at about 10 years. Small yellow pollen cones at branch tips on male trees shed windborne pollen in winter. Female trees bear clusters of small, round, berrylike cones that mature in fall. The pale blue seed cones are beloved by cedar waxwings and other wildlife. Juniper hairstreak and imperial moth caterpillars feed on the foliage. Eastern red cedars are extremely drought tolerant, hurricane wind resistant, and salt tolerant. The rot-resistant, insect-repelling wood was used for fence posts, pencils, and cedar chests.

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### Crystallofolia

By Lynn Artz, David Roddenberry, & Sandy Tedder



Recent weather induced ice flowers to appear at Sopchoppy Depot Park. Flowerlike ice formations appear at the base of certain wildflowers when temperatures drop below freezing but the ground remains warm. Stems may look dead, but their roots still function. As water drawn from the ground moves up cold-damaged stems (separated, not split), thin ribbons of ice crystals emerge, forming flowerlike petals. Few wildflowers can form ice flowers. White crownbeard, or frostweed, is best known for doing so. Scarlet sage is another as shown last week. Wildflowers that make ice flowers have stems with pronounced xylem rays, vessels that transport sap from the center of the stalk to the periphery. Crystallofolia, meaning ice leaves, is another name for this intriguing physical phenomenon. Ice flowers, no two alike, are short-lived.



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### Sparkleberry

By Lynn Artz, David Roddenberry, & Sandy Tedder

Sparkleberry (*Vaccinium arboreum*) is a lovely semi-evergreen large shrub or small tree with year-round beauty. In spring, many 2–3-inch clusters of showy white bell-shaped flowers dangle for weeks and attract pollinators. Shiny black berries feed wildlife. Small oval leaves turn burgundy in fall and persist. Attractive flaking bark reveals reddish color beneath. Sparkleberry grows 10-25' tall and 4-10' wide in sandy soil and prefers part shade. Also called farkleberry, it is a larval host for striped hairstreak and Henry's elfin butterflies and is important to native bees. The fruit on this tallest of the blueberries is edible but not tasty and is usually left for birds. This underutilized slow-growing, long-lived native is drought tolerant, wind resistant, and easy to maintain. Sparkleberry is displaying its fall color in Sopchoppy Depot Park.



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### Bog White Violet

By Lynn Artz, David Roddenberry, & Sandy Tedder

Bog white violet (*Viola lanceolata*) is a dainty white violet that blooms in wetlands in winter. A small solitary white flower tops a delicate green to reddish-purple stalk. The lowest petal has dark reddish-purple lines that function as nectar guides for pollinating bees. The throats of the 5 petals are tinged greenish yellow. The distinctive long, narrow leaves at the base of the plant explain another common name: lanceleaf violet. This perennial occurs naturally in bogs, along pond and marsh edges, and in other sandy, acidic wetlands. They spread through rhizomes to form colonies. The mildly fragrant flowers attract bees and butterflies. Birds and small mammals eat the seeds. A few bog white violets were added to the moist meadow at Sopchoppy Depot Park last year. A first bloom has appeared.

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### Longleaf Pine

By Lynn Artz, David Roddenberry, & Sandy Tedder

The majestic longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) is a long-lived evergreen conifer that once dominated the southeastern U.S. It now covers about 3% of that range. More than 30 endangered species rely on longleaf pine forests as habitat. Birds and mammals eat the seeds and some the needles. Longleafs, at 100 feet tall, provide roosting sites for migrating birds, nesting sites, and cover. They prefer dry, sandy soil in full sun with no competition. Longleafs first spend several years in a grass stage while developing a taproot up to 12' long. They are drought-tolerant, wind-resistant, tolerate salt spray, and resist pests. Longleaf pines withstand fire and depend on fire to remove competition and expose bare soil for their seeds. The Florida Forest Service will give away longleaf seedlings at Hudson Park on January 18<sup>th</sup>.



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### Coral Honeysuckle

By Lynn Artz, David Roddenberry, & Sandy Tedder

A visit to Sopchoppy Depot Park will likely find the colorful blooms of coral honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) displayed on the front fence. Whorled clusters of slender tubular flowers dangle at the ends of the stems. The striking 2-inch-long flowers are rich scarlet to orange-red on the outside and yellow inside. Bright yellow anthers extend beyond the flower. Also called trumpet honeysuckle, the flowers attract hummingbirds, bumblebees, butterflies, and other long-tongued insect pollinators. The blooms are followed by small inedible but ornamental red berries that appeal to many birds. The caterpillars of spring azure butterflies and snowberry clearwing moths dine on the leaves. Grow this 10-15-foot-long evergreen twining vine on a fence, trellis, or arbor. Few plants bear flowers for as long as this robust native vine.



