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## Wildflower Spot – March 2015

### John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

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# BLOODROOT

*Sanguinaria canadensis*

By Helen Hamilton, *Past-president of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

Bloodroot is one of the earliest, and most interesting flowers in the spring. Sometime in March, a brown tip emerges from the soil with a leaf inside wrapped around the stalk. Delicate white flowers appear above the still-folded leaf. Sometimes two flowering stems will sprout from only one underground stem (rhizome). After the flower is done, the petals drop and the leaf with 5-7 wavy lobes slowly opens. Once expanded, the bright green heavily veined leaf shades the developing fruit. The appearance and actions of the leaf are as interesting as the satiny white flower petals.

Bloodroot is named for the red juice that can be extracted from the rhizome. The root juice or powdered root can destroy tissues and has been used to treat skin conditions such as ringworm, warts, fungal growth, etc. Researchers are investigating the root's value in cancer treatment. An extract has long been used in toothpaste and

mouthwash to fight plaque and gingivitis, a use now sanctioned by USFDA. Native Americans used the juice as warpaint and to dye fabrics.

Bloodroot is found in moist but well-drained woodland soil in all but a few counties in the state of Virginia, the range extending throughout the mid to eastern states. Populations of bloodroot are somewhat limited to soils containing high amounts of calcium from fossil shells. Growing 6-8 inches tall in part shade, this plant is one of the spring ephemerals, appearing for only a short time in early spring. Bloodroot will self-sow to form larger colonies each year. The plant goes dormant in mid-summer, and is a good companion to ferns which emerge later in the spring. ❖



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**Photo:** Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) taken by Helen Hamilton  
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