

BUTTERFLY PEA

Clitoria mariana

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

Blooming June through July, Butterfly Pea has beautiful, 2" long flowers, mostly solitary, and pale blue-lilac with darker veins. The stems are twining, bearing compound leaves with 3 broadly lance-shaped leaflets. This species is easily confused with *Centrosema virginianum* which has a calyx (tube around the base of the flower) of slender lobes, not short teeth.

This plant prefers acidic soils in wooded areas and clearings and is drought tolerant. Growing in almost every county in Virginia, Butterfly Pea ranges from New Jersey west to Missouri and Oklahoma and south to Florida and Texas.

The shape of the flowers has inspired the name of this genus. Different species of *Clitoria*

have been used to enhance fertility, to control menstrual discharge, to treat gonorrhoea, and as a sexual stimulant. Users of the plant as folk medicine may follow an ancient principle called the Doctrine of Signatures, a belief that plant structures that resemble portions of the human body indicate their ability to provide remedies for those body parts. ❖

