

---

## Wildflower Spot – November 2016

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

---

## VIRGINIA CREEPER

*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*

By Helen Hamilton, *President of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

This native perennial is a woody vine that will climb or trail along the ground. It is often confused with poison ivy, which has three leaflets, but Virginia Creeper has five leaflets. The species name *quinquefolia* refers to its five compound leaflets, arranged like the palm of a hand. All spring and summer the vine is covered with bright green leaves that turn brilliantly red in late summer and fall.

Tiny and inconspicuous flowers appear in late spring, followed by blue-black “berries” (drupes) that are fed upon by a wide variety of songbirds during fall and winter.

A vigorous climber, Virginia Creeper fastens onto wood or masonry by aerial rootlets on the stems. When well grown, it will be very difficult to remove and damage to walls and bricks could occur. It can be an excellent cover for trellises, arbors, fences, and walls, and once established will grow quickly. Trimming is necessary to keep it away from windows and roofs.

Virginia Creeper grows well in any soil, including slightly salty, moist to dry, and prefers part shade. The thick foliage provides cover for small animals, and the vines are used by birds for perches and

nesting places. As a groundcover it will control soil erosion in shaded areas and is a great choice for holding soil in place on slopes. A member of the grape (*Vitaceae*) family, Virginia Creeper is found in mature forests in nearly every county of Virginia, and throughout the southern, midwestern and eastern half of the U.S.

The caterpillars of sphinx moths feed on the leaves and birds feed on the fruits, but to humans, the berries can be poisonous if eaten in sufficient quantity. The leaves are astringent and diuretic – Native Americans use a tea from the leaves for swellings, wounds and jaundice.

Cultivars are available in the nursery trade with smaller leaves or color variegations on the leaves. ❖



---

**Photo:** Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) taken by Helen Hamilton  
For more information about native plants visit [www.vnps.org](http://www.vnps.org).