

A New Flora for the Old Dominion—and not a century too soon!

The 3,164 plant species native to or naturalized in Virginia are the focus of the much-awaited *Flora of Virginia*, a 1,554-page manual of the plants of the state published in December 2012 by the Foundation of the Flora of Virginia (Richmond, VA) and the Botanical Research Institute of Texas Press (Fort Worth).

This is Virginia's first flora since the "Flora Virginica" was published in Holland in 1762!

The flora is a tool for botanical and ecological research, education and conservation. It was produced by the Flora of Virginia Project, with important partnership support from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. The manual was written by **Alan S. Weakley** (Director of the UNC Herbarium, a division of the North Carolina Botanical Garden, and adjunct professor of biology at UNC—Chapel Hill), J. Christopher Ludwig (chief biologist with the Natural Heritage Program of the Virginia Department of Conservation Resources [DCR]), and John F. Townsend (staff botanist with the Natural Heritage Program of the Virginia DCR).

The term "flora" can refer to the plant life of a region or to a book that describes the region's plant life. The original "Flora Virginica" was written in Latin with a single illustration—a map of Virginia. It was based in large part on plant specimens collected and descriptions written by John Clayton, a naturalist who was clerk of Gloucester County, Va.

"The essential purpose of the 'Flora of Virginia' is to enable identification of plants in the commonwealth," says Ludwig. "Each species is described in fine detail, and other information is presented, such as flowering and fruiting times, the plant's status in the state and the characteristics of its habitat."

The new flora features 1,400 pen-and-ink plant illustrations, commissioned for the book, by botanical artists Lara Gastinger, Michael Terry, and Roy Fuller. Plants are organized by family (such as the grasses, the orchids, the pines, the mints, the asters). Users are guided through the task of identifying a plant by the flora's keys, which help them winnow down the possibilities through a stepwise process.

"Virginia has a richer plant life than most other states,"

comments Ludwig. "There are many reasons for this—the diversity of topography from the coast to the Appalachian Plateau, the patchwork of soil and rock types that are the basis of plant habitats, and the fact that many northern plants reach their southern limits in Virginia, and many southern ones reach their northern limits here."

Special chapters present the history of botanical exploration in Virginia, the processes by which the state's plant communities have developed over time, and 50 "botanizing hotspots" featuring the best areas to explore and learn about Virginia's plant life.

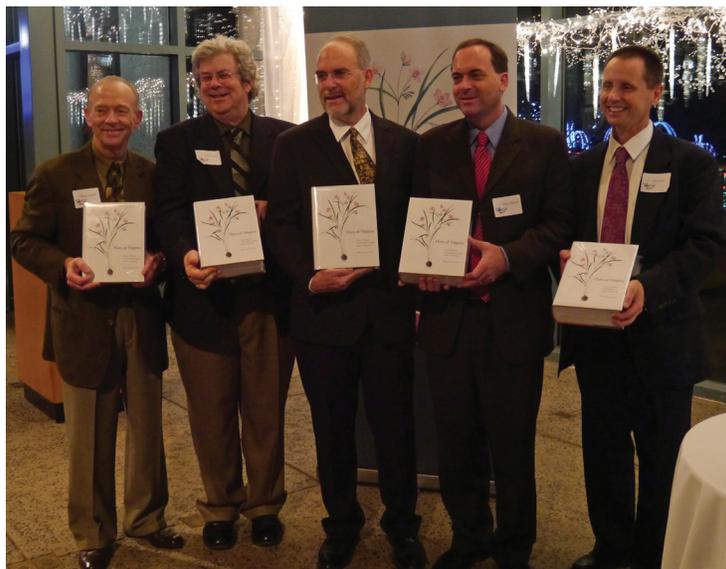
Production of the flora took 11 years and was made possible by the support of individual donors, grants, and flora partners: the Virginia DCR, the Virginia Native Plant Society, the Virginia Botanical Associates, the Virginia Academy of Science, and the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden.

The flora was published by the Botanical Research Institute of Texas Press in Fort Worth. "We are proud to see this product come to fruition and to have been able to realize it with an eye to conservation," says Tom Smith, DCR's natural heritage director and a member of the Flora of Virginia Project's board. "The flora is going to be important to botanists, ecologists, planners and environmental consultants in finding, managing, conserving and restoring our native plant communities for generations to come." It already has been designated the official textbook for this spring's plant taxonomy course at James Madison University.

Weakley points out that "the book will be very useful in adjacent states, including North Carolina. Only in the pinelands of the southeastern part of North Carolina, will the Flora of Virginia

be significantly incomplete, because of the many southern species at their northern range limit there. I'll be adopting it for my Local Flora classes" (UNC-CH's Biology 272).

To order a copy of the "Flora of Virginia," visit the Flora Project's website, www.floraofvirginia.org, and click the red button. The price is \$79.99, plus \$6.50 shipping. Copies will also be available at the Garden Shop at the North Carolina Botanical Garden.



Barney Lipscomb (publisher), Bland Crowder (editor), Alan Weakley, Johnny Townsend, Chris Ludwig (co-authors), at official release of the *Flora* at Meadowlark Botanical Garden, Vienna, Va.