
Wildflower Spot – August 2013

John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

COMMON ARROWHEAD

Sagittaria latifolia

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

Growing over 3 feet tall, this perennial has large fleshy leaves mostly shaped like arrowheads, highly variable in size. Both the leaves and flowering stalks are 2 feet long and contain a milky sap. The flowers are in whorls, with 3 white petals, the upper whorls with numerous yellow stamens. The leaves of Bulltongue Arrowhead (*S. lancifolia* ssp. *media*) reflect the name, as they are broadly lance-shaped, without the projecting pointed lobes at the base.

Common Arrowhead is abundant in marshes, ponds and streams across Virginia, ranging from Nova Scotia and Quebec to British Columbia, south to tropical America. Bulltongue Arrowhead occurs in Virginia only in the counties of the Coastal Plain, and is found near

the coast from Delaware to Florida and Texas and south. Blooms July-October.

The genus name is from Latin *sagitta*, “an arrow”, referring to the leaves. The species name *latifolia* means “broad-leaved.” Another common name “Duck Potato” refers to the tubers produced on the ends of underground stems that are dug up and eaten by waterfowl. Native Americans roasted or boiled the tubers; several days were required to cook them properly -- the “potatoes”, deer meat and maple sugar made a very tasty dish. ❖



Photo: Common Arrowhead (*Sagittaria latifolia*) taken by Jan Newton
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