
Wildflower Spot – January 2008

John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

WITCH HAZEL

Hamamelis virginiana

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

A crooked, multi-trunked, low-branching shrub or small tree, 15-20 feet tall, witchhazel is grown mostly for its winter flowers. Common witchhazel blooms after the leaves fall, usually in deep winter. Depending upon the location, blooming occurs November through February. The strap-like yellow blossoms are often the only color in a snowy landscape. Vernal witchhazel, *Hamamelis vernalis*, produces coral flowers in February.

Witchhazel leaves are aromatic, and in the fall show yellow, orange or purple colors. This plant likes rich, acid soil and moist to dry drainage. Seeds are eaten by ruffed grouse and squirrels. Witchhazel is pollinated by winter moths that fly when temperatures are above freezing. Leaf litter protects the moths during cold nights.

A widely used medicinal herb, the North American Indians used witchhazel bark to heal wounds, treat tumors and for eye problems.



The bark is astringent and hemostatic; a homeopathic remedy is made from fresh bark and used to treat nosebleeds, hemorrhoids and varicose veins. The bottled witchhazel is a steam distillate, used as an external application to bruises, sore muscles, and inflammations. ❖

Photo: Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*) taken by Helen Hamilton
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.