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**Wildflower Spot – August 2014**  
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

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## ARROW ARUM

*Peltandra virginica*

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

In early summer, the most conspicuous part of this plant are the arrowhead-shaped fleshy leaf-blades, up to 10 inches long. They are on long stalks from a tuberous root. In late summer and early fall the leaves begin to fade, becoming dormant over the winter.

The flowers are similar to other members of the Arum Family - Jack-in-the-Pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*) Skunk Cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*) and Golden Club (*Orontium aquaticum*). A tapering, leaf-like bract (spathe) with wavy edges is curled around a yellowish rod-like spike (spadix). This is the reproductive part – the female flowers are at the base of the spadix with the male flowers above, all tiny and inconspicuous.

In late summer the flowers become a club-shaped appendage at the end of the flower stalk lying in wet ground. Inside are numerous black-green berries which spill out and are primarily disbursed by water.

Growing in swamps and shallow waters, the plant survives with special tissue that allows oxygen from its leaves to reach down to the roots. Arrow Arum requires wet soils and is easily grown in standing water to 6 inches deep or in consistently moist boggy soils, in full sun to part shade. It occurs in the Coastal Plain and



Piedmont region of Virginia and ranges from southern Maine to Florida, west to Michigan, Missouri and Texas. Spoonflower (*Peltandra sagittifolia*) is similar, but with a white spathe, and does not grow in our area. The range of spoonflower is from eastern North Carolina south to Florida and Louisiana.

The genus name comes from the Greek *pelte*, “small shield,” and *aner*, “stamen,” referring to the shield-like contour of the stamens. While the roots are rich in starches, they contain crystals of calcium oxalate which cause intense burning. Capt. John Smith said “Raw is no better than poison,” and “it will prickle and grate the throat extremely” unless roasted, sliced, and dried in the sun. The name “Tuckahoe,” was used by the Algonquin who ate the plant after prolonged cooking or drying which destroys the crystals. ❖

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**Photo:** Arrow Arum (*Peltandra virginica*) taken by Phillip Merritt  
For more information about native plants visit [www.vnps.org](http://www.vnps.org).