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**Wildflower Spot – October 2011**  
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

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## COMMON HACKBERRY

*Celtis occidentalis*

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

The bark of this small to large tree is distinctive – it is gray to light brown, smooth with corky warts or ridges. The crown is rounded and the branches spreading or slightly drooping. Alternate on the twigs, the leaves are long-pointed and coarse-toothed with mostly uneven bases.

They are rough on the surface, over four inches long, and have teeth on most of the margin. In early fall, the leaves are often covered with large, pimple-like galls caused by tiny jumping plant lice. In early spring, very small, yellowish-green flowers appear in small clusters, followed by small, orange to purple fruit on stalks at the leaf bases.

Common Hackberry grows in moist soils, usually along streams, and ranges from Canada south to Virginia and west to Oklahoma. The tree grows in most counties in Virginia. Flowers April-May; fruits October-November.

The common name apparently was derived from “hagberry,” meaning “marsh berry,” a name used in Scotland for a cherry. The wood is similar to ash and is used for fencing and cheap furniture. Branches of this and other hackberries may become deformed by bushy growths called witches’-brooms, produced by mites and fungi. Fruits (“sugarberries”) are eaten by many birds, including bobwhite quail, pheasant, woodpeckers, and wild turkey. Common Hackberry is a larval host for five species of butterflies, including Mourning Cloak. ❖



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**Photo:** Hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*) taken by Helen Hamilton  
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