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**Wildflower Spot – June 2010**  
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

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## LIZARD'S TAIL

*Saururus cernuus*

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

These white nodding spikes of tiny, fragrant flowers growing in wet places are instantly recognizable. The heart-shaped leaves grow beneath a flower spike on stems 2-4 feet high. The foliage when crushed has a pleasant aroma like sassafras.

Found in coastal and piedmont regions of Virginia, and most states of eastern U.S. and Canada, Lizard's Tail requires wet soil and partial shade, and is common in swamps, shaded marshes and stream margins. The plant can tolerate saturated soils with up to 4 inches of water.

Lizard's Tail is a great spreading groundcover for moist soils, shallow water, and containers. The plant is well-suited for wetland gardens, bogs or pond areas, and is deer resistant. Blooming June-September, it will colonize large areas. It is both wind- and insect-pollinated.

The young shoots and leaves provide forage for cattle and sheep, but when overeaten this plant may be toxic, and should not be ingested by humans. The flowers attract birds, especially wood ducks.

From the Greek *sauros* (lizard) and *oura* (tail), both the common name and the genus name refer to the long, finger-like spike of flowers that appear during the summer months.

Containing several novel compounds with sedative effects, American Indians used a tea from the whole plant for general illnesses, and the root as a poultice for wounds and inflammations. ❖



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**Photo:** Lizard's Tail (*Saururus cernuus*) by Helen Hamilton, taken in the Ellipse Garden in Freedom Park, Williamsburg Botanical Garden  
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