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and

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### Our Native Shrubs and Vines

IN searching for information concerning the shrubs and vines native to Western North Carolina several authorities have been consulted and much data has been checked over, but a bulletin issued by the headquarters of the Nantahala national forest in Franklin seems to be more complete and more pleasingly arranged than any other that could be found, therefore it is given below as prepared by the author:

#### SHRUBS AND VINES OF THE NANTAHALA NATIONAL FOREST

By

JAMES B. CARTWRIGHT, JUNIOR FORESTER

From almost any point in our rugged Nantahala Forest discerning eyes can rove over high mountains, steep slopes, deep, narrow coves, and see strips of darker green where hemlocks and white pines follow to their very sources the numerous branches and streams. In sharp contrast are the ridges and slopes covered with oaks and chestnuts or perhaps dotted with pitch pines. These mark to the distant eye the wide range of habitat this region affords. Conditions vary from roadside rock cliffs, swamps or stream banks to dry mountain tops. Altitude ranges from six hundred feet to more than five thousand feet.

In the same extravagant style which nature manifested in preparing the setting she has clothed it with a verdure of amazing complexity. Trees, shrubs, vines, wild flowers, ferns, mosses and lichens all occur in a multiplicity of species.

One of the most interesting of these groups are the native shrubs. Many of them are not only prized as ornamentals, but furnish edible fruit, game food and shelter, medicinal and other products. All of them have a natural beauty of flower, foliage or form.

One of our most common and beautiful shrubs is the great laurel or rhododendron. Along the course of almost every stream on this forest may be found large quantities of this valuable species. Its thickets have probably hidden more moonshine distilleries than all other plants combined. In June and July it bears clusters of bell-shaped, pale-rose or nearly white flowers. The thick, evergreen leaves make it attractive the year round. A smaller and less important species, the mountain rose bay, is also common on moist slopes.

The azaleas, perhaps better known as honeysuckles, are also members of this group. The most common of these are the purple or pink azalea and the flame-colored azalea. Their beauty is well known to every lover of nature. The former species is quite fragrant but the latter is not. The azaleas are not evergreen.

A relative of the rhododendrons often mingling in thickets with them is the evergreen mountain laurel or ivy. In May and June its beautiful flowers are in evidence on nearly every slope. This shrub is planted extensively in parks and lawns.

In scattered patches on moist hillsides is to be found the *Andromeda floribunda*. Its creamy white flowers in crowded clusters occurring in April and May are most attractive.

The dog hobble or fetter bush is a strictly stream-bank species. Its flowers are similar to those of *Andromeda*. The weak stems and habit of growth cause it to form tangled thickets that even a dog has difficulty in forcing a way through. Funeral wreaths are made from the branches which are closely lined with the sharp-pointed, evergreen leaves.

Less important ornamentals of the heath family are the mountain sweet pepperbush or *Clethra* and the he-huckleberry or maleberry.

Among our best known flowering shrubs is the granddaddy gray beard or fringe-tree. This tall shrub bears white flowers in drooping clusters resembling an old man's beard. The fruit is purple with a whitish bloom. Fringe-tree is very ornamental in cultivation. It is quite common on some parts of the forest.

Also extensively cultivated in lawns and parks is our native sweet-shrub or Carolina allspice. During April and May it bears many dark maroon red flowers with narrow incurved petals. All parts of this plant when cut or crushed have the odor of ripe strawberries.

The Brook Evonymous or strawberry bush, rather common on rich, moist soils, is frequently cultivated. The twigs are slightly four-sided and green in color. The fruit is crimson red when ripe and somewhat resembles a strawberry.

A less common but highly prized ornamental is the mountain *Stewartia*. The large white flowers develop in May and June. Usually it occurs on wooded slopes and along streams; seldom on roadsides.

One of our showiest large shrubs is the flowering dogwood. Its habit of growth as well as its beautiful white flowers make it an attractive ornamental. The irregularly divergent branches with up-curved twigs suggest hands extended palm upwards, with fingers slightly curved as though asking alms. A smaller and less common relative is the alternate-leaved dogwood. Its leaves, bark and flowers give it a high esthetic value. In swamps and on lake and stream banks grows the silky or swamp dogwood, a less important species.

On rich mountain slopes may be found the mock orange with its showy white flowers. It is similar to the commonly cultivated species except that the flowers are odorless.

Common on rocky banks is the wild hydrangea, known locally as sevenbark. Its flowers are borne in flat-topped clusters, the fragrant, fertile ones in the center and the showy sterile ones around the margin.

Another of our native shrubs often found in cultivation is the false indigo or *Amorpha*. This is a tall shrub with compound leaves and violet-colored flowers crowded in narrow spire-like clusters. Belonging to the same family and often found growing in the same localities as the *Amorpha* is the bristly locust or rose acacia. The twigs and

stems of this shrub are densely covered with bristly hairs. It bears large rose-pink flowers in drooping clusters.

The sumacs are familiar to nearly everyone. The staghorn sumac often reaches small tree size. Its wood is used in manufacture of souvenirs. The young shoots are used in the North to make spiles for tapping maple trees. The bark and leaves are rich in tannin. Smaller species are the smooth sumac and the dwarf sumac. These shrubs are all more or less common in cultivation. They grow in various conditions and localities, frequently in thickets along roadsides.

In damp, rich woods may be found two shrub-like relatives of the Christmas holly. These, the mountain holly and winterberry, both shed their leaves in winter. However, they bear clusters of red berries in late fall that persist well into the winter.

An interesting shrub of moist woodlands is the spicewood. The yellow of its small flowers is one of the first colors of spring. The leaves and fruit possess the odor of gun benzoic when crushed, although that is not a product of this shrub. The fruit is berry-like and red in color, ripening in September. A beverage may be made by steeping the twigs in hot water. A few twigs thrown in with wild meat while cooking will kill the strong, wild flavor. It is said that where this shrub is found growing the permanent water level is within six feet of the surface.

A not uncommon shrub or small tree of moist fertile soils is the Hercules club, devil's walking stick or angelica tree. Although it is cultivated to some extent as an ornamental, I do not believe its value as such is appreciated. The stem and branches are covered with hard, slightly curved spines. The twice-compound leaves grow to three feet long by two and one half feet wide. The flowers are small, cream-white in large erect clusters sometimes twenty or more inches long. The fruit is a black berry.

In dry and rocky woodlands and along roadsides is sometimes seen dense patches of the bush honey-suckle. This shrub is a smaller relative of cultivated weigela. The flowers occurring from June to August are at first pale yellow, turning to deep yellow, scarlet, crimson, or even maroon.

A rather attractive, low shrub of dry, sterile and mostly sandy soils is the sweet fern. Its leaves are fern-like and sweet-scented. Their odor is quite noticeable to anyone walking through the thickets commonly formed by this shrub.

Another low shrub found in dry woodlands and along roadsides nearly everywhere on the forest is the New Jersey tea or red root. It bears clusters of pretty white flowers in July. The roots are said to have medicinal value. During the American Revolution the leaves of this plant were used for tea.

Two attractive shrubs of the rose family are the red and black chokeberries. The former and more common one is found in moist woods and swamps. The white or reddish flowers are borne in clusters at the tips of the twigs. The fruit is berry-like, dark-red, astringent. The black chokeberry resembles the red but is smaller and bears very dark purple or black fruit. It grows on Rabun Bald, Georgia, possibly the most southern point of its range.

The maple-leaved arrowweed or dockmackie occurs on rocky slopes. It bears white flowers in flat-topped clusters. The fruit is dark blue. The leaves, as the name implies, are maple-like.

The wild-raisin, sweet viburnum and black haw are three similar species with flowers and fruit much like the maple-leaved arrowweed in appearance. The fruit of these three, however, is sweet and edible. The black haw is cultivated extensively as an ornamental. The sweet viburnum is a stream bank species while the wild-raisin is more frequently found in swampy situations.

The common elderberry, found growing in rich, moist lowlands, is quite attractive when in flower and when the fruit is ripe. The white flowers occur in broad, flat-topped clusters. The fruit is a cluster of small black-purple berries. These are used for making wine, pies and jelly. The stems and twigs have large pith and are used by boys to make whistles, pop-guns and squirt guns.

A rare shrub on this forest is the American barberry. It has an unusual appearance due to the triple spines and bristle toothed leaves. The fruit is a red berry. The flowers, wood and inner bark are yellow.

A large shrub or small tree found along stream banks in rich soil is the papaw. It is not only ornamental due to its dull purple flowers and rather large leaves but also it bears edible fruit. The latter resembles a small banana but the seeds and taste are similar to the persimmon.

Much of the present national forest land was once in cultivation. Scattered all over the forest are old abandoned home sites. On many of them such shrubs as rose of Sharon or *Althea*, coralberry, lilac, snowball and roses have spread over considerable areas.

Some of the woody vines which have an esthetic value are the Japanese and coral honeysuckles, grapevines, cross vine, trumpet creeper and Virginia creeper.

The Japanese honeysuckle was introduced as an ornamental and has become a pest in some sections. The flowers are white to yellow and quite fragrant. This vine is now proving quite valuable in preventing erosion of banks and terraces.

The coral honeysuckle or woodbine is a beautiful climbing vine with clusters of trumpet shaped flowers, bright red on the outside and yellow within. The fruit is an orange-red berry. The leaves near the tips of the twigs are united around the stem at their bases. This vine is frequently seen in cultivation.

The wild grapes are common everywhere on various soils. They are quite ornamental and are eaten by animals and humans too. Sometimes, however, they do rather serious damage to timber.

The cross vine is rather common locally along streams. It is a tree climber with orange-colored flowers. A cross-section of the stem shows a cross through the center. The pores of this vine are open between nodes. Boys sometimes cut out these internodes, dry them and then smoke them like cigars.

A commonly cultivated vine found along streams is the trumpet creeper. It bears trumpet-shaped, orange-colored or red flowers in August and September.

The Virginia creeper is found in woods on tree trunks, rock cliffs and slopes and is occasionally planted around porches.

A tall shrub or small tree of spreading form is the witch-hazel. It bears small yellow flowers in the fall at the same time its fruit ripens. When mature, the woody capsules split suddenly from the top and forcibly expel the seeds. A lotion is obtained from the sap. Natives of this forest sometimes peel the wood of witch hazel into curled shavings so thin as to be translucent and use them to fill bedticks. These are said to be, "soft again as a feather bed."

An important game-food shrub or small tree is the chinquapin. It is a miniature of the chestnut. The nuts are eaten mostly by squirrels. The American and beaked hazelnuts are both important for their fruit which is not only eaten by rodents, but has a market value as human food.

Squirrels relish also the fruit of the flowering dogwood. Wild grape and muscadines are among the favorite foods for raccoons and opossums.

Blueberries and huckleberries are probably our most important shrubs from the standpoint of edible fruit. Many thousand acres of timber land have been burned in the past to improve the crop of these berries.

Gooseberries do not occur to any great extent on this forest. This is fortunate for although many people relish the berries, these shrubs are quite harmful in that they are the alternate host plants for the white pine blister rust. This disease threatens to wipe out the white

pinus in some portions of the North and West where gooseberries are abundant.

A not uncommon shrub, frequently parasitic on the roots of the sweet shrub, is the oil-nut or buffalo-nut. Its dark-green leaves are not unattractive.

Probably the most feared and despised shrubs we have are the poison sumac, poison ivy and poison oak. The poison sumac, our most poisonous species, occurs in swampy situations. It reaches small tree size. The poison ivy is a sub-erect, sometimes climbing, shrub, which occurs abundantly in hedgerows, thickets and woods. Poison oak grows erect in dryer sites. Some people are immune to the poison of these plants, others become severely irritated from very slight exposure.

Hiking on many parts of this forest is made difficult the year round by green briars, sawbriars, bamboo briars and the like. These thorny pests are the ruin of many clothes and the cause of many a severe scratch. They also damage the sensitive new shoots of young trees by hanging in them and choking them with their tendrils.

The economic importance of native shrubs may be small, compared with that of our main forest crop, the timber trees, but their influence on the recreational value of our forest can scarcely be overestimated.

### Letter-Press

Editor Franklin Press:

I note with regret the report of a fatal airplane accident in Macon county. One familiar with the aircraft industry, and a pilot of sorts myself, is not surprised to learn that both the airplane and the pilot involved were unlicensed.

North Carolina is one of the few states left that does not require that all interstate operations conform with the regulations of the bureau of air commerce for interstate operations. (Perhaps there are such state laws now, but if they are not enforced in the most outlying parts of the state, of what value are they?)

For the protection of life and property, for the protection of reputable operators and for the advancement of aeronautics and the benefits received therefrom, there should be set up a state agency for the control of aircraft operations within the state, over which the department of commerce has no control.

This agency should be organized so that it is completely independent of politics and political appointments. It should not be a licensing board but should simply require that all pilots and planes within the state be licensed as capable and airworthy by the department of commerce, and have authority to enforce such requirements. It should also have power to prohibit commercial operations from inadequate landing fields and by such an instrument, protect the "fixed base" operator who has considerable investment and sense of public responsibility.

County authorities should not have powers of their own but should cooperate with the enforcement of the state laws.

Funds for the maintenance of such a state agency could be adequately had by diverting the gasoline tax that is paid by commercial operators and private owners.

Fifteen years ago, North Carolina launched a program to connect every county seat with every adjoining county seat by a paved highway. That foresight has meant more to the development of our state than any other one factor.

Now is the opportunity for North Carolina to launch a program for an airport for every county seat and not 15, but five years from now, the investment will prove equally as valuable as our highway program of 15 years ago.

Private and commercial aviation has made more advancement in the last year than in the five years previous.

Five years from now it will be as easy and safe for the vacationer to commute from New York to Franklin by plane as it is now for him to commute from Atlanta by automobile.

Will Macon county have the facilities to receive such visitors? Or will she only have an occasional outlaw plane and pilot bootlegging rides?

(signed) F. B. Johnson,  
West Trenton, N. J.