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**Wildflower Spot – December 2012**  
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

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## BLACK WALNUT

*Juglans nigra*

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

Black Walnut is a large tree with a straight trunk and broadly ascending branches. The dark brown bark is deeply furrowed into scaly ridges. Compound leaves are alternate along the stem, with 9-21 long, pointed leaflets which are covered with soft hairs beneath. They are dark green, turning yellow in autumn, and when crushed, have a spicy scent. Small, greenish catkins (flowers) in clusters are usually drooping and fuzzy. The large fruits are spherical with green or brown husks; the thick-shelled inner layer covers one sweet edible seed.

Native to nearly every county in Virginia, Black Walnut grows in moist, well-drained soils from Vermont to Minnesota and south to Georgia and Texas. Flowers appear April through June and the tree forms fruits in October and November. In winter the large fruits on the ground signal the presence of this tree nearby, since the leaves are gone by the end of November.

This is one of our most valuable and beautiful native trees. Heavy, strong, durable heartwood is easily worked and in great demand for



veneers, cabinetmaking, interior finishing, and gunstocks. Large trees have been almost exterminated in some regions. Since colonial days and before, Black Walnut has provided edible nuts and a blackish dye made from the husks. The delicious nuts must be gathered early, before squirrels and mice can consume them. Tomatoes, apples, and other species may not survive near large walnut trees. ❖

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**Photo:** Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*) taken by Helen Hamilton  
For more information about native plants visit [www.vnps.org](http://www.vnps.org).