
Wildflower Spot – September 2017

John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

MEADOW-BEAUTY

Rhexia mariana/virginica

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

Now blooming heavily in roadside ditches, the color of this unusual four-petaled flower ranges from almost white to deep pink, with prominent, bent yellow anthers. In damp soil and full sun Meadow Beauty blooms from July through September. Although found in wet acidic spots in the wild, this low-growing plant does well in an average soil that is irrigated during extreme drought. Even after its long bloom season ends, the plant remains attractive as the numerous urn-shaped seedpods retain their rosy color.

Rhexia is the only genus of the mostly tropical Melastomataceae family found in the North. Both species are found in our area. *Rhexia mariana* is blooming in the Williamsburg Botanical Garden, and along the ditches of the entrance roadway. The flower is paler in color than *Rhexia virginica*, with winged stems and vivid rose-purple petals.

This plant is common along roadsides, the edges of fields and meadows, and can often be

found for sale in local nurseries or online. It overwinters as a sweet potato-like tuber. The seedpods are somewhat sticky, and may become attached to the fur and feathers of passing animals, which carry the seeds to new locations.

Pollen in the bright yellow, curved anthers can only be released by bumblebees that visit the flowers and perform “buzz pollination” – the bees vibrate their thoracic muscles near the anthers, opening pores to release pollen, which is deposited on the pistils of neighboring flowers. This unusual method of pollination also occurs in tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, cranberries, and blueberries. Greenhouses that grow these plants have resident bumblebees to produce their harvest. ❖



Photo: Meadow-beauty (*Rhexia mariana*) taken by Helen Hamilton
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.