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## Wildflower Spot – March 2012

### John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

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## VIRGINIA PINE

*Pinus virginiana*

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

Although once considered a “forest weed” and called “Scrub Pine,” Virginia Pine quickly reforests abandoned and cutover lands and has become a principal source of pulpwood and lumber in the southeast. Commonly a small or medium-sized tree, a specimen 114 feet tall has been recorded. Long branches are often drooping, forming a ragged, flattened crown. The lower branches are long persistent even when dead.

Reddish-brown bark is thin and scaly, with shallow fissures. The needles are in 2's, to 3 inches long, stiff, twisted, dark green, persisting 3-4 years. The cones are somewhat prickly, maturing the second year and remaining on the tree for several years after the seeds are released. Greenish male cones are in clusters at the tips of branches, while the female cones sit upright on the branches. This tree is wind-pollinated, blooming April through May.

Virginia Pine grows best on clay and loamy acidic soils, well-drained, especially on abandoned farm fields. This tree occurs in every county in Virginia and ranges from southern New York to northern Florida and east Texas.

The Cherokee found medicinal uses for various plant parts and used the needles or gum to scent soap.

The seeds are an important food source for many small mammals and birds, including the Northern Bobwhite. Because older trees contain much softened wood, Virginia Pine offers good nesting sites for woodpeckers. ❖



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**Photo:** American Holly (*Ilex opaca*) taken by Helen Hamilton  
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