

**Virginia Living Museum**  
**Virginia's Botanical History, 1607 to Today**

This article appeared in the September 2005 GCV *Journal* and was submitted by the Huntington Garden Club in its application for Common Wealth Award funding.

The Virginia Living Museum in Newport News will celebrate "Jamestown 2007" with the installation of an exciting permanent botanical exhibit, Virginia's Botanical History, 1607 to Today. An introductory sign will describe Virginia as it appeared in 1607 when the colonists first arrived to see vast forests, swamps, rivers and the Chesapeake Bay. There will be display gardens of native plants used by the indigenous peoples for food and medicine, gardens of plants that the colonists used for survival and gardens of species the colonists collected, named and introduced to European botanists and gardeners.

In addition, the 2007 landscape will be presented showing man's impact on the land for the past 400 years. It will include plants introduced to Virginia as well as descriptions of endangered and extinct species. The gardens will demonstrate how the use of the land and the use of native plants changed the landscape of Virginia. By viewing the gardens it is hoped that visitors will be encouraged to consider the use of native plants.

The Virginia Living Museum provides environmental education to 140,000 school children each year through more than 2,700 SOL-correlated classroom pro-grams held at the Museum and offered as outreach programs in schools across the Commonwealth. The Huntington Garden Club is proud to support this remarkable facility with funding and with volunteers.

Virginia's Botanical History, 1607 to Today, an educational living exhibit, will open in April 2007, named "Horticulture Month" by the organizers of the "Jamestown 2007" celebration. Hardscaping and plantings must begin soon, and therefore the Huntington Garden Club is requesting financial assistance for this project through the 2005 Common Wealth Award. The project meets all Garden Club of Virginia's areas of interest: conservation, beautification, horticulture, preservation and most especially education.

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## The Virginia Garden at the Virginia Living Museum

The following article was extracted from the Virginia Living Museum's website and describes the Common Wealth Award project. <https://thevlm.org/explore/exhibits/virginia-garden/>.

The Virginia Garden highlights 400 years of Virginia's botanical history. See the native plant species that were present when the first settlers arrived at Jamestown, the flora that was introduced to Virginia colonists by Native Americans and the plants that helped the settlers survive those first critical years. The garden also displays species introduced by the colonists and some native species that were exported to England to be used in gardens there. Learn about an early colonial botanist who was key to identifying and naming Virginia's flora. Finally, the garden emphasizes some plants that have been introduced to Virginia that have become invasive and threaten native plant populations.

The entrance to the garden is through a Virginia woodland of pines and flowering trees and shrubs. As the visitor emerges from the woods, the plants that Native Americans introduced through trade are displayed. Beans, corn, sweet potato and tobacco are just a few. Across from that are blueberries, dogwood, and timber trees, which helped the colonists survive by providing food, shelter and revenue.

When the visitor moves a little further down the path, we discuss the difference between a native and a non-native plant. Not only did the settlers arrive in 1607, but so did their livestock. In the bellies of their livestock resided seeds of European plants, which were deposited on Virginia soil. Queen Ann's lace, dandelion and ox-eye daisy are thought by many to be native, but are, in fact, introduced. Virginia did not have suitable native grasses for grazing either. Therefore, colonists imported seeds of grasses that would be better suited for the task.

At first, crops were grown to support the settlement as a whole. More colonists arrived and towns began to form. People began to cultivate individual gardens where food plants, herbs and medicinal plants were grown together. Visitors can see what these colonial gardens were like, the types of plants that were grown, and how they were used.

There is also a portion of the garden that is dedicated to the display of "New World Ornamentals." Early naturalists and botanists, like John Bannister and John Clayton, began to catalogue and name the vastness of Virginia's flora. As they did, they discovered beautiful and unusual species that were prized by European collectors. Many of our native flowering trees and shrubs were collected and exported as "exotic species from the New World."

Finally, there is a section of the garden that discusses non-native invasive plants in Virginia. The visitor gets an opportunity to discover which plants are taking over native ecosystems. Some plants, like kudzu, were introduced to Virginia to help with a particular problem, like erosion control. Others, like purple loostrike, were imported for use in our gardens. All of these plants are growing out of control and are choking out native plant populations.

The Virginia Garden is located in front of the Harry Wason Education Center. The garden has been partially funded by The Common Wealth Award obtained by the Huntington Garden Club from The Garden Club of Virginia, with additional support from Lancaster Farms Wholesale Nursery and Custom Gardens, Inc.