

What is this mystery plant?

You go through life, and you become aware of various truths. For instance, for me as a teacher (maybe you?), it seems that the students are getting steadily younger. What about this one: a lot of books out there were apparently printed with shrinking ink. And here's another: Christmas seems to come earlier and earlier every year, it seems. As far as Christmas and this long string of holidays just a few short weeks ago, here is a botanical reminder of the rapidly changing seasons.



JOHN NELSON
Plant Columnist

This is a native woody vine, common in all of the Southeast's coastal plain counties. It may be found from New Jersey well into Florida and then all the way to eastern Texas. It really likes its feet wet, and is quite at home in wetlands,

especially swampy places. It likes to grow in thickets, atop a variety of bushes such as ti-ti, pepperbush and red bay. During the summer, it pretty much blends into all the other vegetation.

The leaves are basically football-shaped (a fat football), and bright green. Not too much special there. The flowers are pale yellow, produced in the late spring, and they are arranged in small umbels. (Recall that an umbel is a cluster of individual flowers, all of which are connected by their stalks to a central point. Think of the way your chives look in bloom.)

Our showy mystery plant has a number of very similar viny relatives (in the same genus), all of which are evergreen, and native to this area, and which feature sharp thorns. Unlike its relatives, though, our mystery vine is completely deciduous, losing all it leaves by winter. It also lacks thorns. Green, spherical berries follow the blooms, and as they ripen, the berries become brilliant, glossy red. Each

berry will have two to three hard seeds within. When one of these vines produces a big crop of fruit, it is quite a show.

Because the vines climb into adjacent shrubs and trees, the berries are sometimes mistaken for those of a holly. These berries taste pretty awful (at least to me), but are eaten by wildlife and waterfowl. By the way, the other species that are related to our mystery plant tend to have bluish or even black berries, not nearly as conspicuous. I'm wondering why this vine isn't featured in gardens. Such beautiful berries in the winter!

This species was named for Thomas Walter, an Englishman who immigrated to South Carolina before the Revolutionary War. Walter lived in a plantation along the mighty Santee River, not far from the old canal (the "Santee Canal") that was designed to, and did, connect the Santee with the Cooper River, easily allowing river commerce to Charleston.

Walter is of considerable

importance as a southern botanist, for in 1788, his epic "Flora Caroliniana" was published, in which he described all the known plants of South Carolina, and which represented the first major botanical treatment of American plant species. It turns out that Walter would have seen this plant, and indeed he refers to it in his flora. But the species was formally named in Walter's honor by Frederick Pursh, 26 years later.

[Answer: "Coral catbrier," *Smilax walteri*]

John Nelson is retired curator of the A.C. Moore Herbarium at the University of South Carolina in the Department of Biological Sciences in Columbia, S.C. As a public service, the herbarium offers free plant identification. For more information, go to herbarium.org, call (803) 777-8196 or email nelson@sc.edu.

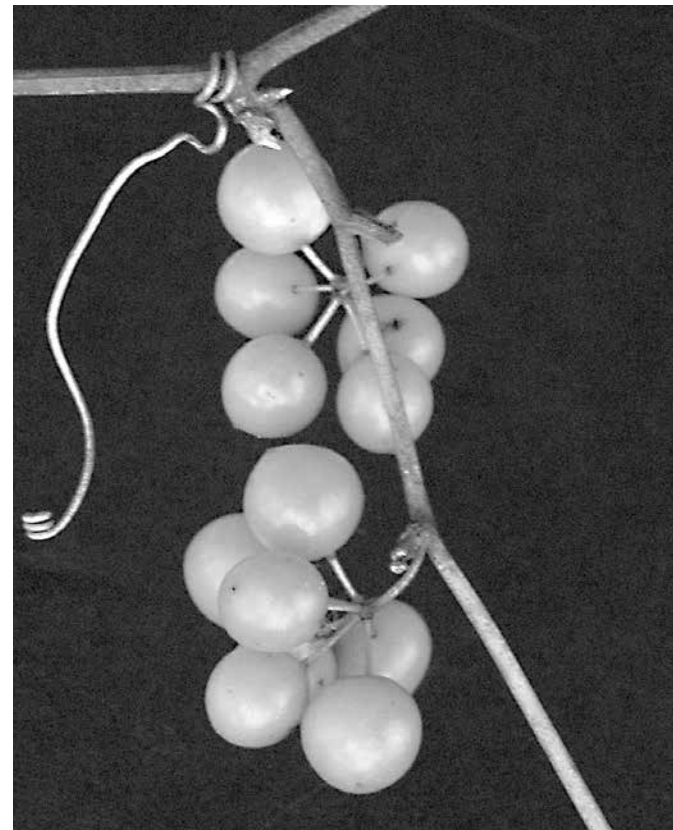


Photo contributed by Linda Lee

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BUSINESS

ATMC accepting applications for 2020 grant programs

ATMC is currently accepting applications for the 2020 Community Connections and Smart Connections Grant Programs. ATMC will award \$35,000 in Community Connections grant funds to nonprofit organizations and \$35,000 in Smart Connections funds will be given to educators in Brunswick County and areas of Columbus County served by ATMC.

Community Connections Grants are available for programs serving Brunswick County and Columbus County residents in the areas of emergency and disaster

relief, arts and culture, civic service and health and human services.

Smart Connections Grants are available to Brunswick County educators, pre-school organizations, or other agencies that provide educational services, as well as educators and administrators in Columbus County at Guideway Elementary, Williams Township School, Old Dock Elementary, Whiteville Primary, Edgewood Elementary, Nakina Middle, Central Middle, South Columbus High School and Whiteville High School. Applicants may request up to

\$2,500 in funds for qualifying programs.

ATMC has awarded more than \$700,000 in community and education grants since the program's inception in 2006. Details regarding eligibility rules and exclusions are available on ATMC's website at atmc.com. Applications are available on the website or at ATMC offices at 640 Whiteville Road in Shallotte.

For more information regarding ATMC's Grant Program, call 755-1677. Applications must be received at ATMC offices by 6 p.m. Feb. 28.

Helayne Levy Payne achieves Super Lawyer designation

Local attorney Helayne Levy Payne J.D., LL.M. in Elder Law, has been selected for the coveted Super Lawyer designation.

This designation is presented to less than 5 percent of attorneys in the state of North Carolina who demonstrate dedication to improving service to their clients and visioning their firm and services to deliver a top-notch client experience.

To qualify as a Super Lawyer, Payne was nominated by someone outside of her firm, underwent a thorough review with 12 indicators of professional achievement, and was subject to peer review before being considered for final selection. Those inducted as a Super Lawyer are recog-

nized for dedication and hard work over the years providing excellent service, not only to clients but also to their local community.

Payne is the founder of the Elder Law and Life Care Planning Center, a law firm that is the first of its kind, dedicated to elder law, estate planning, asset protection, long-term care planning, and life care planning. Its center offers quality representation to clients throughout southeastern coastal North Carolina. With an advanced master of laws degree in Elder Law and years of experience as an attorney and counselor-at-law, she has championed causes through her participation in national, state and local organizations to further North Carolina's



Photo contributed

Payne

aging adult legislative and public policy interests.

Zeetlegoo's Pet & People Store celebrates 15 years



Photo contributed

The Southport-Oak Island Area Chamber of Commerce hosts a 15-Year Anniversary ceremony for Zeetlegoo's Pet & People Store located at 1635 N. Howe St. in Southport. Owners Paul and Rae Keane with Salvatore (cat) are shown with employees, customers, chamber members and officials. Zeetlegoo's is Brunswick County's premier supplier of all-natural, holistic, healthy pet foods and treats with no meat by-products, corn, soy, food coloring, preservatives or artificial ingredients.

Margaret Rudd & Associates helps generate \$55K in local farmer revenue

People-First Tourism, Inc. in conjunction with NC State University's Fork to Farmer project has released research from its 2019 Vacationer Supported Agriculture (VSA) program for Brunswick, New Hanover and Pender counties in southeastern North Carolina.

In just its second year of the program, VSA has certainly achieved its goal of "bridging the divide between rural and urban areas by promoting equitable development through tourism, and sustainable agriculture practices."

VSA achievements for 2019 included over \$55K in local farmer revenue for Brunswick, New Hanover and Pender counties and an 850 percent increase in revenue from the 2018 pilot program.

In addition, Margaret Rudd & Associates, Inc. was awarded an honor-

able mention as a first-time participant in the program for its "commitment to equitable and sustainable growth, and for innovative practices in guest produce pickup."

The VSA program, or "Vacation Vittles" as it is locally called, allowed vacationing guests of the agency to pre-purchase produce bags containing everything from summer squash, zucchini, blueberries, watermelon, a variety of tomatoes, sweet corn, herbs, cucumbers, green beans, okra, peaches, grapes, a variety of peppers and a variety of lettuces and radishes.

All picked at the peak of freshness by area farmers, the bags provided enough produce to feed a family of four with at least three servings of fruits and vegetables during a week-long stay on Oak Island. To make the process

even more convenient for Margaret Rudd & Associates' guests, the bags could be picked up during the normal Saturday arrival process each week during the summer.

For the 2020 Vacation Vittles program, People First plans to improve produce packaging for better transport and greater quantities of produce in each bag. As a long-time supporter of the local economy and area farmers, Margaret Rudd & Associates looks forward to providing this valuable service to its vacationing guests for years to come. For more information on the 2020 Vacation Vittles program and how our renting guests may take advantage of this service, stay tuned to the Oak Island blog area of its website or follow Oak Island Beaches by Rudd on Facebook.

Novant Health named 2020 FutureEdge 50 award recipient

Novant Health has been recognized as a FutureEdge 50 award winner by the International Data Group (IDG) CIO Executive Council. The FutureEdge 50 awards highlight organizations using emerging technologies to transform the customer experience, enhance worker productivity and much more. The 50 companies recognized have established information technology initiatives that drive business success as well as early-stage projects pursued for high potential. Novant Health will receive the award at the AGENDA20 Awards in March.

"We are honored to be recognized by IDG as a cross-industry leader in the adoption of early stage technologies," said Angela Yochem, executive vice president and chief digital and technology officer, Novant Health. "In 2018, we launched our digital health initiative with the goal to transform healthcare by increasing access to care through digital channels, improving quality of healthcare through advanced technologies and analytics, and creating world-class consumer and team member experiences. As we incorporate emerging technologies into our digital strategy, we will continue to improve healthcare outcomes for our patients and make our communities healthier places to live."

Novant Health's digital health initiative has helped improve access and quality of care in the following ways:

Expanding video visits through the Novant Health smartphone application to include an advanced virtual exam tool that enables patient access to 24/7 quality care. Establishing the Novant

Health Institute of Innovation & Artificial Intelligence, which develops AI-driven solutions for clinical quality and operational productivity. Examples include implementing an AI-based solution for stroke patients and reducing Novant Health's average treatment window to about half the

national average, often sending stroke patients home with no side effects; reducing the readmission rates for congestive heart failure patients by leveraging an AI-based predictive algorithm; and creating inpatient flow solutions to drastically improve hospital experience.

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