

LEXINGTON CHAPTER — April, 2015

<http://lexington.wildones.org>

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The Lexington chapter of *Wild Ones* meets the first Thursday of every month and at other times for special programs. Visitors welcome! Check our website www.lexington.wildones.org for details.

This newsletter is a publication of the Lexington chapter of *Wild Ones*. It is published nine times a year—March through November—as an electronic newsletter.

If you have any questions, suggestions, or information for future editions, contact Ann Bowe, chair of the Marketing and Communications Committee, at annbowe@annbowedesigns.com or Judy Johnson, newsletter editor, at judylex@twc.com.

President's Message...



Native plant gardeners tend to think of themselves as being engaged in a moral enterprise. After all, their gardens preserve natural heritage, feed caterpillars, provide habitat for pollinators, capture rain water, filter pollutants, sequester carbon, clean the air and are generally good for everybody. A garden with so many virtues clearly puts a neighbor's turf desert to shame.

However, the gardener next door may refuse to be shamed. She or he may feel irritated instead, seeing only

an unsightly mess that brings down property values and breeds snakes. Virtue, according to this view, lies in the act of trimming, the effort to keep things neat looking and under control.

Recently in my readings, I came across an observation that native plant gardeners are rather puritanical about their pursuits. I was shocked. Surely this must be a misjudgment of who we are. We foster life. We embrace nature. We are not rigidly committed to order! Then, remembering that defensiveness can be the beginning of insight, I asked myself what the writer saw in our movement that was hidden from me.

It is true that native plant gardeners are often very serious about their dedication, which is surely not a bad thing. But what about those who project a "greener-than-thou" attitude, similar to the Puritans' holier-than-thou bearing? Or those who have no use at all for time-honored aesthetic values but judge every assemblage of plants purely from the point of view of its ecological utility? Or some for whom community standards invoke a kind of defiance that has less to do with the benefits of habitat gardening and more with the conviction of being right and having to demonstrate it?

Our chapter is embarking on a conversation with the city of Lexington that we hope will modify current yard ordinances to accommodate the kinds of gardens we create. Not only is this an opportunity for us to make our ideas visible, but it should also motivate us to reflect on the question of what we want our neighborhoods to look like. If we sympathize with homeowners who pay no attention at all to their neighbors' feelings on matters of order and beauty or who invoke the ideal of habitat gardening as an excuse for avoiding needed maintenance, our cause will suffer.

After all, we are on a mission. We want to invite people to realize that natural processes should be fostered in our immediate environment, in our cities and suburbs. I am often astonished by the attention people give to arguments that extol the benefits of native plants or the need to protect pollinators. Not that such conversations immediately lead to the eradication of front yard boxwoods, but response to the plight of the monarchs has demonstrated how open the general public can be to the environmental issues we raise. Should we not make an effort to be equally open to our neighbors' aesthetic sensibilities?

Beate Popkin



Pollinators Go Native

By Linda Porter



The tiny bumblebee crawled out of an open rose mallow flower on a summer morning. It had spent the night deep in the heart of the bloom so it would be ready to begin work in the morning. Soon its leg pouches were covered with yellow pollen as it did the job it was born to do. The little bee buzzed off to another flower and inadvertently dropped off part of its load. The cycle was complete – pollination had begun.

For me, my garden is all about pollinators. It took me some time to wake up to the fact that without pollinators in my garden, my garden would not be truly alive. In fact, 75% of flowering plants and 35% of food crops depend upon pollinators to reproduce.

An amazing array of creatures move through our gardens every day spreading the stuff of life: bees, butterflies, moths, flies, beetles, hummingbirds, bats – all have a role to play. How can we keep them coming? How can we help them thrive as our garden thrives? Here are four important things to keep in mind.

Bee Native: The most important pollinators in your garden may be the natives. It is true that the non-native honeybee is valued by farmers. It can be moved from place to place and raised in artificial habitats. But native bees and other pollinating insects have played a critical role in pollinating plants across time. In fact, they are two to three times more effective than honeybees in collecting pollen. Native pollinators also work best when raised in proximity with native plants. It makes sense—native pollinators and native plants have evolved together. Studies from the University of Wisconsin have shown that both abundance and diversity of native bees increase along with the amount of nearby natural habitat.

Bee Welcoming: Think habitat. For example, native bees are often solitary bees. Miner and mason bees lay single eggs in small holes. You can form a home for these tiny bees out of bunched-bamboo stems. Some bees are ground dwellers and several butterfly caterpillars feed on grass. Protect these habitats by avoiding pesticides and leaving natural areas in your yard. Also leave some bare soil (not mulched) for the ground nesting bees.

Bee Diverse: By providing a wide selection of plants, you are more likely to attract a diverse group of pollinators. For example, we all know that red flowers attract hummingbirds. Bees do not see red and are more likely to come to your garden if you include groupings of purple and yellow flowers. Shape also plays an important role – bees and butterflies appreciate flat landing platforms, while tubular flowers will attract hummingbirds and moths.

Bee Safe: Pollinators hide, rest, overwinter and eat in your garden amongst the plants. Keep that in mind every day, especially when doing your seasonal clearing of debris. And just say **NO** to pesticides. Even organic pesticides can kill pollinators and impact their life cycles.

Bee Seasonal: Pollinators never stop needing the pollen and nectar that your garden provides. Be sure to have flowers blooming to attract pollinators throughout the growing season. Here are several pollinator favorite plants for spring, summer and fall:

Early Spring—Some bees and butterflies overwinter in your garden and then emerge very early. Two plants that provide nectar for these early visitors are bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) and serviceberry (*Amelanchier sp*) shrub.

Spring—Great blue hyssop is a wonderful nectar source that blooms from late spring to early fall (*Agastache foeniculum*). Wild columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*) self-seeds to be there for hummingbirds and bees year after year.

Summer—Purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) is a favorite of bees and butterflies. Butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) is not only a great pollinator plant but also the host plant for the monarch butterfly caterpillar.

Fall—Joe Pye weed (*Eupatorium purpureum*) is a stately addition to your garden that will attract a diverse array of early fall pollinators. New England aster (*Symphotrichum novae-angliae*) is a late fall beauty that provides fuel for winter hibernation.



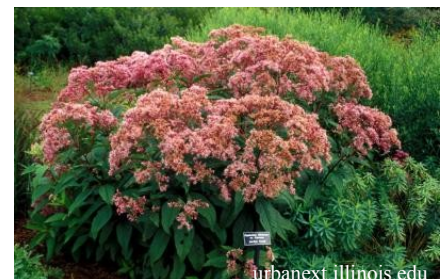
Serviceberry shrub



Wild columbine



Purple coneflower



Joe Pye weed

So, bee safe, bee diverse, bee welcoming, bee native, bee seasonal. The pollinators are counting on you!

Nature vs. Nurture

By Judy Johnson

Thad Scott, LFUCG code enforcement supervisor, was able to join *Wild Ones* on Thursday, March 12, after the last of winter's snow was cleared away. He came to discuss the ordinances that govern the maintenance of property in residential areas. Owners with unmanaged properties often claim a property has been returned to nature but there is no evidence of nurturing—design and cultivation—which should be a characteristic of a residential yard.

By code standards, any property condition that is detrimental to the property of others qualifies as a nuisance but what does that really mean? So much is left to interpretation in existing code language and none of the code was specifically written to address naturalized properties or native plant gardens.

Scott challenged *Wild Ones* to take on the task of advocating for clear, enforceable standards. He said his office could enforce existing codes but recommendations for changes to the enforcement codes should come from the community, perhaps through a council member, and be approved by the urban county council.

This suggestion led to a spirited discussion of possibilities. Questions were posed about the need to

identify invasive plants, a possible naturalized yard certification process, status of existing vegetable plantings, and many examples of citizens ignoring the code enforcement process.



Wild Ones members Gillian Skonby, Betsy Adler and Sue Beard with Thad Scott.

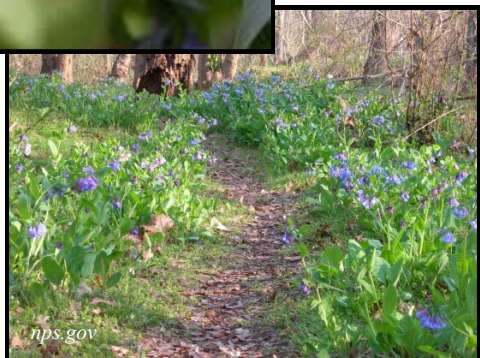
Susan Plueger, Director of Environmental Services, was identified as an initial contact who can provide information and guidance about how to proceed should *Wild Ones* choose to advocate for clear standards.

Helping to define clear standards for naturalized residential properties appears to be a topic of interest to many members. Should *Wild Ones* take up Thad Scott's challenge, this could result not only in more explicit policy language, but also in a broader community understanding of the role of native plants in our landscapes.

PLANT PUZZLE



*from the
curious mind of...
Deborah Holloway*



I am a shy sky blue southern belle—but I get around! You may find me anywhere in the east from Alabama to Canada. I grow to three feet in height and I am quite graceful, if I do say so myself. People say I have very good posture.

I love the cool pastel shades in my dress and in my shady dwelling place as well. Blue is my favorite color but sometimes you may see me in pink and purple. If I am happy, I will place myself here and there, happily dancing in the shadows. After May, I put my pretty colors away and show my long grey green strappy leaves.

I love wooded areas best but I will grow anywhere there is a bit of damp soil—even under a walnut tree!

My relatives are very fine. (I am a member of the borage family.) I grow from a rhizome. I am fond of ferns as neighbors and friends.

Can you guess who I am?

Look on page 5 for the puzzle answer and the Latin name for this beauty.

Soil Matters

By Karen Lanier

“So get out and play in the dirt and improve your mood and your life,” says Bonnie L. Grant in an article on the website gardening-knowhow.com.

“Antidepressant microbes in soil cause cytokine levels to rise, which results in the production of higher levels of serotonin. The bacterium was tested both by injection and ingestion on rats and the results were increased cognitive ability, lower stress and better concentration to tasks than a control group.

Gardeners inhale the bacteria, have topical contact with it and get it into their bloodstreams when there is a cut or other pathway for infection. The natural effects of the soil bacteria antidepressant can be felt for up to 3 weeks if the experiments with rats are any indication.”

Why care about the soil? Because dirt is dead but soil is alive! Soil is the most biodiverse part of any ecosystem. Millions of organisms can inhabit a spoonful of rich, healthy soil. Every arthropod, bacterium, fungus, or worm plays a role that affects the other members of the soil community. These organisms shred, graze, and predate on each other but mainly they take care of organic matter. Everything from leafy tendrils to tough tree trunks are processed by the underground food web. They also build the infrastructure for plants’ roots. Nutrients are made available, water is dispersed, and air pathways are opened for good circulation just as in any healthy community or habitat.

The benefits of biodiversity in the soil don’t stop with the plants. Recent studies have found that early exposure to healthy amounts of bacteria, fungus, and even some parasites could build children’s immune systems, leading to less inflammatory conditions in adulthood. Scientists are trying to identify which members of a healthy gut microbiome affect specific problems ranging from Crohn’s disease to autism.

Similarly, researchers are interested in isolating the cause and effect of certain bacteria and fungi on soil chemistry and fertility. However, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) states, “Many effects of soil organisms are a result of the interactions among organisms, rather than the actions of individual species. This implies that managing for a healthy food web is not primarily a matter of inoculating with key species, but of creating the right environmental conditions to support a diverse community of species.

Where do you find the richest, most diverse, and most resilient soil systems? In forests. Forests can have up to 40 miles of fungus in just one teaspoon of soil, compared to several yards of fungus in a teaspoon of typical agricultural soil. Chemical-free gardening with native plants encourages a rich, biodiverse community above and below ground and mimics the conditions found in the wild.



Two Opportunities to Dig Deeper into Healthy Soil...

Wild Ones Meeting 7 p.m. April 2

“Importance of Native Soils”

Dr. Shawn Lucas

St. Michael’s Episcopal Church, 2025 Bellefonte Dr.

The Symphony of the Soil

6:30 p.m. on April 14

at Lexington Central Library Farish Theatre

(the first in the 2015 Good Foods Co-op Film Series)

April Wild Ones Event



Dr. Shawn Lucas, professor of sustainable agriculture at St. Catharine College's Berry Farming Program, will join the *Wild Ones* at 7 p.m. on April 2.

Dr. Lucas will discuss how our native soils are inextricably linked to the health of our native plants, our native ecosystems, and human health in general.

He will also address the importance of building and maintaining soil quality in soils managed by people.

The work of this soil scientist is guided by Wendell Berry's concept: "The soil is the great connector of lives, the source and destination of all. It is the healer and restorer and resurrector, by which disease passes into health, age into youth, death into life. Without proper care for it we can have no community because without proper care for it we can have no life."

Join us for a thought provoking discussion!

Wild Ones Introduces Garden Buddies

At every *Wild Ones* meeting, opportunities arise to meet and greet other garden gurus and novices but sometimes it is helpful to have a matchmaker. "Garden Buddies" is a new program for those who don't enjoy gardening alone. Are you ready to garden, but don't have a space to work? Do you have too much yard and want some help digging and planting? Maybe you work with native plants and just want a friend to keep you company. Or perhaps you like the idea of passing on some of the knowledge you've gained over years of trial-and-error.

At the April meeting we will pass around a sign-up sheet for interested parties to list types of gardening needs and/or offers of gardening help. Examples might include starting a pollinator garden, hardscaping, pruning shrubs or just weeding.

After the featured speaker finishes, we'll make introductions for like-minded individuals and let you take it from there. We hope this activity will encourage members to share expertise and, thus, strengthen and enrich our native plant community.

PLANT PUZZLE: Virginia bluebell or *Mertensia virginica*

April Calendar



Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest

Sat., April 25, 2:00 to 3:30 p.m.—Wildflower Walk—A guided hike is a great way to learn about spring wildflowers. Cost is \$5 for members; \$10 for non-members. Call 502-955-8512 before 4 p.m. the day before to register.

Cove Springs Park in Frankfort

Suns. in April 2:00 to 3:30 p.m.—Guided Wildflower Walks—Different presenters. Call 502-227-3276 or 502-875-8575 for more information.

Floracliff Nature Sanctuary

Sat., April 4 at 11:00 a.m.—Wildflower Hike with Laura Baird—Moderate to difficult hike featuring spring wildflowers. Suggested donation \$5.

Sun., April 12 at 1:00 p.m.—Wildflower Hike with Josie Miller—Moderate to difficult hike to Elk Lick Creek. Suggested donation \$5.

Sat., April 18 at 1:00 p.m.—Wildflower Hike with ecologist Brian Yahn—Moderate to difficult hike during peak blooming season. Suggested donation \$5. For more information about any of these events call 859-351-7770 or go to floracliff.org.

Mallory Springs Farm (Berea, KY)

Sat., April 18 (tentative depending on the timing of the mischievous morels)—Morel Mushroom Retreat—A day long program including a guaranteed successful mushroom hunt. For details contact Tim Hensley or Jane Post at pjane-post@aol.com or call 859-986-3734.

Natural Bridge State Park

Fri. to Sun., April 10-12—KY Native Plant Society Wildflower Weekend—Programs and variety of hiking choices. Cost is \$10 for adults, \$3 for ages 13-17, ages 12 and under free. Registration at 8:00 a.m. each day; events begin at 8:30 a.m. For more information go to knps.org or email info@knps.org.

Reforest the Bluegrass

Sat., April 11—Sandersville Road Greenway—Volunteers needed to plant trees Contact John Saylor at 859-258-3405 or email jsaylor@lexington.gov.

UK Arboretum

Party for the Planet Events during April are FREE. Call 859-257-6955 for registration information:

- 1.) Wed., April 1 from 2:00 to 6:00 p.m.—KY's Past**—Activities and tours in Cumberland Mountain and Appalachian Plateau regions geared to children and families to highlight KY's early history.
- 2.) Sun., April 12 from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.—KY's Present**—Tours of the Bluegrass region and the Arboretum Woods to learn about invasive plants and native alternatives. **Meet at the Visitors' Center.**
- 3.) Thurs., April 23 from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m.—KY's Future**—Visit the Pennyriple region. Learn how to select and properly plant a tree that children and families can watch grow in the Arboretum for years to come.