

The News From Native Plant School

May 2012



Native Plant School is a partnership between Shaw Nature Reserve, Grow Native! and Wild Ones Natural Landscapers. Classes are held in the Whitmire Wildflower Garden at Shaw Nature Reserve.

Please register and pay [online](#)



Upcoming classes:

Please register and pay [online](#).

2012 Schedule

Sat, May 12, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
[Spring Wildflower Sale](#)

Thurs or Sat, May 17/19, 1-4 p.m.
Gardening for Wildlife and People
(Tylka)

Thur or Sat, June 14/16, 1-4 p.m.
Rain Gardening for Home Owners
(Gilberg)

Thur or Fri, July 12/13, 1-4 p.m.
Small Flowering Trees, Shrubs and
Vines Part 2 (Woodbury)

Fri, Aug. 17, 5-7 p.m.
Book Review 1 Noah's Garden/Stein
(Chapters 1-6) (Gilberg/Woodbury)

Friday, Sept. 7, 4-8 p.m.

Nature Connection:



While gathering nectar from blue wild indigo, bumblebees use specialized leg and body hairs to collect pollen that is later mixed with nectar to make a nutritious food. Some pollen inadvertently falls onto flowers as the bee flies from blossom to blossom. This act is called pollination and leads to the production of seeds. Without pollination, seed production and native plant populations can decline or even become extinct.

Friday, Sept. 7, 4-8 p.m.
[Fall Wildflower Sale and Open Garden](#)

Thur, Sept 13, 1-4 p.m.
Reconstructing Tallgrass Prairies
(Woodbury)

Thur-Fri, Oct. 11/12, 1-4 p.m.
Small Flowering Trees, Shrubs and
Vines Part 3 (Woodbury)

Fri, Oct. 12, 5-7 p.m.
Book Review 2 Noah's Garden/Stein
(Chapters 7-13) (Gilberg/Woodbury)

**Please register and
pay [online](#).**

May Native Plant Highlight

Copper iris (*Iris fulva*) is one of our showiest wetland species, it is a welcome compliment in any home garden. It is quite versatile as it is equally tolerant of both wet and average soil in full to part sun situations. In May, when copper iris is in full bloom (photo to right), hummingbirds are surprisingly drawn to rich, coppery-red flowers. The leaves are broad and strikingly vertical, an attractive contrast for almost any other foliage in the garden. This gem is a must to include in rain gardens as well as traditional gardens for its unique flower color.



Gardening Tips:

Sweep or blow clean all walkways and curbs on a weekly basis.

Nutsedge plants become visible during this month. Persistently pull by hand or apply Sedge-Hammer this month. Sedge Hammer is the only herbicide that works on nutsedge.

Plant perennials and grasses in early May.

Cut back tall perennials in late May to reduce height in late summer to fall. Asters, Goldenrods, Rudbeckias, and many other fall blooming plants can all be cut back to half their height to promote abundant flowering and less flopping.

Water new transplants and newly planted shrubs and trees unless rainfall is abundant.

“Knowing trees, I understand the meaning of patience.
Knowing grass, I can appreciate persistence.”
Hal Borland

Photos from Native Plant School

Last year we had a native plant school class where students created huge concrete stepping stones and decorated them by pressing natural objects into the surface. The stones were made to provide a path to our new tool shed down in the garden. This spring the tool shed was moved into the garden and the stepping stones have been installed.



stones have been installed.



Top right: Ostrich fern and persimmon trees surround the new garden tool shed.

Below left: In November of 2011 the stepping stones were made by filling cardboard tubes with concrete and pressing plants into the surface.

Below right: David walks along the new stepping stone path.



Native Sedges Fit for Gardening



Scott Woodbury

When most gardeners think of sedges, a particular weed comes to mind. Yellow nutsedge. It isn't a proper sedge in the genus *Carex*, but a flatsedge in the genus *Cyperus* which mostly consists of spreading species too weedy for gardening. Among *Carex* however, several work well in the garden. Unlike their flatsedge cousin, these garden-worthy species delight gardeners. For real, as my 5-year old son would say. Take cedar sedge, *Carex eburnea* for instance. Its pocket-sized emerald green tufts of hair-like leaves top out at 3 inches. This winter it was nearly evergreen, though in normal years it turns tan. It slowly creeps to form into a dense mat in dry, shady



tan. It slowly creeps to form into a dense mat in dry, shady places and works nicely with other diminutive shade-lovers

like wild sweet William, *Phlox divaricata* and crested iris, *Iris cristata*. There is an interesting YouTube video of this one showing the plant in the wild.

Next in the line of tiny sedges is bristle sedge, *Carex leptalea*. It is also referred to as slender sedge or bristle-stalked sedge. It looks like a green bristle brush or a spiny sea urchin. Slow-growing and topping off at 4 inches, this one is similar to cedar sedge though it tolerates sun and wet areas. It makes an ideal rain garden plant at the edges. In the Whitmire Wildflower Garden, where I've gardened for the past two decades, this one grows next to prairie alumroot, *Heuchera richardsonii*, and is partially shaded by a red buckeye, *Aesculus pavia* which blooms at the same time in early April. Bristle sedge is currently in production at Shaw Nature Reserve and should become available in 2013 at the Spring Wildflower Sale.

Oak sedge, *Carex albicans*, is gaining popularity thanks to its ease in gardening and the pioneering work of Missouri Wildflowers Nursery. It is a shade to part sun-loving sedge growing 8-10 inches on dry to moist soils. Its arching thread-like foliage surrounded by prairie pussytoes, is a winning combination. If you like this one, you might try the very similar James sedge, *Carex jamesii* which is slightly evergreen though its leaf tips tend to go tan in summer.

A versatile *Carex* that would grow in most gardens is palm sedge, *Carex muskingumensis*. It tolerates sun or shade, dry or wet. Beginner gardeners can't go wrong with this one. It's two feet tall, long-lived and provides a fine-textured tropical contrast to broad-leaved plants. In sunny areas mix in a couple yellow wild indigo, *Baptisia sphaerocarpa* and orange coneflower, *Rudbeckia fulgida*. In the shade, try it with sensitive fern, *Onoclea sensibilis* and the bold round leaves of wild hydrangea, *Hydrangea arborescens*. It also tolerates rain gardens and tough clay. When planted in mass, palm sedge reduces garden maintenance. It can be cut down once a year in March with a push mower set on high with no need to rake up clippings or for mulching. Two other terrific sedges under two feet for shade include fringed sedge, *Carex crinita* and bur sedge, *Carex grayii*.

Native gardeners have relied heavily on prairie dropseed, *Sporobolus heterolepis* over the years to create that soft, grassy look that resembles nature. None of the other native grasses perform in the same short, permanent, well-behaved way in full sun. But some sedges do and are as good or better than prairie dropseed, especially in clay or poorly-drained soils. The fox sedges come to mind first, *Carex vulpinoidea* and *Carex annectans*. They look similar, if not identical, to prairie dropseed though they bloom in spring with no intense fragrance. Lets face it, you either love the smell of prairie dropseed in bloom or you hate it.

If you are looking for a low-maintenance native groundcover to use instead of invasive wintercreeper, English ivy, periwinkle or lirioppe, look no further. Gold sedge, *Carex aureolensis*, at 10 inches is a great alternative. Tolerant of sun and shade, this creeping sedge quickly fills into a solid mat, eliminating most weeds and the need to mulch. Simply mow in March as you would lirioppe and walk away. Scatter in a few companion plants like seedbox, *Ludwigia alternifolia*, or slender mountain mint, *Pycnanthemum tenuifolium* for contrast. Brown sedge, *Carex buxbaumii* and field sedge, *Carex praegracilis* are two other top-performing alternative groundcovers.

All of the plants mentioned will be available at the Spring Wildflower Sale at Shaw Nature Reserve, Gray Summit, MO on Saturday, May 12, 2012 from 9-4.

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