

# The News From Native Plant School

September 2014



Native Plant School is a partnership between Shaw Nature Reserve, The Missouri Department of Conservation, and Wild Ones Natural Landscapers. Classes are held in the Whitmire Wildflower Garden at Shaw Nature Reserve.

Please register at [shawnature.org/NPS](http://shawnature.org/NPS)



## Upcoming classes:

### 2014 Schedule

Friday Sept. 5, 4-7:30 p.m.  
Shaw Wildflower Market

Thur, Sep. 11, 1-4 p.m.  
Landscaping with Vines

Thur, Oct. 9, 1-4 p.m.  
Small Flowering Trees and Shrubs

Please register at  
[shawnature.org/NPS](http://shawnature.org/NPS)

### Prairie Day:

September 20, 2014  
10 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
at Shaw Nature Reserve

We will be giving out free milkweed plants to the first 2,000 visitors to our booth at prairie day.

Bring your plant questions to us. We can help you identify the mystery plants in your yard, make recommendations for your landscape, and help you brainstorm solutions to stormwater problems.

Look for the Shaw Nature Reserve Booth at Prairie Day.

## Nature Connection: Hummingbird thieves!

It always pays to be in the right place at exactly the right time and spending a lot of time outdoors helps too. As I've said before, I see new things whenever I'm in the native garden. The other day I spotted a crime being committed in my front yard in broad daylight. I nearly called the police but decided to put pen to paper instead to inform you of the dastardly deed. At approximately 1 p.m. Monday August 18, 2014 two or three insects were pinched by a hummingbird from a garden spider web built in the tall garden phlox by my front door. Granted the insects were goner's, soon or already turned to venomized goo by Mr. spider but hey, the spiders lunch was stolen before he could say silk pajamas. Makes me wonder how many spider webs get cleaned out by thieving hummingbirds on any given day. Let me know if you know the answer.

By Scott Woodbury



"Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will low their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves."

John Muir

## Shaw Wildflower Market:

Friday, September 5, 2014  
from 4 p.m. till 7:30 p.m.  
in the Whitmire Wildflower  
Garden, Shaw Nature Reserve in  
Gray Summit MO

Shop for locally produced native  
plants, food and crafts. Also,  
experts will answer your native  
gardening questions.

Vendors attending:

Missouri Wildflower Nursery  
Bring Conservation Home  
Yvonne's Honey  
Williams Brothers Meats  
Doris's baskets  
Martha's bulbs  
Ross's books  
Janet's felts  
Colleen's Irish toffee  
Barbara's paintings

## Wolf Fest 2014:

Wolf Fest 2014, the Endangered  
Wolf Center's annual open house,  
will be Saturday, Sept. 27.

The theme again will be nature/  
wildlife/conservation. Among the  
exhibitors will be the World Bird  
Sanctuary, Longmeadow Rescue  
Ranch Barn Buddies, the Missouri  
Department of Conservation, Shaw  
Nature Reserve, the Missouri Parks  
Association, Wildlife Rescue Center  
and the Crown Ridge Tiger  
Sanctuary.

Gates open at 9 a.m. and close at 5  
p.m.

Wolf Fest is a day of food, drink,  
music, play and great fun! There  
will be games and activities for  
children, including a bounce house  
and climbing wall.

Admission is just \$25 a carload. No  
reservations are necessary.

[www.endangeredwolfcenter.org](http://www.endangeredwolfcenter.org)

## Milkweed for Monarchs:

Join in Mayor Slays "Milkweed for Monarchs  
Initiative" by registering your Monarch  
garden! "Creating monarch butterfly habitats  
where people live, work and play." Please use  
this form to register your Monarch garden.  
The project will track progress toward the  
goal of planting 250 monarch gardens in the  
City of St. Louis during 2014.



[https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/mayor/initiatives/sustainability/milkweeds-monarchs.cfm?utm\\_source=E-News+8%2F20%2F2014&utm\\_campaign=UA-19666340-1&utm\\_medium=email](https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/mayor/initiatives/sustainability/milkweeds-monarchs.cfm?utm_source=E-News+8%2F20%2F2014&utm_campaign=UA-19666340-1&utm_medium=email)

## Friday Greener Garden Series:



The 2014 *Friday greener garden series* in the Whitmire Wildflower Garden is a new opportunity to learn about native plants and native landscaping. Shaw Nature Reserve Staff will be leading round-table discussions and tours along with Missouri Department of Conservation staff and Wild Ones members. Nurseries will be on hand to speak with gardeners and sell plants and seeds. Come enjoy the company of gardeners and assorted plant nuts in this informal outdoor setting.

September 12, 2014 Seeding a Tallgrass Prairie or Savanna! Larger land owners/managers who are wondering what to do with that huge expanses of mowed lawn or field can benefit from this discussion led by DJM Ecological Services, Missouri Department of Conservation and Shaw Nature Reserve Staff. Come learn how to plan, prepare the site, install and maintain a seeded prairie or savanna landscape. 5 - 7:30 p.m.

October 24, 2014 Celebrate Autumn Color! What better time than autumn to discover the beauty of Missouri native trees and shrubs. On hand to talk about Missouri's showiest woody plants are Missouri Department of Conservation, Shaw Nature Reserve and Forrest Keeling Nursery. Many trees and shrubs will be in full autumn color and will be for sale. 4:30 - 7 p.m.



Friday events are free but you must register in advance. Participants are encouraged to bring food to share. Drinks will be provided. Registration is limited to the first 40 people.

Register by emailing [besa.schweitzer@mobot.org](mailto:besa.schweitzer@mobot.org)

## BioBlitz:

BioBlitz in Forest Park, September 26 & 27, 2014

The Academy of Science - St. Louis BioBlitz is an exploration and inventory of the biodiversity of urban parks. Teams of public volunteers led by biologists, naturalists and environmental enthusiasts search natural areas, listing as many different species as they can find. At the end of the day, participants have a new appreciation of these very special places.

Here's your chance to learn about everything from birds to butterflies, crickets to katydids! Join teams of scientists and skilled naturalists during the BioBlitz at St. Louis urban parks.

<http://academyofsciencestl.org/initiatives/bioblitz.php>

## Gardening Tips:

Attend Shaw Nature Reserve Wildflower Market in early September.

Check plants for signs of water stress, nutrient deficiency or disease. Fertilize only when necessary.

Now through November is a good time to plant perennials and grasses mulched to a depth of 2-3 inches. For trees and shrubs be sure to mulch to a depth of 3-4 inches.

Divide and move perennials and grasses September thru October.

Mulch where needed to reduce weeding and maintain moisture and protect from winter freezing and drought.

September and October are best months to kill invasive bush honeysuckle. Cut and spray stumps with 10% glyphosate. Properly dispose of cuttings if they contain berries to prevent spreading the seeds and reinfesting the newly cleared area.

## Learning in the Garden:



Shaw Nature Reserve and Missouri Department of Conservation staff recently participated in a joint training in the Whitmire wildflower garden. Scott Woodbury lead the group and talked about woodland restoration, traditional vs. naturalized gardening techniques, pond management, and invasive control. The prairie/woodland area to the west of the Whitmire garden has received a lot of attention over recent years to control invasive plants and improve this area so that it can be easily managed with fire. Invasives include bush honeysuckle, witercreeper, and red clover. We have found that after removing the invasives and stabilizing the soil we must selectively thin the trees and sew a heavy grass matrix. The grasses will carry a hot fire through the thinned woodland, burning up new woody growth.

## Grasses for Everyday Gardening add a Touch of Nature

By Scott Woodbury

For years ornamental grasses have been making a splash in gardens with many bold textures, massive and diminutive sizes and leaf colors from blood red, orange and green and white stripes. They remind me more of the tropics and the colorful work of Brazilian landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx and less of the wonderful and diverse natural landscape found in Missouri in our prairies, savannas, woodlands and wetlands. If you are looking to add a touch of nature and a natural look, consider adding a few native grasses to your garden. I'll admit they are more subtle looking than many of the bold ornamental grasses but they add wildlife value, have a tolerance for our widely fluctuating weather, reflect our regional natural landscape, and are beautiful additions to the home landscape.

A popular sun-loving native grass in gardening is prairie dropseed, *Sporobolus heterolopis*, a dry-tolerant prairie grass with leaves 1-2 feet tall and nearly leafless flowering stalks 3 feet tall. There is a strain that originated from Tucker Prairie near Auxvasse, Missouri that is robust and 3-4 feet tall but most are much smaller. When flowers appear in August and September two camps of gardeners take up sides on its fragrance (or odor) depending on which side you choose. Some, myself included, enjoy the cilantro-like smell the flowers produce. Others find it mildly offensive. In the home garden a few plants strategically planted at the edge of a flower border or at the foot of patio steps can soften the landscape with fountains of fine-textured green leaves that turn yellow and orange in fall. Prairie dropseed has been used as a low-maintenance turf alternative when planted in masses with plants spaced 18-20 inches apart (a good groundcover calculator is found at [classygroundcovers.com](http://classygroundcovers.com)). For large areas many plants may be needed so plugs can be an economical alternative. They may take an extra year to get established. The down-side to using prairie dropseed as a groundcover is that it produces stump-like mounds that can't be mowed with a push mower at the end of winter. They can only be cut back with a string trimmer, hand trimmer or fire. Alternatives that can easily be cut down with a push mower include palm sedge, *Carex muskingumensis*, Pennsylvania sedge, *Carex pennsylvanica* and oak sedge *Carex albicans*.

# 2014 Dogtown Sustainability Expo:

The Sustainability Expo is taking place as part of the 5th annual Dogtown Street Musicians Festival. Street musicians will play up and down Tamm Ave. The Dogtown Historical Society (DHS) hosts the festival with the purpose of celebrating the rich musical history of Dogtown. The purpose of the Expo is to inform residents about the many organizations in the Dogtown community working on issues of ecological and social sustainability. They also want to encourage attendees to adopt sustainable practices at their homes.

Saturday, September 20th from 12:00noon-5:30pm

## National Public Lands Day:

National Public Lands Day Planting, Clean Up, and Paddle Sept 27

Riverlands Bird Sanctuary, West Alton, MO.

Starting at 8:30am. Help plant trees and clean up at public lands at the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri River. Starting at 1:00pm. Enjoy paddling on Ellis Bay in the Riverlands Bird Sanctuary.

<http://www.greenwaynetwork.org/get-involved/national-public-lands-day-planting-clean-up-and-paddle.php>

An archive of this newsletter is available at:  
<http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/visit/family-of-attractions/shaw-nature-reserve/gardens-gardening-at-shaw-nature-reserve/native-landscaping-for-the-home-gardener/native-plant-school/the-news-from-native-plant-school.aspx>

If you garden in dry, sloped or rocky soil little bluestem, *Schizachyrium scoparium* or sideoats grama, *Boutaloua curtipendula* are good choices but soils should be well-drained and full sun is best. Little bluestem and sideoats grama may get overgrown and flop over when planted in rich, or overly wet clay soils. Plants may even rot and die. If plants get overgrown try giving them a 40-60% haircut in late April or early May. This will reduce the height. These grasses grow 2-4 feet tall depending on the soil fertility and watering. Little bluestem has blue, green or red leaves and stems. Sideoats grama typically has red to orange flower pollen which gives it a striking appeal during its summer bloom. In fall it turns yellow then tan in winter.



I love the dark green, glossy foliage of American beakgrass (or beakgrass), *Diarrhena obovata* growing in the woods. The leaves of this plant are 16-20 inches tall with leafless flower stalks that gently arch above to two or three feet in late summer. Expect single plants to be 2-3 feet wide in as many years. Plants spread slowly though so if you want to create a solid groundcover plant 14-16 inches apart. They tolerate very dry to average garden soils but will yellow in full sun. Unlike prairie dropseed a groundcover of this is easily mowed down in March with a push mower making maintenance much easier. To mow high grass with a push mower, remove leaf-catching bag if you use one, set the mowing deck to its tallest setting, raise the front wheels off the ground while slowly moving forward and then lower the deck down over the leaves. This will shred and scatter the leaves which can then be left in place as a mulch. I call this self-mulching.

Another "grass" for part shade is giant cane, *Arundinaria gigantea*. This is the native bamboo which technically is a grass that grows 8-10 feet tall. This is a woody, shrubby plant that I can't live without as it provides a soft dark green foliage that moves and rustles in the wind, grows well beneath black walnuts, and provides great habitat for birds year-round. It should be used carefully because it spreads with underground runners. If you are a fastidious gardener in shade, you can keep it in place by chopping off and pulling up runners as they appear in early summer. Runners are just under the soil surface in a straight line between the parent plant and the sharp-tipped sprout that emerges from the ground in June or July. A sharpened, flat-edged spade works well. If you don't spend much time gardening you can surround cane with mowed turf, root barrier, house foundation, driveway or more likely a combination of barriers. Plastic or metal root barriers should be hand dug or trenched 18-24 inches deep to prevent spread and left out of the ground two inches to easily monitor root jumping.

Above all the quality I most admire about grasses is their flammability! I don't recommend this next to a vinyl sided buildings, cars or nervous neighbors (or at all if you live in an area with burn bans) but prairie dropseed and other grass and sedge clumps burn very nicely and make spring garden cleanup quick, easy and really fun. Also, sections of fresh bamboo stem (with two swollen nodes) thrown in an outdoor fire bowl pop like firecrackers and will liven up your happy hour. Always remember to be discrete, safe and cautious when using fire and always have a garden hose turned on and ready to use. Happy gardening!

"May your trails be crooked, winding, lonesome, dangerous, leading to the most amazing view. May your mountains rise into and above the clouds."

~Edward Abbey

## Gardening with Native Vines

By Scott Woodbury

In nature, the highest-climbing vines reach into treetops 40-70 feet and often are of greater interest to wildlife than people. They may suit your landscape if you have some acreage or the time to keep these brutes pruned back. Also, I've seen home gardeners surround these vines with mowed lawn to keep them in place on a trellis or tree.

Some species can't climb mature trees and so grow up together with the tree from adolescence. Grapes, pipevine, American wisteria and lady's eardrops climb this way or leapfrog from shrubs to understory trees to larger canopy trees. Others attain such great heights by generating "sticky" aerial rootlets or clinging tendrils that climb mature tree trunks like spider-man. Virginia creeper, crossvine, trumpet creeper and poison ivy rise up to the sky this way. Woolly pipe-vine leaves are the larval food for pipe-vine swallowtail butterflies. The evergreen cross vine flowers are visited by hummingbirds and then by humans when the showy orange and yellow flowers dehisce and fall to the ground fresh and whole. Trumpet creeper flowers are similar to cross vine but produce seed pods that resemble dugout canoes. Lady's eardrops attract so many pollinating bees (mostly honeybees) that they can be heard buzzing when growing on a trellis. Virginia creeper adorns cliff faces and tree trunks in autumn with its bright red and burgundy foliage.

Planting large native vines is like planting acorns. You have to trust that someone or something will appreciate it down the road or just out of sight in the treetops.

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## Volunteers in the Garden:



Volunteer Bill Schwab collects garden phlox seeds in the garden. The seeds will be set out to dry and then cleaned by separating out debris before storage. Most seeds are stratified in late fall for three months of cold stratification before sowing in late winter in our green house. After germination each plant is carefully transplanted into its own pot. If you come to our spring plant sale you might buy a phlox grown from the seed Bill collected.

## Planting your pond edge:

The pond edge can be a tricky place to garden. Fluctuating water levels and erosion can challenge plants during establishment. Wildlife entering the water create paths and will sometimes eat your plants. Establishing plants along the pond edge is very important for controlling erosion and will deter pesky Canada geese. This planting along the edge of the woodland gazebo pond is looking beautiful with Mist Flower (Wild Ageratum), Cardinal flower (Lobelia cardinalis), and Black-eyed susan (Rudbeckia fulgida var. umbrosa). Getting these plants established has been a long process with interference from muskrats building tunnels through the dam and eating the young plants.



## Shaw Nature Reserve Prairie:

There are over 20 acres of reconstructed tallgrass prairie surrounding the Whitmire Wildflower Garden. It is glorious at this time of year, bursting with color and life as the end of the growing season nears. Tallgrass prairie was once a common feature in Missouri existing throughout the state. In the Wildflower Garden, trails meander through acres of blooming Indian grass, big and little bluestem, gama grass and switch grass. In addition, tall yellow sunflowers and goldenrods rise above the grasses while fall-blooming asters impart pink, blue and purple to the scene. Much more color and animation is provided by numerous bird and butterfly species searching for seeds and nectar before the winter months set in. The prairie is managed with periodical late winter burns alternated with mowing.