

The News From Native Plant School

January 2015



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



Upcoming classes:

Thur, Feb. 12, 1-4 p.m.

Naturescaping Beyond Beauty: The Art and Function of Native Landscaping

In need of the tools necessary to transform your yard into a beautiful and functioning landscape that enhances life for you and wildlife and fits into the neighborhood? This class will go into basic design styles, planning methods and plant selection that maximizes wildlife potential while also fitting in with the neighborhood. Come learn how to select, arrange, install and maintain native plants for optimal owner, neighbor and wildlife satisfaction.

Thur, Mar. 12, 1-4 p.m.

Greenhouse Propagation

Growing native perennials, grasses, trees and shrubs from seed isn't a mystery. This class will introduce the basic propagation methods that involve stratification, scarification, timing, soils, containers, fertilization and basic insect management.

Thur, April 9, 1-4 p.m.

Woodland Gardening

Sat, May 9, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Shaw Wildflower Market

Please register at

shawnature.org/NPS

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, to 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.



Giant cane, *Arundinaria gigantea*, is beautiful in spring, winter, and fall.

Register Now:

Sat, Feb 28. 9am-4pm ,
**Partners for Native
Landscaping Workshop**
at Powder Valley Nature Center
Kirkwood Missouri

In-Depth Workshop offers
information and resources on how
to landscape with native plants for
greener communities.

Learn How to...
Garden for Birds and Pollinators
Design & Maintain a Native Garden
Promote Monarch Butterflies
Develop & Maintain a Rainscape
Manage Invasive Bush Honeysuckle

Also...
Hear about Organizations
Discover Upcoming Events
Meet Other Native Gardeners
Purchase Missouri Wildflowers

Cost \$10, includes lunch.
register online at
www.stlouisaudubon.org/PNL/

Partners include Metropolitan
Sewer District, Missouri
Department of Conservation, Shaw
Nature Reserve, Bring Conservation
Home, Wild Ones - St Louis, and
Grow Native!

"There are two seasonal diversions
that can ease the bite of any winter.
One is the January thaw. The other
is the seed catalogues."
- Hal Borland

Great Backyard Bird Count:

February 13-16, 2015
Great Backyard Bird Count
Count birds in your own backyard to
contribute to the global picture of
bird populations.
For more details on this citizen
science event, visit
<http://gbbc.birdcount.org>

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. 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. For large areas many plants may be needed so plugs can be an economical alternative. However, 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*.

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 over-grown 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!

"January is the quietest month in the garden. ... But just because it looks quiet doesn't mean that nothing is happening. The soil, open to the sky, absorbs the pure rainfall while microorganisms convert tilled-under fodder into usable nutrients for the next crop of plants. The feasting earthworms tunnel along, aerating the soil and preparing it to welcome the seeds and bare roots to come."
- Rosalie Muller Wright

Gardening Tips:

- Water during winter drought periods. Trees and shrubs planted in the previous season may suffer if not kept watered, even in winter.
- Check that gardening tools and equipment are in good repair—sharpen mower blades, hand tools, saws and replace washers in garden hoses as needed, etc.
- Continue pruning trees and shrubs.
- Provide cover for wildlife where appropriate. Leave plant stalks and seed heads standing. Create brush piles. Leave deadwood for insects to overwinter.
- Keep highly visible areas of your landscape looking tidy.

Classes Around Town:

Garden Reuse: Insect Hotels
March 28, 2015
10:00 am - 12:00 pm
at Perennial in St Louis, cost \$35

Attract beneficial insects to your garden and increase the biodiversity of your backyard with an Insect Hotel. Bug hotels provide a safe place for beneficial pollinators to live year-round and add a bit of decoration to your yard. Theresa, community artist and gardener, will guide the class through building an insect hotel from found materials. Participants will learn about bug habitats and appropriate housing material for a variety of insects. News of your new hotel will be buzzin' around town!

Perennial 7413-15 S. Broadway,
Saint Louis, MO 63111 United States
Website: <http://perennialstl.org>

Landscaping For Life

Start Your Own Habitat Garden To Attract more Birds and Butterflies

by Mitch Leachman
Executive Director
St. Louis Audubon Society



It all began almost 10 years ago, after I had moved into my first house. A friend suggested a few plants, all Missouri natives, for a bed along the driveway. When complete, we had installed aster, coneflower, coreopsis, milkweed and penstemon, 20 plants at most, where only irises and daylilies had been previously.

Those few plants have been a source for countless fascinating and inspiring moments ever since. The asters in full fall bloom draw a myriad of native bees. I look forward to my near-daily lunch time visits from my home office to meditate with them—green ones, yellow, black or orange, honeybees and bumble bees, even blue ones—yes, I said BLUE! I take pictures, study them; they fly around and next to me. I have never been stung or ever felt threatened. I also recall the first time I saw goldfinches extracting the seed from the coneflowers toward the end of a long summer. I had just come up the driveway in the car and sat there watching, not wanting to get out and disturb them. Bird feeding by native plant—how cool is that!

In the years since, I've added more native plants and removed nearly all the invasive bush honeysuckle at the back of the lot. Now, instead of a plain, uniform wall of honeysuckle, I have an interesting variety of native shrubs including beautyberry, currant, ninebark and sumac. The currant is in bloom as I write, bright yellow and oh how fragrant. It is an important nectar source for early-arriving hummingbirds. The beautyberry will yield bright purple berries this fall, and I will again be on watch for the return of the catbirds and thrashers as they stop to feed on the fruit in advance of their southbound migration. The catbird got named from its "mew" call note—a sound I now anticipate through open windows in the early fall. Bird watching AND feeding courtesy of natives I planted!

I've known for quite some time that small patches of habitat are important for our native birds, butterflies and such. News reports, online posts and broadcasts regularly tell tales of endangered plants and animals and habitat lost to development of some sort. Then, just two years ago I was encouraged to read *Bringing Nature Home* by Doug Tallamy, an entomologist who has studied plant-eating insects for decades. He states that installing native plants within our personal landscapes at home and work is imperative to reverse those declines. In short, native plants provide food for native insects which are an essential protein source for 96% of all our land birds, including every Missouri songbird.

Just think about that. Cardinals, goldfinches and even hummingbirds eat insects. They must. Their babies need protein to build muscle and bone; seeds and nectar alone won't cut it. But a juicy plant-eating caterpillar packs lots of protein, more per pound than beef.

Makes sense for a small bird to look for a tiny package of protein. Funny thing is lots of other animals eat insects, too—reptiles, amphibians, foxes, owls and even fish! Of course, the fish aren't in most neighborhoods, but all the rest could be. Take a look at your home, your workplace, your worship house. Is there room for a habitat garden? I started with just 60 square feet—not much at all. Are you hungry for something more in your landscape, more inspiring than turf grass or ivy? Perhaps hummingbirds and butterflies or catbirds and tree frogs. If creating a living landscape sounds daunting, there are plenty of resources available including the Bring Conservation Home program from St. Louis Audubon. Just visit www.stlouisaudubon.org/BCH for details. The birds and butterflies will thank you, and you'll be glad you did.

For more information please contact the St. Louis Audubon Society, www.stlouisaudubon.org or call 314-599-7390. Originally published by The Healthy Planet

RESTORING PEACE: Six Ways Nature in Our Lives Can Reduce the Violence in Our World

Here are six reasons why meaningful relationships with nature may — in concert with other approaches — bolster mental health and civility, and reduce human violence in our world.

1. Green exercise improves psychological health.
2. In some cases, greening neighborhoods may help reduce domestic violence.
3. Natural playgrounds may decrease bullying.
4. Other species help children develop empathy.
5. Greater biodiversity in cities can increase social and family bonding.
6. More nature in our lives can offset the dangerous psychological impact of climate change.

Read the rest of this blog at:

[http://
blog.childrenandnature.org/2014/12/01/restoring-peace-six-ways-nature-in-our-lives-can-reduce-the-violence-in-our-world-2/](http://blog.childrenandnature.org/2014/12/01/restoring-peace-six-ways-nature-in-our-lives-can-reduce-the-violence-in-our-world-2/)

Editors Note:

We are seeking feedback for this newsletter in 2015. What do you want us to write about? What are your favorite parts of the newsletter? How can we improve?

Send your feedback to Besa at besa.schweitzer@mobot.org

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](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)

Top 10 Native Nectar Plants for Butterflies:



A Grow Native! Top 10 List

These plants were chosen because they are attractive, drought-tolerant, long-blooming, attract pollinators, and feed migrating Monarch butterflies.

5 Annuals that will reseed themselves:

- * Rocky Mountain beeplant (*Polanisia dodecandra*) grows to 16-20" and has pink flowers summer-fall.
- * Helen's flower (*Helenium amarum*) grows to 8-14" and has yellow flowers summer-fall. Pictured above.
- * Partridge pea (*Chamaecrista fasciculata*) grows to 20-30" and has yellow flowers summer-fall.
- * Snow-on-the mountain (*Eupatorium marginatum*) grows to 30-60" and has green & white flowers summer.
- * Palafox (*Palafoxia callosa*) grows to 18-30" and has pink flowers late summer-fall.

5 Perennials:

- * Purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) grows to 24-36" and nectar attracts butterflies, seeds eaten by goldfinches.
- * Slender mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum tenuifolium*) grows to 20-24" and nectar attracts skippers, butterflies & bees.
- * Showy goldenrod (*Solidago speciosa*) grows to 36-48" and Monarchs eat nectar in fall migration.
- * New England Aster (*Aster novae-angliae*) grows to 48-60" and Monarchs eat nectar in fall migration.
- * Eastern Blazingstar (*Liatrix scariosa*) grows to 30-42" and nectar attracts skippers, butterflies & bees.

Messenger a poem by Mary Oliver

My work is loving the world.
Here the sunflowers, there the hummingbird—equal seekers of sweetness.
Here the quickening yeast; there the blue plums.
Here the clam deep in the speckled sand.
Are my boots old? Is my coat torn?
Am I no longer young, and still not half-perfect? Let me
keep my mind on what matters,
which is my work,
which is mostly standing still and learning to be
astonished.
The phoebe, the delphinium.
The sheep in the pasture, and the pasture.
Which is mostly rejoicing, since all the ingredients are here,
Which is gratitude, to be given a mind and a heart and these body-clothes,
a mouth with which to give shouts of joy
to the moth and the wren, to the sleepy dug-up clam,
telling them all, over and over, how it is
that we live forever.