

The News From Native Plant School

December 2013



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 at shawnature.org/NPS



Upcoming classes:

2014 Schedule

Thur, Feb. 6, 2014, 1-4 p.m.
RainScaping Fundamentals

Thr, Mar. 13 1-4pm
Greenhouse Propagation

March 21-22, 2014
Partners in Native Landscaping
Workshop at MBG
special guest Doug Tallamy

Thur, April 10, 1-4 p.m.
Top Performing Plants

Friday May 9, 4-7:30 p.m.
Saturday May 10, 9-4 p.m.
Shaw Wildflower Market

Thur, May 15, 1-4 p.m.
Container Gardening

Thur, June 12, 1-4 p.m.
Landscaping with Sedges

Please register at
shawnature.org/NPS

December in the Prairie



What seems to be a quiet time in the prairie is not that at all. The prairie is full of seeds that mammals and flocks of birds alike scramble to collect and eat. The big and little bluestem, Indian grass and others have turned to a light tawny brown color that shines red-orange in the winter sun. Much of their seed still hangs on the stems, bent now more from the weight of finches and other birds than from the weight of the fast disappearing seed. The interesting seed head structures of coneflowers, sunflowers and blazingstars offer the last lingering seeds to the large flocks of juncos, finches and sparrows. Many seeds that are accidentally dropped by birds become a welcome meal for the mice that are waiting below. Hawks circle overhead, ever watchful for the occasional careless rodent that will become their next meal. The thick growth of the prairie becomes an even more important source of protective cover for wildlife as the winter months set in. The prairie management schedule takes this into account and burning or mowing is only done in late winter and early spring.

“While I relish our warm months, winter forms our character and brings out our best.”

~Tom Allen

RainScaping:

You can improve water quality and reduce runoff pollution with some simple, sustainable landscaping practices.

RainScaping consists of an array of sustainable landscaping practices that a landowner may employ to improve rainwater related problems. In addition to rain gardens and bioswales, a diverse landscape that includes trees, shrubs, perennials, mulch and amended soils intercepts and disperses rain as it falls, and allows more water absorption into the soil and by plants.

Find out more at:

<http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/sustainability-conservation/sustainable-living/at-home/rainscaping-guide.aspx>

Rainscape rebates:

<http://deercreekalliance.org/rainscaperebates.aspx>

BiodiverseCity St. Louis:

A Community Initiative to Promote, Protect and Plan for Biodiversity Throughout the Greater St. Louis Region. BiodiverseCity St. Louis recognizes our region's reliance on biodiversity, the variety of life, and natural systems. We depend on biodiversity, not only for the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat, but also for the basic health, livability and economic prosperity of our region.

Learn more

<http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/sustainability-conservation/biodiversecity-st.-louis.aspx>

It Starts with a Plant: Choose Natives and Let the Buffet Begin By Scott Woodbury



Over the decades there has been an endless march of wildlife showing up at my native plant buffet: I've noticed bees buzzing flowers to gather pollen, finches picking coneflower seeds, caterpillars nibbling milkweed leaves, ants licking spikenard nectaries, hummingbirds visiting trumpet flowers, bumblebees napping in rosinweed flower clusters, sparrows nesting in hawthorns, butterflies sipping nectar from all sorts of flowers, dragonflies prowling the prairie, wasps paralyzing spiders, crab spiders ambushing bees, and praying mantis looking back at me. This is just the tip of the biological iceberg that appears above ground in my small garden.

At a Wild Ones chapter meeting I attended long ago, I heard the words “plant it and they will come,” but at the time I couldn't begin to understand what that meant. Did that simply mean that I'd attract thirsty butterflies to blazing star and milkweed or was I just providing a little extra food and cover for wintering birds? It took awhile for the words to sink in; what I discovered was more complex and required more time to discover. It took me hours and years and even decades to see the plant-insect animal relationships unfold before my eyes, and the life supported by my garden continues to surprise me every moment that I take the time to look.

What I've come to know is that virtually every living creature that enters my garden is there for a reason. I spied the stealthy bobcat that ate the snake in the tall grass that patiently ambushed the fence lizard by a log that munched a moth that came to the garden to feed on the sweet nectar of evening primrose. This particular chain of events began with a native plant, in this case, evening primrose, and took me years to observe. The more time I spend in the garden, the more of the biological iceberg becomes visible to me. I'm eager to come home to see what nature reveals to me and my six-year-old. Will the purple coneflower that feeds nectar and pollen to the bee, which feeds the dragonfly, which feeds the frog also feed a snapping turtle in the pond? And what then eats snapping turtles? Makes me wonder what I'll attract if I plant buffalo grass!

Encounters with nature like those I've mentioned above don't happen in a traditional garden devoid of native plants. This may be music to your ears if you don't like bugs, but there is a consequence, a major one. According to Dr. Doug Tallamy, author of *Bringing Nature Home*, 96% of terrestrial bird species feed their young on mostly caterpillars. He also states that it takes 4,800 caterpillars to feed a nest full of baby chickadees. I wonder how many leaves it takes to feed 4,800 caterpillars? A task for my budding naturalist first grader! According to Tallamy, those caterpillars eat the leaves of native oaks, cherries, willows, plums, birch, pine, and hickory trees, to name the top few. Not ginkgos, as much as I love them. Not golden rain trees, or saucer magnolias. Only natives attract wildlife, which have

Why Use Native Plants?

For Educational Opportunities:

Native plant gardens present endless opportunities for learning about seasonal cycles, wildlife, and plant life cycles. Quiet spaces outside can be used for art and reading classes. Environmental and conservation topics are taught best outdoors.

Gardening Tips:

Review the year's schedule and make plans for next year's improvements.

Prune any tree branches in parking lots and sidewalks that interfere with public safety.

Continue with leaf removal if needed.

Continue pruning trees and shrubs.

evolved with our native plants for thousands of years. Without native trees, birds are in trouble, their decline is due to habitat loss and a lack of suitable insect food for their young.

Tallamy and research associate K.J. Shropshire also compiled extensive lists of other plants, including perennial, herbaceous wildflowers that provide food for butterfly and moth larvae. Sunflower species, for example, support 73 species; goldenrods, 112! Non-native zinnias, only six, and hostas and daylilies: zero. My experience as a gardener tells me that there is so much more that could be happening in places where we grow lawn. Tallamy states that there are more than 40 million acres of lawn in the United States—there is much more lawn, in fact, than the acreage of all national parks combined.

This past August I visited a big chunk of that lawn in South County St. Louis. I consulted with city officials and park residents who hope to convert about one fifth of an acre from turf to native wetland plants in a couple of low areas. The rest of the 63-acre park is entirely mowed turf. My advice was to start small and go native, and to develop a native garden that suits the owner who may be a little gun shy. Organize a team of volunteers who can maintain it, especially during the first two years, and then yearly thereafter. With careful planning, maintenance, and education this small native planting could flourish, support a diversity of insect and other species, and possibly inspire a neighborhood to imagine what could come next!

Printed originally in the Missouri Prairie Journal, Fall/Winter 2013

Native Plant Bake Off at the Fall Shaw Wildflower Market: An interview with Terri Brandt

Q- How do you make Blackberry bounce? What is the story behind the recipe?

A- The recipe is very simple for blackberry bounce. Layer blackberries with sugar in a glass jar and pour vodka over it, leaving a space at the top. Tighten the lid on it and shake it until the sugar dissolves. Loosen the lid. Every couple of days, tighten the lid and shake again. Don't forget to loosen the lid when you're done shaking. After about 2 weeks (or longer) place cheesecloth over a strainer and pour the liquid through. Put the remaining fruit in the cheesecloth and squeeze the liquid out of it. The fruit is the most flavorful part. Scott Woodbury gave me the recipe.

Q- Why did you decide to enter the bakeoff?

A- I decided to enter the bake-off because I wanted people to see how tasty Blackberry Bounce is and how easy it is to make. The hardest part is picking the blackberries but also the most fun. I also wanted to raise money for the wildflower garden.

Q- Do you have any memories of collecting wild edibles with your children?

A- We had a mulberry tree behind our house when we lived in Florissant. My kids loved picking and eating the mulberries. We had an elderly neighbor who told the kids how much she loved mulberry pie. The kids picked a huge bowl and I made her a pie. She was so happy.

Q- What are your other favorite native plants to cook with?

A- I haven't really cooked with other edibles but I sure enjoy eating the wild fruits- raspberries, persimmon, serviceberry, and paw-paw when I can find one.

Q- What is your favorite place to visit to enjoy the outdoors in MO?

A- I have two favorites. I have a friend who owns a large piece of property on the Black River near Lesterville. I love poking around in his woods and ponds looking for native plants and of course sitting in the river on a hot day, watching the river flow. My most favorite, though, is doing float trips in my little blue kayak on the 11 Point River which is near Arkansas. It is the most pristine river I've ever seen.



“Nature is an open book for those who care to read. Each grass-covered hillside is a page on which is written the history of the past, conditions of the present and predictions of the future. Some see without understanding; but let us look closely and understandingly, and act wisely, and in time bring our methods of land use and conservation activities into close harmony with the dictates of nature.”

--John Weaver,
North American Prairie, 1954

Q&A:

Question:
What is the best way to store seeds?

Answer:
Store seeds in total darkness and in as consistent a temp and humidity as possible. Individuals storing small amounts can stick them in the fridge and store for up to 5 years or more. Large-scale operations keep seeds either in walk-in refrigeration/humidity controlled rooms with an ideal of 50 deg and 50% humidity or similar (40 deg and 60% humidity, 60 deg and 40% humidity).

More info at
[http://
www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/
Portals/0/Shaw%20Nature%
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Avian Adventures - for the Birds

by Cindy Gilberg

Outside my window is a constantly moving and colorful avian dance. Hummingbirds are tenaciously defending their nectar sources and will do so until their departure in October. Goldfinches hang onto coneflowers as they extract the seeds they love so much. Bluebirds and Phoebes swoop down to capture various insects. As the days get shorter signaling the last hoorah of summer, a multitude of birds begin their long migrations southward. Our region is on a major flyway for many of these travelers who visit us for brief periods in the fall and again in the spring. Numerous other bird species are either year-round residents or come to stay for the winter months.

Recognizing basic needs such as food, water and shelter and providing those needs year-round is important. Diversity of plants in your garden is the key to ensuring that a diversity of our feathered friends will visit. Water gardens with small, shallow rivulets or waterfalls provide water and additional habitat for birds while also an exciting garden feature for the gardener. A very small percentage of birds actually visit birdfeeders and most prefer natural habitat that favors their needs.

The smorgasbord should include plants that provide seeds or berries and a habitat conducive to insects, a favorite food of many birds in the summer. Deadheading flowers is a common practice for many gardeners but prevents nutritious seeds from ripening. Avoid using insecticides (harmful to birds too!) and allow the birds to be part of your biological control program. After the first frost don't be so quick to clean up the garden. Pruning perennials to the ground not only removes both seed and cover for many birds, it can also cause crown damage or winter kill in many perennials.

One of the most popular birds is the ruby-throated hummingbird. They arrive in April when the wild columbine (*Aquilegia*) and bluebells (*Mertensia*) are blooming in our woodlands. These quick-flying, diminutive gems that frequent our gardens are especially attracted to tubular-shaped red, orange and pink flowers that provide nectar. They dart about for nectar, returning again to the shelter of large shrubs and trees, so include some in your garden design. Provide favorite nectar sources such as blazing star (*Liatris*), beebalm (*Monarda*), Phlox and catchfly/pinks (*Silene*). Larger plants, for example, red buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*) and trumpet creeper (*Campsis*), are among other desirable nectar sources. Prairie and savannah plants appeal to a wide array of birds such as wrens, sparrows, cardinals, finches and my favorite – the indigo bunting. Blazing star (*Liatris*) is at the top of the list again, inviting numerous butterflies when in bloom and then birds that nibble at the seeds. Plant an assortment of flowers from the aster family, the most familiar being Aster, coneflowers (*Echinacea*), black-eyed Susan's (*Rudbeckia*), goldenrods (*Solidago*) and sunflowers (*Heliopsis/Helianthus*). Grasses add unique form and texture to the garden as well as an abundance of seed. Little bluestem (*Schizachyrium*), prairie dropseed (*Sporobolus*) and side oats grama (*Bouteloua*) are wonderful additions to garden designs.

As autumn turns to winter insect populations decline and many birds shift their diet to fruits, most commonly provided by shrubs and trees. Migrating birds such as orioles and tanagers search for high-fat fruits offered in fall by dogwoods (*Cornus*) and spicebush (*Lindera*). I love watching the large flocks of cedar waxwings visit our cedar trees (*Juniperus*) to eat the frosty blue berries. Hawthorn (*Crataegus*), blackgum (*Nyssa*) are other welcome additions in any garden setting. To complete the garden design add some shrubs, most notably winterberry (*Ilex*), Viburnum and Sumac. All of these have attractive fruit that create winter interest in the garden.

Look over the plants lists for attracting birds and notice that many plants attract more than one group of birds in different seasons. Incorporate any or all of these plants into a conventional sunny garden design or looser more natural design – either way you will notice an increase of avian visitors.

For more information about attracting birds to your backyard visit the St Louis Audubon website at
<http://www.stlouisaudubon.org/>