

The News From Native Plant School

November 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



Upcoming classes:

Thur, Nov. 13, 1-4 p.m.

Control and ID of Invasive Plants

Invasive plants are a threat to native ecosystems and landscapes because they compete with native plants for light, nutrients and moisture. Many natural and landscaped areas have become severely infested with invasive species due to several years or decades of neglect. Control methods described in this class are designed for both homeowners who are having problems with bush honeysuckle and several other invasive plants.

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.

Please register at shawnature.org/NPS

Gardening above Snow-line Is Good for the Gander:

By Scott Woodbury

If last winter is any measure of winters to come I plan to garden differently this year. It was colder with snow covering the ground longer and with many cold, windy days. In the garden I noticed footsteps on the snow beneath native plants and seeds still hanging on where I thought they were totally gone. Blazingstar, aster, goldenrod, little bluestem, switchgrass, black-eyed susan, pale purple coneflower, Bradbury beebalm, and ironweed all had some seed left on dried seed heads. Perhaps as little as 5 percent on some was clearly enough to feed flocks of hungry birds who foraged above the snowline. It is entertaining to see sparrows pluck seeds from seemingly bare plant stems. Blazingstar stalks are sturdy and can support the weight of a bird or two yet the stems of little bluestem grass bend over nearly to the ground from the weight of a single bird. In case you were wondering, a song sparrow weighs about one ounce, the equivalent of one slice of bread. No wonder tiny native plant seeds can feed them. Stems of Indian grass are glassy and birds slip down the stems...oops. Seeds that fall on the snow become food for the juncos and white-throated sparrows who perhaps already know it's far easier to sit on the snow like fat thanksgiving turkeys and wait for the food to come to them. Who needs novels for winter entertainment?

One snowy winter morning while cross country skiing through Shaw Nature Reserve I noticed the footprints of a mouse who left tiny tracks between black-eyed Susan stalks poking above the snow. At the base of each stem was a scattering of seed and chaff. The mouse was moving from stem to stem climbing each like a coconut tree in search of seeds.

As a gardener I plan to keep native plant stems standing all winter. The native garden in winter is essentially a bird feeder that you never have to refill. In spring I'll plant more blazingstars which seem to be the preferred food with its relatively large and prolific (10-20% left on the stalk in winter) seeds. A lesser-known native plant to gardeners is false boneset, *Brickellia eupatorioides*. This one holds on tightly to most of its showy white fluffy seeds in early winter. Same is true of the salt and pepper shaker type seed heads of Bradbury beebalm, *Monarda bradburiana*, wild basil, *Pycnanthemum incanum* and downy pagoda-plant, *Blephilia ciliata* all of which dispense seeds throughout winter.

Gardening Tips:

Blow or rake tree leaves from beds onto lawn and mow. Rake up ground leaves, compost and use the following season.

Clean tree leaves and debris out gutters after tree leaves have fallen.

Before shutting down irrigation system for the winter, inspect drip lines, pipes, nozzles, etc. for leaks. This may involve digging up a pipe or valve in a soggy area to inspect for punctures or leaks. Mark all leaks and repair after turning off the water for winter.

November 15 to March 15 is the best time to prune most trees and shrubs. Remove conflicting and crowded branches, dead limbs, double-leaders and unsightly branches.

Add fuel stabilizer to engines before winter storage. Drain and store water hoses. Clean up all tools.

Good time to make improvements to hardscapes (pavers, walls, stonework, woodwork, etc.)

“As I looked about me I felt that the grass was the country, as the water is the sea. The red of the grass made all the great prairie the colour of winestains, or of certain seaweeds when they are first washed up. And there was so much motion in it; the whole country seemed, somehow, to be running.”

– Willa Cather, *My Ántonia*

Your Photos:

Mark Ostendorf loves hiking at Shaw Nature Reserve and enjoys sharing his beautiful photos of native plants and landscapes with us. You can see them on his flicker page by following the link below.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/78584244@N02/sets/72157648959624852/>

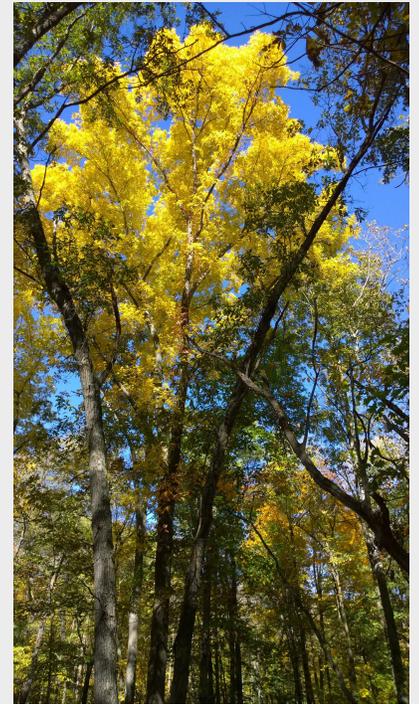
Making Good Choices for Trees:

Reprinted from earlier work
By Cindy Gilberg

Photo: Mockernut Hickory, *Carya tomentosa*

Missouri tests our trees with its winter storms. Some of these events have left damaged trees, but, for the most part, healthy, well-maintained trees have survived these tempests.

Even so, many homeowners and some tree service companies have chosen to top trees (the severe removal of the top branches in mature trees) to prevent storm damage to houses. On the contrary, tree topping (also known as studding, heading or lopping) creates weaker branches and potential for diseases that can kill the whole tree. In the long run, especially when the tree dies and needs to be replaced, tree topping can actually cost you more in labor and dollars. Having your tree evaluated first will likely save you money in the long run.



The Missouri Anti-Tree Topping Campaign was formed to provide quality information for anyone who has trees. You can call 1-877-406-6867, talk to a real person (Really! I tried it a number of times) and have information sent. For the computer savvy, the website (www.communitytrees.com/treetopping.html) is packed with information.

When you are ready to select a tree care specialist, use only a certified arborist whose job it is to promote a well-maintained, long-lived tree. Proper pruning and care will result in a healthy tree that has natural beauty and shape. A list of certified arborists can be seen at the Horticultural Co-op of Metro St. Louis's website (www.hortco-op.org).

Mike Sestric, a certified arborist who works for Trees, Forests, and Landscapes of Kirkwood, says their focus is “dedication to tree health and safety with the emphasis on safety when working with trees”. Trees, Forests and Landscapes is a professional tree care company (www.treesforestsandlandscapes.com) owned by Bill Spradley, also a certified arborist. For much of their tree work they now use a spider lift. This equipment gives safe access to eighty percent of the trees, a significant increase over the usual thirty to forty percent with conventional bucket trucks. The light-weight spider lift can be maneuvered into tiny spaces and eliminates much of the need for more dangerous climbing.

When faced with replacing a large tree that has died, choosing the right tree for the right place is a tremendous first step towards good tree health. Carefully match your tree selection with soil and light condition (dry, wet, sun or shade). If a shade tree is what you desire, consider long-lived native oak trees like bur oak, chinquapin oak, or swamp white oak. All are tolerant of a wide range of soil and light conditions and contrary to common belief, these species grow quite rapidly. One of my favorite medium-sized trees is the black tupelo tree (*Nyssa sylvatica*). It has a beautiful rounded shape and striking fall color. Tupelo can grow in soil that is moist since it grows in lowlands in Missouri, although it is equally tolerant of dry soils. Small trees like Ohio buckeye and pawpaw are the best choices for working under utility lines while redbud, flowering dogwood, and witch hazel work well closer to the house. Always check into the tree's mature height, breadth and cultural requirements before making a decision as to which tree to plant where.

You can find lists, cultural information and photos of recommended trees for Missouri at www.grownative.org.

News from St. Louis Audubon:

Honeysuckle Problem Gets Additional Attention

Magnificent Missouri has taken up their first big "issue" campaign, and we can't thank them enough for making it Bush Honeysuckle!

You may have seen their Enemy of the State campaign on billboards around Missouri: <http://stop-honeysuckle.org/>

Then, just this week, the campaign made Channel 5 with a story that highlights the HEALTH concerns with honeysuckle infestations. That was great! It is a part of the problem that is rarely discussed but oh so important. This just might be the reminder to take your honeysuckle efforts beyond your own landscape; talk to your neighbors, colleagues and such. Spread the word!

<http://www.ksdk.com/story/news/local/2014/10/15/honeysuckle-spreading-missouri-illinois/17300613/>

Climate Change Impact on Birds Studied by Audubon

Just about a month ago, National Audubon released results of seven years of research into climate change and birds. The findings are not pretty with over 300 bird species expected to lose habitat, population and in some cases go extinct as a result. You can see all the details here: <http://climate.audubon.org/>

We reached out to local media at the same time with our own press release relating specifics for Missouri's birds. St. Louis Public Radio picked up our message and ran this story: <http://news.stlpublicradio.org/post/report-climate-change-threatens-dozens-missouri-birds>

Climate change is big and bad and real hard to appreciate, but know that habitat gardening with native plants WILL make a difference!

Watch this video about climate change and birds: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aN2-a82_3mg&feature=youtu.be

Honeysuckle Control is Like the Movie Groundhog Day:

By Scott Woodbury



Top right: Bullhog attachment on bobcat

Above: Wall of honeysuckle before thinning.

Right: Woodland after bullhog and tree thinning.



Tree thinning will break the cycle in woodlands greater than one acre.

An effective method and perhaps the only cost-effective method for large-scale (greater than one acre) management of bush honeysuckle is a combination of bull-hogging (which grinds honeysuckle from top to bottom), tree thinning and reseeding with savanna grasses and forbs.

1. Bull-hogging: Ecological services typically charge about \$1,800 per day for a bullhog (also called a forestry cutter) plus operator and can treat 3 acres or more per day. In our experience this device killed greater than 60% of shrubs ground in August and is reported to do the same in winter. This followed by spraying the resprout with glyphosate effectively removes mature honeysuckle.
2. Tree thinning (by 40-60%) in my opinion this is the ONLY way to change the playing field in our favor. Without tree thinning it is like the movie groundhog day...killing honeysuckle every 3-5 years over and over and over and a constant outflow of money. Tree thinning potentially stops the bleeding of funds because it addresses three critical things:
 - Greater air flow/wind to encourage hotter fires
 - More sunlight to develop a ground layer of grasses to fuel hotter fires
 - Open woodlands also allow equipment to drive in for mowing or spraying where you can't use fire.
3. Reseeding with native savanna grasses and forbs (showy flowering plants) in December following the first two steps above is the final step in developing a long-term program of honeysuckle management.

Dispelling the Myth of Native Plants:

Scott Woodbury was interviewed recently about dispelling the myth of native plants and it resulted in this article in the Washington Missourian; http://www.emissourian.com/features_people/feature_stories/sustainable-beauty/article_a7769a56-6046-11e4-b843-e77d28be7026.html

Missouri Tree Pests Web Site:

Missouri's main emerald ash borer web site has been expanded to include many other tree pests. The new TreePests site, hosted by University of Missouri Extension, now also includes current information about other invasive forest pests, such as thousand cankers disease of walnut, gypsy moth and Asian longhorned beetle, as well as other major forest health concerns (oak wilt, oak decline, rapid white oak mortality). The site is a service of the interagency Missouri Invasive Forest Pest Council.

<http://extension.missouri.edu/treepests/>

“Useless Creatures; Wildlife is and should be useless in the same way art, music, poetry and even sports are useless. They are useless in the sense that they do nothing more than raise our spirits, make us laugh or cry, frighten, disturb and delight us. They connect us not just to what’s weird, different, other, but to a world where we humans do not matter nearly as much as we like to think. And that should be enough.”

~Richard Conniff

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>

Propagating Milkweed at Home:

By Besa Schweitzer

Many of you planted milkweed (*Asclepias*) plants this year and are now noticing their plump crescent shaped pods in your garden. If you would like to increase your milkweed population or grow a few plants to give to friends, this is how to do it; As soon as the pod begins to split is the best time to collect the seeds. If you pick them right when the pod splits but before they fluff out it is easier to separate the seed from the fluff by holding the fluffy part and scraping down with your fingernail to separate the seeds. Do this in a place without a breeze or your seeds will blow away. Inspect your seeds for insects and remove them.



We give our seeds 3 months of cold moist stratification before sowing. To do this place seeds in a plastic zip-lock bag or plastic container with a tight fitting lid. Label the seeds on the outside of the container with the name and date. Add about equal volume of clean sand, peat moss, or sphagnum. Add water to moisten and then mix contents. Firmly squeeze any excess water from the soil mix. Store the container for three months in your refrigerator before attempting to germinate. Check the seeds occasionally to make sure they are not drying out.

You are now ready to germinate your seeds. Prepare your pots with potting mix or clear a plot in your garden. Sprinkle the contents of your refrigerated container along the top of your soil. Try to space your seeds to have a few per inch. Cover very lightly with more soil, just a sprinkle. Clearly label and date the seeds in a way that the writing will not be washed away by water. Keep this area moist until the plants are established.

To learn more about propagating native plants:

<http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/Portals/o/Shaw%20Nature%20Reserve/PDFs/horticulture/Propagation.pdf>

Frost Flowers:



On frosty mornings look for frost flowers on wingstem, *Verbesina spp.*

Frost flowers are created during the first frozen nights of fall. Water in the plant cells freeze and burst through the stems in long ribbons. Frost flowers are usually only visible in early morning as they melt in the sun's warmth.