

The Native Plant Society of New Jersey

Fall 2025



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NPSNJ President Kazys Varnelis, Editorial Advisor;
Hara Rola, Editor; Marissa Bauman, Design and Layout

Cover photo by Kazys Varnelis

The President's Corner



Welcome to another issue of the NPSNJ newsletter! Much like your public broadcasting station, NPSNJ is made possible by members like you. But unlike public broadcasting, we're not just supported by people like you—we're an all-volunteer organization run by people like you.

We've had some changes since our last newsletter. Susan Haake, leader of Hunterdon Chapter, has retired from years of designing the newsletter. Instead, she's going to focus on other NPSNJ print publications, while Marissa Bauman, who joined the board as co-webmaster this spring, has taken over that role. Thank you Susan, and thank you to Hara Rola, who continues on as editor! We look forward to what Marissa will bring to the newsletter, which remains a vital way to explore themes and share the broad range of activities happening across NPSNJ.

When I became president, the President's Letter appeared twice a year in our newsletter. But there's a lot happening throughout the year—events, advocacy opportunities, even the change of seasons—and I wanted a way to share those things more frequently and respond to what's going on in real time. These monthly letters give me a chance to reflect on plants, the native plant movement, and what's happening in the Society, while the newsletter continues its important work of exploring themes in depth, especially those raised at our conferences.

Speaking of themes, this issue of the newsletter highlights our Fall Conference on November 1, 2025: *Weird N.J. Plants!* *Weird N.J.* is a New Jersey institution, and for good reason—our state embraces its weirdness. From the Pine Barrens to roadside oddities to our

stubborn refusal to pump our own gas, New Jersey is proudly strange. They've kindly let us use their trademark. As we planned our fall conference, I asked Dr. Randi Eckel, Past President and owner of Toadshade Wildflower Farm, which native plants she thought were the strangest. She said to me, "You know, Kazys, all plants are weird in their own way." Still, to borrow a phrase from Orwell, all plants are weird, but some plants are weirder than others.

Our speakers will explore some of the strangest plants you might encounter in New Jersey. Jason Hafstad will explore fungi (okay, not plants, but indispensable to understanding our ecosystems). Dr. Jeffrey Benca will take us back to ancient plants and early plant evolution. Dr. Kadeem Gilbert will present on carnivorous and parasitic plants. And Dr. Kate Lepis, NPSNJ's own Botanist, will explore aquatic plants. This newsletter takes up the theme as well—with articles on Pokeweed, Indian pipes, and Ironweed. I've written about Skunk Cabbage, which generates its own heat to melt snow.

The conference is free to all via Zoom, and it's the day after Halloween, which is fitting. We thought this would be a great way to engage young people and folks who might not have thought about native plants before. Will you help spread the word about the conference?

Kazys Varnelis, Ph.D
President, Native Plant Society of New Jersey

Skunk Cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*): The Fetid Furnace of New Jersey's Swamps

Photos by Kazys Varnelis, Ph.D.

By Kazys Varnelis, Ph.D., NPSNJ President

Wetlands comprise one fifth of our state, putting it in the top ten swampiest states (fun fact: Alaska has the most wetlands of any state). We have so many fabulous wetlands—the Great Swamp, Troy Meadows and Great Piece Meadows, the Meadowlands, Cedar Swamp at High Point, and of course the Pine Barrens—and when winter is about to turn into early spring, they come alive with one of our most bizarre native plants: *Symplocarpus foetidus*, the Eastern skunk cabbage. Eastern it may be, but it is not only found in eastern North America—it is found in east Asia as well and it somehow traveled across Beringia some 4–7 million years ago, prior to the Ice Ages.

I do love skunk cabbage—an apparition seemingly born from H. P. Lovecraft's imagination, with its large mottled spathe, a modified leaf-bract enfolding the stalk of tiny flowers (spadix) within. Possessing it means that *Symplocarpus*, a member of the *Araceae* family, the Arums, which is usually tropical but has some outliers that include some of my favorite weird NJ plants, many of which you can plant in your garden (including skunk cabbage, if you have a moist spot, like by a pond): Jack-in-the-pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*), which changes sex from year to year depending on its energy reserves; green dragon (*Arisaema dracontium*), whose spadix extends beyond its spathe like a serpent's tongue; arrow arum (*Peltandra virginica*), an aquatic plant with arrow-shaped leaves that is taking over my small pond (the least weird of these plants); and, likely impossible to grow for most, the beautiful wild calla (*Calla palustris*), which thrives in the cold, acidic bog on top of High Point.

What makes skunk cabbage truly weird is that it is thermogenic—it literally generates heat. The plant can maintain temperatures at an incredible 15–35°F above the surrounding air, reducing snow and ice around it to slush and creating its own microclimate.



This is exceedingly rare among plants. Moreover, the spathe emits an odor said to be like the scent of decomposing flesh (appropriate for our state's swamps, perhaps?), to attract its primary pollinators: carrion-feeding flies and gnats.

After the spathes fade, green leaves unfurl to form a lush carpet across the woodland floor. But this is no delicious edible. Like many arums, skunk cabbage is filled with calcium oxalate crystals—take one small bite and you'll be crying for hours, if not days. I've heard that deer will eat skunk cabbage, but in the swamp by the Lenape Trail off Ridge Road in Cedar Grove, it's the one plant they leave alone. There, in suburban Essex County, where so few native plants remain, skunk cabbage still grows wild amid invasive Japanese pachysandra, periwinkle, and barberry that deer have allowed to dominate. Yet amidst this chaos, skunk cabbage persists—generating heat, stinking of death, and feeding the first flies of spring, a reminder of what belongs here.

This article is a heavily abbreviated and edited version of my essay "Skunk Cabbage and the Entropic Landscape," <https://varnelis.net/the-florilegium/skunk-cabbage-and-the-entropic-landscape/> (March 2025)

2025 Fall Annual Meeting and Conference

November 1 • 8:50 AM – 2 PM FREE on ZOOM!

New Jersey is home to more than 2,100 native plant species, yet many plant lists and gardens highlight only a small group of familiar species such as *Eutrochium purpureum* (Joe-Pye weed), *Echinacea purpurea* (Purple coneflower), *Rudbeckia* spp. (Black-eyed Susan), and *Lobelia cardinalis* (Cardinal flower). This year, the Native Plant Society of New Jersey is focusing on the less familiar species—the unusual, rare, and unique plants that make our state's ecosystems so distinctive.

From parasitic plants that lack chlorophyll to carnivorous species that trap insects, from ancient plant lineages that predate the dinosaurs to aquatic plants that evolved on land before returning to water, New Jersey's flora includes species that challenge our assumptions about how plants work.



These “weird” plants aren’t just curiosities—they’re indicators of specialized habitats, key players in complex ecological relationships, and windows into evolutionary history. Understanding them helps us appreciate the full complexity of our native ecosystems and the importance of protecting diverse habitats.

With the kind permission of [Weird NJ](https://weirdnj.org), our 2025 Fall Conference explores these botanical oddities. Join us as we highlight the “weird” side of New Jersey’s flora—and beyond.

For more information about the Fall Conference and to Register: npsnj.org/event/fall-conference-2025



Weird Fungi of New Jersey

Jason Hafstad, Preserve Manager and Ecologist, NJ Natural Lands Trust

This presentation will introduce the audience to New Jersey fungi, particularly those species with a weird morphology, ecology, or natural history.



Botanical Dinosaurs: New Jersey’s Primeval Lycophytes

Dr. Jeffrey Benca, Research Associate, University of California Museum of Paleontology, UC Berkeley

In *New Jersey’s Primeval Lycophytes*, we will take a deep-dive into the native diversity of this amazing branch of the tree of life and learn how their ancient relatives impacted our planet over 400 million years.



Pitchers and Sundews and Parasites, Oh My! Carnivorous and Parasitic Plants in New Jersey

Dr. Kadeem Gilbert, Assistant Professor, Department of Plant Biology and W.K. Kellogg Biological Station, Michigan State University

This presentation will tour the weird and wonderful carnivorous and parasitic plant species that can be found living naturally in New Jersey.



The Wet & Wild World of Aquatic Plants

Dr. Kate B. Lepis, Horticulturist, Deep Cut Gardens of the Monmouth County Park System and NPSNJ Botanist

Let’s explore some of the species that exist within the interface of land and open water. A focus will be put on the adaptations and ecology that make aquatic plants unique (aka weird).

Ghost Plant or Indian Pipes (*Monotropa uniflora*)

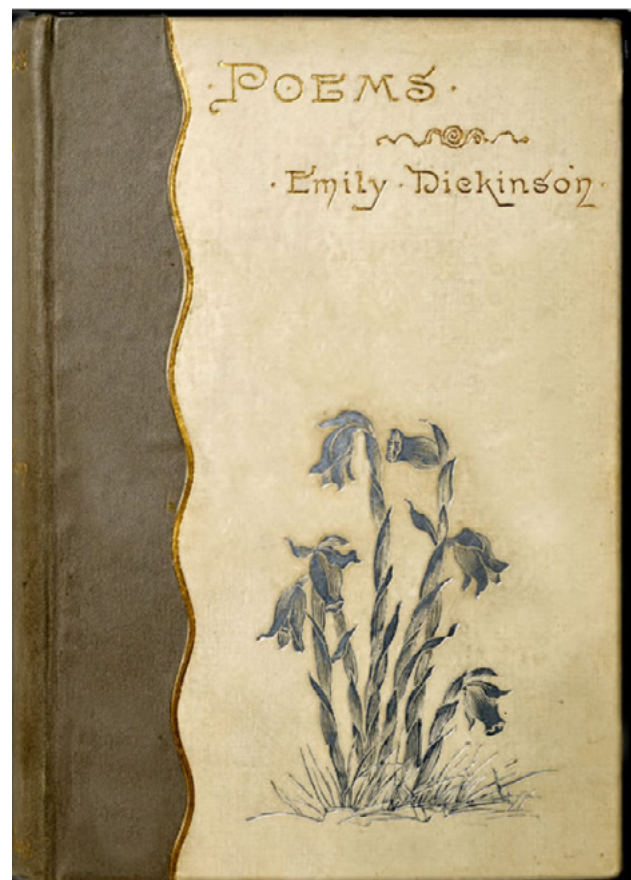
By John Suskewich, Essex Chapter
Photos by Deb Ellis

Is *Monotropa uniflora*, (Indian pipes or Ghost plant), even a plant? It looks like something crafted in the underworld, carved and filed and incised out of what? Stygian fog or witch's wax? There's not a speck of green to any part, which means it has no chlorophyll. It is utterly, absolutely, indubitably white. This "marble pallor", the terrifying whiteness with which Melville invests his monstrous creation, *Moby Dick*, is inherent in this unnerving organism. Too bad its season is early summer and midsummer; if nature had any PR sense, it should appear around Halloween, or Walpurgis Nacht or something similar. We saw this colony of Indian pipes on June 14th at an Essex County Park, Mills Reservation in Cedar Grove, NJ.

Indian pipes are perennial wildflowers that grow in woodsy, acidic, leafy humus. Most of the ones I've ever seen are about six or eight inches high and are usually found in pretty deep shade, easy for them because lacking chlorophyll they don't need sunlight to grow. Instead, through mycorrhizae, they suck nutrients "vampire-like" from the roots of nearby trees, which are photosynthetic. When the plant first arises, its flowers hang down like the cone at the end of a candle snuffer, then stand up straight as seed is setting. Indian pipes are classified in the family of *Ericaceae*, which is a surprise to me and really cool because even though they look not alike at all, that means they are related to blueberries and rhododendrons, plants that also thrive on sour soils.

For such an oddball organism, this plant is unusually rich in literary associations. Indian Pipe appears in poems by Adrienne Rich, G.C. Waldrep, Barbara Kingsolver... One of its most moving performances is in "Child" by Sylvia Plath, where it becomes an unsettling symbol of danger, decay, and death in the beautiful world of nature seen by a kid on a walk in the woods.

Emily Dickinson once referred to it mysteriously as "the preferred flower of life." Since she herself later in life almost exclusively attired herself in white, maybe she identified with the albinism of this plant. She used it metaphorically in many of her lyrics, such as "White as an Indian Pipe, red as a cardinal flower..." contrasting its shade of death to the lobelia's garnet life. As one of the images shows, her editor used it on the cover of her first book of poems, published posthumously—not "post-humously."





Unripe American Pokeweed



Ripe American Pokeweed

The American Pokeweed, (*Phytolacca Americana*) a Weird NJ Plant

By Amy DiPalma
Morris Chapter Co-Leader

It's October, a spooky time of year and one of New Jersey's most feared native plants is abundant with its deep purplish black berries. It is a scraggly, shrubby bush that can grow up to 10 feet tall and 5 feet wide, with bright green leaves, fuchsia stems and chains of berries that start off an alien green and turn such a dark purple that they are almost black.

It is a striking plant to say the least. *Phytolacca americana* (American pokeweed) is known for its poisonous berries that might look tempting to taste, but unless prepared correctly, might be the last thing you eat. Many of you might be familiar with it simply because your parents told you not to eat the berries. In fact, all parts of this plant are poisonous to humans, but treated properly they can have beneficial qualities. Indigenous cultures knew ways to safely prepare the young leaves for food and ways to use other parts of the plant for medicinal purposes. Colonists would use the berry juice to make dye. Unless you have proper instruction, it would be recommended to leave this plant to the birds.

Birds love the pokeweed berries and many will stop to eat them along their migration routes. The staining purplish, red droppings help spread the pokeweed far and wide. Pokeweed is a pioneer species, a plant that grows best in areas that have been disturbed. They make way for other plants to follow suit. It is not only a food source for birds, the flowers provide nectar to native bees, butterflies and hummingbirds. Pokeweed is also a host plant for caterpillars including the beautiful Leopard moth. Some mammals like deer, raccoons, foxes and opossums will eat the fruit and/or leaves. Remember though, those berries are a trick not a treat for humans.

Pollinator Plant Profile: New York Ironweed (*Vernonia noveboracensis*)

By Irene O. Sabin, Hunterdon Chapter
Photos By Eric Baumgarten

Vernonia noveboracensis (New York ironweed) is a perennial wildflower in the *Asteraceae* family. Native to the eastern United States, it is an ecologically important plant for pollinators because it flowers at the end of summer to early fall when other plants have stopped blooming.

The natural habitat of New York ironweed includes wet meadows, floodplains and riverbanks. It grows well in rich to average moist soils and needs six to eight hours of full to partial sun per day. In the home landscape, New York ironweed can reach five to eight feet in height with large clusters of deep purple to magenta flowers at the top of the stems. It would be a good choice for the back of a perennial bed or border and is striking as a specimen plant. It's used in rain gardens, pollinator and native plant gardens and other naturalized areas.

New York ironweed is a strong, clump-forming plant with a deep root system that helps to prevent soil erosion and contributes to soil fertility. The stems can be rough and hairy or smooth with alternate lanceolate leaves with serrated edges. The leaves vary in surface texture like the stems. The name, ironweed, may have come from the toughness of the plant, especially when early settlers were clearing ground for farmland.

Propagation of New York ironweed can be by division of clumps, "softwood" cuttings, and seeds. In a garden setting, dividing clumps every three or four years keeps the garden from overcrowding. Seed propagation is the easiest and most recommended method. In a naturalized area, seedheads can be left on the plant to be dispersed by the wind. Collected seeds need a period of cold stratification before planting. The plant produces many seeds. To limit self-seeding



in the garden, late season flowers can be cut for bouquets to enjoy indoors. Seedheads can be dead-headed and used for bird food.

As the plant matures, the sturdy, hollow stems, fading flowerheads and fluffy seeds turn a rusty color which may contribute to its "ironweed" name. After seed dispersal, the hollow stems can be used as perches for feeding birds or trimmed to 12 or 14 inches to provide cavities for nesting bees. The stems are beautiful in dried flower arrangements. This easy to grow, low maintenance plant is ecologically important, providing seeds, nectar and pollen for butterflies, specialized native bees, honeybees, moths and other insects as well as hummingbirds and songbirds during the transition from summer to fall.

Deer sometimes browse young plants but don't seem to like the fragrance, bitter taste, or vegetative texture of the mature *V. noveboracensis*. The bright purple flowers of New York ironweed paired with Showy goldenrod, New England asters, and other late bloomers present a buffet for wildlife and a feast for the eyes.

Photos were taken at the RMG Educational Garden, Rutgers Cooperative Extension Building, RT 12, Hunterdon County. More extensive information about New York ironweed can be found on the NPSNJ website under "Awesome Native Plants:"

Independent Garden Center (IGC) Committee Update

By Kim Rowe, IGC Committee Co-Chair



members indicated their biggest problem was locating natives in local nurseries. Since then, there has been a rapid expansion of native plants available from large wholesalers that supply IGCs in our state, two are *Centerton* and *Prides Corner*. There are other wholesalers who are also providing a selection of straight species natives and native cultivars. IGCs, in turn, have begun stocking more native plants. We assume that this is a result of better availability and greater customer awareness.

“Pollinator Day was VERY successful—all who attended loved it: attendees, panelists, and exhibitors. Some who attended had a tough time hearing, so maybe [we’ll use] a portable microphone system in the future. A record sales say, over \$4400, whereas a regular Saturday, we’d be most lucky to see half of that. We sold a total of 220 north American native plants, 104 unique item lines.”
— Ros Doremus, *My Backyard At Nectars*

The importance of customer awareness and availability is highlighted in this report: [Native Plant Market Report - Nursery Mag](#). According to the report, the majority of IGC customers want natives but don’t care whether it is a cultivar or straight species. 54% of IGC owners surveyed plan to increase their inventory of



“It was a great day, lots of interest in the natives from all of our customers, both new and old came out for the event. The pre-order plant sale went very well. Many attendees did purchase plants on the day of the event, they and others have continued to trickle in over the last week to buy more.”
— Dan Coneeny, *Colonial Nursery*

native cultivars in the next 3 years. 88% said that education about cultivars would help customers feel more confident in their choices. NPSNJ has an opportunity to frame the conversation about cultivars in NJ.

IGC initiative continues to focus on “Pollinator Days” events. Based on the rapid uptake of native plants at IGCs, we feel there is less need for NPSNJ to drive the initiative. However, as an organization we still want to drive awareness of and education about native plants through our statewide and chapter based programs. And, help IGCs who supply native plants attract customers and educate them about natives. “Pollinator Days” do both.

2025 “Pollinator Days” Locations: *Bountiful Gardens*, Hillsborough; *Bountiful Gardens*, Ewing; *Glen Wilde*, Bloomingdale; *Bast Brothers*, Mullica Hill; *Pantano*, Holmdel; *Magnolia Garden Village*, Magnolia; *Staffa Stone & Garden Center*, Marlton; *Colonial Nursery*, Lincroft; *My Backyard At Nectars*, Titusville.

Our goals for 2025–26 are: to continue to support Pollinator Days events across the state; update the IGC web page; re-run the NPSNJ mailing list survey to measure changes in accessibility of native plants; develop some educational materials about cultivars versus straight species that can help guide consumer and IGC owner choices.

A Word About Nativars – Some are not Native

By Kate B. Lepis, Ph.D., NPSNJ Botanist



DeepCut *Viburnum dentatum*

Most have heard the argument for planting straight species over native cultivars (aka nativars). The main purpose of landscaping native is to increase biodiversity around the home; biodiversity is the cure for the ecological dysfunction surrounding us. The gold standard are NJ natives grown from local seed. They represent lineages that have stood the test of time and evolved to be the best adapted to the local environment. Restoration ecologists often define local as from the same geological region as the restoration site: Coastal Plain, Piedmont, Highlands, or Ridge & Valley. This working definition may not be realistic for all, but serves as a useful framework and goal to strive for.

If local plants are unavailable or the origin unknown, a straight species native to NJ would be the next best thing. Straight meaning derived from seed of wild type parents. Biodiversity is measured by the number of different species in a landscape and the genetic variation that exists within each. The nativar problem is a genetic diversity problem; often, when you see a nativar for sale you are looking at a table of clones – all 100% genetically the same.

Consider *Viburnum dentatum* 'Synnvestedt' (Arrowwood viburnum 'Chicago Lustre'). Discovered as a seedling in Morton Arboretum outside of Chicago, it is described as a prolific fruit producer compared to the species¹. It can be argued that at least this cultivar is the result of the genetic variety that exists within *Viburnum dentatum* (Arrowwood viburnum). Where it falls short is every plant sold is a clone of the shrub from Morton (ensuring all hold true to the description). If you have five 'Chicago Lustre' in your yard, genetically speaking there is only one. Many *Viburnum* are self-incompatible – they cannot pollinate themselves. To get the profusion of fruit described you need genetically distinct individuals for cross-pollination.



Nativar: Pink Double Delight Coneflower
Trishia Shears, Wikimedia Commons

Some cultivars are crosses between separate species – with one non-native parent. By all accounts that hybrid is not native. Additionally, interspecific crosses often result in infertile offspring. Without fruit/seed, there is a diminished potential for supporting the food web. Like other non-native plants, these cultivars are more of an ornament than a contributor to ecosystem function. *Agastache* x 'Blue Fortune' (Anise hyssop) is an infertile cultivar trying to sound native. Neither parent, *Agastache foeniculum* (Anise hyssop) and *Agastache rugosa* (Korean mint)² is a NJ native. *A. foeniculum* is native to the Upper Midwest and the Great Plains³ – the latter from Korea.

If healing the Earth is the goal, buy plants that provide the greatest potential to that end. Avoid nativars that are less palatable to the insect herbivores we want to support – those with different leaf colors, double blooms, and even unique flower color. Evolutionarily insects choose the color they prefer as seen in the straight species. Embrace scientific names and beware of plants sold only under a genus name. Those are not native, but are marketed by some as such.

¹ Chicago Botanic Garden. Plant Finder. https://www.chicagobotanic.org/plantcollections/plant-finder/viburnum_dentatum_synnvestedt--arrowwood_viburnum

² NC State Extension <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/agastache-blue-fortune/>

³ BONAP. <https://bonap.net/Napa/TaxonMaps/Genus/State/Agastache>

Leaving the Leaves: A Simple Way to Support Native Landscapes



**By Jean Epiphan, Ph.D., Rutgers Agriculture & Natural Resources Agent/Assistant Professor,
NPSNJ Advisory Board Arborist**

Leaving leaves is an essential part of your native plant landscape. All species of plants evolved for millions of years with leaf drop. Autumn leaves of native trees and shrubs are critical resources that contribute vital nutrient assemblages to soil. Native leaf litter promotes healthy soil microbial life that processes nutrients for natural plant uptake, the way our locally native plants evolved to access nutrients. Furthermore, the best leaf litter for your native plants are the types of leaves they evolved with – leaves from their plant community.

Take native oak and pine leaf litter, for example. They contribute to the soil health, maintaining acidic soil pH (like 5-6), and specialized microbial processes that keep understory blueberries, huckleberries, and azaleas healthy (heath family a.k.a. ericaceous plants). These types of decomposing leaves contribute compounds that promote ericoid mycorrhizal fungi, which co-evolved with blueberries and related plants in lower pH soils, to provide nitrogen and chelated iron naturally. Have you ever had a “chlorotic” or yellowing rhododendron or blueberry? This is likely due to lack of chelated iron. Instead of feeding synthetic chelated iron fertilizer that can harm microbes, you can simply start leaving leaf types they co-evolved with – native oak and pine. All-in-all native leaf litter helps promote natural plant health, resilience, and reduces incidence of disease and decline.

Fallen leaves in native gardens and forested areas provide more than critical nutrition for plants and soil microbes. Fallen leaves are vital to our entire natural ecosystem. Countless species of native insects rely on leaf litter as habitat, shelter, forage, and larval hosting such as moths, bumble bees, and fireflies. Have you noticed fewer fireflies in your neighborhood? Leaf removal is a major contributor to mass insect declines. Yet, insects are indispensable to our local food webs. They pollinate our plants



and feed other wildlife like native birds, shrews, and chipmunks forage in leaf litter for insects while they help us by eating up non-native earthworms and ticks too. All parts of our local webs of life rely on fallen leaves supporting healthy ecosystems for all.

Remember, fallen leaves are nature’s original mulch – but never over-mulch. Leaf litter layer thickness should not exceed two inches and make sure to not pile leaves against tree trunks. A healthy leaf litter layer is not compacted and allows passage of air, as well as nooks and crannies for wildlife and insects to forage and hide. Harboring a healthy leaf litter habitat in gardens and forests benefits our entire ecosystem, including us humans and our societal health.

For more information, check out the Rutgers Fact Sheet: Why Leave Leaves and How to Do it here:
<https://njaes.rutgers.edu/fs1369/>

NPSNJ Grant Follow Up-Kingwood Township Environmental Commission

By Priscilla Hayes, Commission Member

This article consists of excerpts taken from a post-grant report, August 2025

The Kingwood Township Environmental Commission received a mini-grant award of \$750 for native plant gardens at the Kingwood Township Municipal Building, 599 Oak Curve Rd., Frenchtown NJ.

This grant funded the first native plant demonstration garden at the Municipal Building. The intent of the garden is to educate and inspire visitors on the importance and benefits of native plants.

The garden has begun with one planting bed and will continue in a series of subsequent planting beds, all of which will provide visitors the opportunity to see how native plants can be used in their own home gardens and be just as, or more, attractive as “conventional” non-native plantings.

Planning Committee member Randi Scher hired and paid native plants expert Randi Eckel, Ph.D. and NPSNJ Vice President and Entomologist to do planning and an accompanying report to guide our project. Ms. Eckel gave us recommendations for each of the various beds surrounding the Municipal Building. She recommended purchasing potted plants since they're more mature than the plugs we had originally considered. This report represented an expenditure which would have consumed most of our grant budget. Without Ms. Scher's generous contribution that paid for this analysis and report, we would not have been able to secure these expert recommendations.

We are very glad that we listened to Randi since the growth in the initial bed has been amazing—far more than the “sleep” or “creep” we might otherwise have expected of a first-year native plant garden. More mature plants make the garden particularly effective for demonstrations since visitors can see progress and beauty right away, without being gardener “geeks” who simply love our plants no matter what size. It all comes at a price, since potted plants, especially shrubs are more expensive than plugs.

We expect this to be an ongoing project, encompassing all sides of the Municipal Building, as time



and energy permits. The Municipal Building is the best kind of project venue, as its landscaping beds are akin to the size limits of beds around most homes. We want to show people plants that work on all exposures of home gardens.

We used 100% pure native species: *Zizia aurea*, *Monarda punctata*, *Eryngium yuccifolium*, *Pentstemon digitalis*, *Pycnanthemum muticum*, *Physocarpus opulifolius*, *Pycnanthemum tenuifolium*, *Panicum virgatum*, *Asclepias tuberosa*.

We expect completion of the original bed and one more by September/October 2025. By March 2026, we expect to fill in any remaining spaces in the two original beds and create a maintenance plan. We also expect to host our first two public garden events by then.

We're very proud of all we have accomplished since we received the NPSNJ funding—we could not have done this [project] without the grant.

Somerset Chapter Visits Mini-grants' Site

By Ellen Locker, Somerset Chapter

On the evening of July 15th this year, the Somerset County chapter hosted members for a tour of the Rutgers Master Gardener Teaching Garden in Bridgewater, N.J. – the site of two 2024 state mini-grant awards.

Shona Erlenborn, grant recipient, shared a brief history of the Teaching Garden created in 2018 for Somerset County Master Gardener education and public outreach. Within the native plant beds was a wet area perfect for installation of a 44' x 7' Firefly Habitat, consistent with the 2024 Somerset County Fair theme, "4-H Fairytale," and the subject of the mini-grant award. The grant supported the purchase of 120 plugs of 19 straight native species of wet-loving perennials, grasses and *Carex* (Sedges) as well as *Cephalanthus occidentalis* (Buttonbush) shrub. The bed was designed in the shape of a firefly with plants arranged from tallest to shortest, and with attention to bloom time and color placement (see flyer). Master Gardeners planted and maintained the habitat through summer 2024 drought conditions. Educational signage of plant species, including larval host information, was created and posted for garden visitors. The hard work was rewarded in spring 2025 with an amazing display of plantings which have, indeed, met the ultimate objective of attracting and supporting a robust firefly community!

Lynne Adler and Kathy Marschall, grant recipients, also located their Meadow project in the Teaching Garden. Part of their Rutgers Environmental Steward internship, the project was inspired by Owen Wormser's book entitled *Lawns into Meadows: Growing a Regenerative Landscape*, which describes how to replace the *deadscape* we call "lawn" with low-maintenance, ecologically friendly meadows. The undertaking focused on evaluating different methods for installation of a native meadow. Four test plots were established on an existing grassy area with varying site preparation (solarization versus vegetative cut) and planting methods (plant plugs versus overseeding). Grant funding was used to purchase native plugs and seeds.



The Somerset County Master Gardener Teaching Garden is open to the public by invitation only. Those interested to visit should contact Jessica Shick at jshick@co.somerset.nj.us.

Fireflies: Nature's Own Fairies

RMG TEACHING GARDEN FIREFLY HABITAT

OUR OWN FIREFLY HABITAT
GARDEN BED WAS DESIGNED
WITH NATURE'S OWN FAIRIES'
PREFERENCES IN MIND.



THE BED WAS PLANTED IN THE
SHAPE OF A FIREFLY WITH
PLANTS ARRANGED FROM
TALLEST TO SHORTEST



#	Latin Name	Common Name
1	Cephalanthus occidentalis	Buttonbush
2	Lobelia siphilitica	Blue lobelia
3	Iris versicolor	Blue flag iris
4	Lobelia cardinalis	Cardinal flower
5	Aquilegia canadensis	Columbine
6	Monarda didyma	Scarlet bee balm
7	Pachira aurea	Golden rainwort
8	Panicum virgatum	Switch grass
9	Chasmodium latifolium	Northern sea oats
10	Deschampsia cespitosa	Tufted hairgrass
11	Carex rosea	Curly wood sedge
12	Helianthus scaberrimus	Oxeye sunflower
13	Helianthus angustifolius	Swamp sunflower
14	Helenium autumnale	Sneezeweed
15	Zizia aurea	Golden alexander
16	Symphotrichum laeve	Smooth blue aster
17	Asclepias verticillata	Swamp milkweed
18	Heuchera americana	Coral bells
19	Chelone glabra	White turtlehead
20	Sieyinchium angustifolium	Blue eyed grass
21	River rock/stones	
22	Branches/tlogs	

FIREFLY LARVAE LIVE IN
MOIST AREAS WHERE THEY
WILL PREY ON SLUGS, SNAILS,
AND WORMS FOR 1-2 YEARS.



INCLUDED ARE 5 DIFFERENT GRASS
SPECIES, WHERE FEMALES HANG
OUT WAITING ON SIGNALS FROM
MALES ABOVE.



THIS PROJECT WAS SUPPORTED BY A 2024 NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY OF NEW JERSEY MINI-GRANT

NPSNJ Essex Chapter Outreach

By Deb Ellis, Essex Chapter Leader
Photos By Kate Albright, Essex Chapter
Steering Committee Member

NPSNJ chapters are the "milkweed seeds" of out-
reach – blowing far and wide – we collectively host
over 100 events each year! These tours, talks, walks
and workshops are the way that many people gain
first-hand experience with native plants. It is espe-
cially gratifying when we reach young people! Here
are pics from the Essex Chapter's recent shrub sale
and guided nature walks.

Our youngest
customer
contemplates
her purchases.



Steering Committee Member Jessica Miller shares
the magic of Buttonbush seeds on a guided walk.



NPSNJ WildStory Podcast

Episode 25 is now available on Spotify, Apple, Google, and Amazon

Share this podcast with your friends and family. The WildStory is a FREE resource to learn from and available to everyone!



Hosted by [Ann E. Wallace, PhD](#)
Poet Laureate Emeritus of Jersey City



Co-host [Kim Correro](#)
Rutgers Master Gardener and Director of State Programs



Special Contributor [Dr. Randi Eckel](#)
Entomologist and Vice President of Membership NPSNJ

This month's **featured poet** is [Holli Carrell](#) (0:2:22), whose debut collection ***Apostasies*** was recently published by [Perugia Press](#). Holli speaks about her personal process of reflection and discovery—including an intentional turn toward the natural world—after leaving the Mormon church of her upbringing.

In **Ask Randi** (0:29:15), **Dr. Randi Eckel**, Owner of [ToadShade Wildflower Farm](#), tackles a listener's question about Oleander aphids and explains why buying ladybugs isn't the best approach to eliminating them.

In **Five Questions**, President of the [Native Plant Society of NJ](#), [Kazys Varnelis](#) (0:38:46), shares the lineup of speakers for [Weird NJ, this fall's virtual](#)

The WildStory

A Podcast of Poetry & Plants

by The Native Plant Society
of New Jersey



Listen Here!

[conference](#), happening Saturday, November 1. From parasitic plants to carnivorous, aquatic, and fungal species, discover how these fascinating natives play vital roles in our ecosystems.

And to close out the episode, we speak with **Mary Anne Borge** (0:55:31), editor of [Butterfly Gardener Magazine](#), a publication of the [North American Butterfly Association \(NABA\)](#), and a naturalist at [Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve](#). Mary Anne talks with us about how we can each make a difference for butterflies, the connection between the Sleepy Orange butterfly and Wild Senna, and why ants deserve a spot on every gardener's "thank you" list.

Check out Mary Anne's blog [The Natural Web](#), and her recent Wednesday webinar for NPSNJ [All About Asters!](#)

Four Years in the Life of a Pollinator Garden with Lucy Hooper

November 19 • 7 – 8:30 PM

The pollinator garden in Mickleton Park (Gloucester County), conceived through grants, was planted in spring 2022 and has been through 4 growing seasons. You will be taken on a tour through its years while introducing you to the 60 native species which make up the garden and some of the wildlife that visit it.

Lucy has always been an avid gardener and has had a passion for native plants for 3 decades. She planted a native meadow 30 years ago in her backyard, starting each plant from seed. Her native backyard meadow which includes forbs, grasses and shrubs is still thriving and evolving. Her experience with growing native plants was drawn upon when an opportunity arose to start native plantings in a local park. Lucy is a member of NPSNJ Southwest Chapter.

NPSNJ WEDNESDAY WEBINAR SERIES



Register on Zoom

Native Meadows, Glades and other Sunny Habitats: Ecology, Restoration, and Gardens

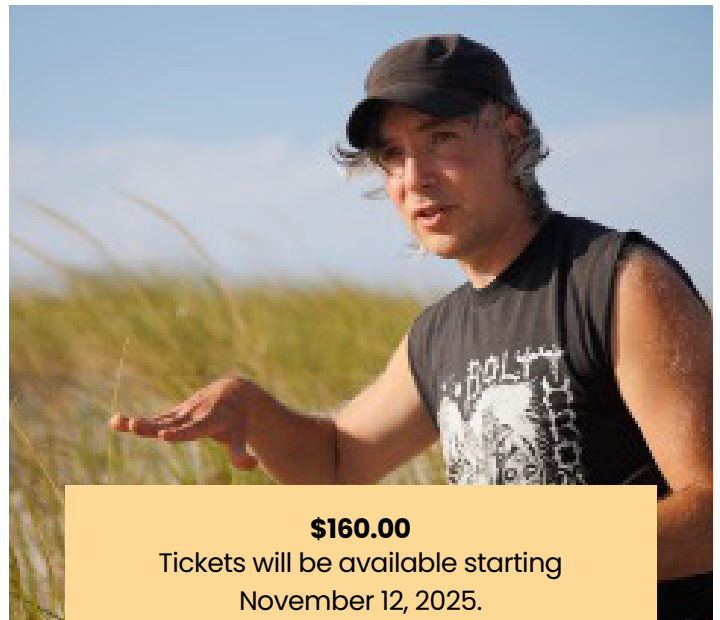
Presented by Jared Rosenbaum, Botanist
Thursdays, January 8, 15, 22, and 29, 2026 • 7 – 8:30 PM

In this short course we'll discuss the ecology of open sunny plant habitats. What role do open habitats play in the historical ecology of our area? What forces allowed for the persistence of sunny habitats in a region typically dominated by forests?

We'll focus in on sun-loving native plant species, and learn about many charismatic plant species that rely on open habitats. We'll also discuss the many species of conservation concern found in meadows, glades, shrublands, and other openings.

Jared Rosenbaum is a botanist, native plant grower, and Certified Ecological Restoration Practitioner. He is a founding partner at Wild Ridge Plants LLC, a business that grows local ecotype native plants using sustainable practices and performs botanical surveys.

More information about the course and Jared at <https://npsnj.org/event/native-meadows-glades-and-other-sunny-habitats-ecology-restoration-and-gardens/>



\$160.00

Tickets will be available starting
November 12, 2025.

Register on NPSNJ.org

The Native Plant Society *of* New Jersey

Our mission is to promote the
appreciation, protection and
study *of* New Jersey's native flora.

npsnj.org

