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Mississippi Native Plants

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Winter 1996

Rudbeckias are hardy, rewarding wildflowers

by Lynn Libous-Bailey

Whether you're talking about Black-eyed susans or Orange coneflowers, to gardeners they epitomize hardy, carefree and easy.

Both Black-eyed susans and the Orange coneflowers are members of the North American native group of plants called *Rudbeckia*. This genus includes over 30 annuals, biennials and perennials found occurring in the wild, many of which occur in Mississippi.

Most *Rudbeckia* are best appreciated growing wild in Mother Nature's garden where lanky growth and small flowers are unconditionally accepted. But many have nudged their way into our gardens where we have welcomed them with open arms.

Plant taxonomists know it as *Rudbeckia hirta*, but most people refer to this native as Black-eyed susan. It is a reseeding annual or at best a short lived perennial which in one season will easily grow to a three by two foot mound covering itself with deep yellow flowers having a black central cone. Hence the common name containing 'black eye'.

The stems of Black-eyed susan are rough and the leaves sometimes so hairy that the plant may take on a sage-like grey-look. It is extremely drought tolerant and survives in even the leanest of soils where it will happily bloom from June through September.

A pawn in the game of plant breeding, the wild form was taken and



CUT-LEAVED CONEFLOWER *Rudbeckia laciniata* L.

crosses made to increase flower size, decrease height, add some red, mahogany and gold to the flower color and voila.

The native Black-eyed susan, with changes in tow, was introduced to the gardening public as the 'Gloriosa Daisy'. Commonly available as seed or transplants are selections known as 'Indian Summer', 'Becky Mix', 'Rustic Colors', 'Toto', and 'Marmalade', to name a few.

The Gloriosa daisy has become a mainstay in gardens across the country. And deservedly so. Their breeders passed some of the best traits of the native *Rudbeckia hirta* their way. The fact that they grow happily in full sun and are very drought tolerant remains in their genes.

When a perennial counterpart to the annual Gloriosa daisy is asked for the name

Teacher receives \$2,500 grant for native plant projects

Congratulations are in order for MNPS member Alicia M. Blair, a fourth-grade teacher at Howard II Elementary School in Biloxi who has received a \$2,500 grant for native plant education.

The grant will fund an outdoor classroom with a native plant garden, and publication of a native plant book written and photographed by the students. Students will research, collect and study native plants prior to writing the book.

The grant came from the Tidelands Lease Funds, which are fees that come primarily from the floating casinos' rentals of state water bottoms.

Alicia is looking for local MNPS members who are interested in helping with the project. She plans field trips to collect native plants from yards of Coast residents. So if you have some plants you can donate, or are interested in working on the project, give Alicia a call at 872-3022.

Alicia says the entire staff and student body of Howard II will be involved in this project, which is a joint venture across the curriculum including language, science and art. The school also has the support of the Navy/Marine detachment at Keesler Air Force Base.

Students will collect plant samples, replant natives in the school's garden, press plant samples for the herbarium collection, collect and grow seeds, and photograph the plants. They will learn to identify and plants, will provide research information on each plant, and draw and watercolor sketches of plants.

The classes will have field trips to The Crosby Arboretum and other sites. The staff will select the best representative of each species for reproduction in the book, and mount and frame the original to be displayed in schools around the district.

Rudbeckias...cont. from page one

'Goldsturm' rolls off the tongue of more people than any other. 'Goldsturm' is a more compact and floriferous selection of the native Orange coneflower (*Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii*) found across much of the United States, including Mississippi.

The Orange coneflower is found naturally occurring at woodland edges and damp meadows. This native spreads from its roots (i.e. rhizomatous) as well as seed and will quickly form large clumps in loose rich soil. 'Goldsturm' has retained this running ability which is viewed as an asset by some, a curse by others!

The leaves on 'Goldsturm' are deep green and only slightly hairy. This provides a wonderful color balance to the deep orange/yellow flowers which cover this two foot tall selection for months on end beginning in May.

Although it is perfectly happy grown in a dry area with good garden soil 'Goldsturm' performs best in full sun with even moisture. This makes it somewhat better adapted to a planting which receives watering on a regular basis than its drought tolerant relative which may rot if conditions are too damp.

Other native *Rudbeckia* are equally as garden worthy. Keep a sharp eye out for them and others at your local nursery or garden center or favorite mail order source. They too are destined to become part of the growing group of 'gardeners favorites with native roots'.

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ACROSS:

2. High in vitamin C this part of the rose becomes fleshy after flowering; (plural).
3. It is --legal to dig plants from the Blue Ridge Parkway.
4. To race through quickly.
5. Additional work hours; sports extension; (abb.)
6. "Absence of '---'; To be without crabapples.
7. Silent H pronunciation of Herbs.
8. This blue *Lobelia* may need to visit a 'clinic'.
12. Hanging downward.
13. A circular cluster; Familiar overwintering form of many plants.
14. Wounded; in pain.
15. Fur coat material.
16. Wrinkled.
17. The Mississippi State Flower.
19. This tree is an intergeneric hybrid between an automobile and a pine.
23. "A Rosa is red, a '---' is blue, this may not be great but it's the best I can do.
24. Mississippian with a selection of *Phlox paniculata* named for him.
27. Small thin pallet for a child to nap on.
28. Plural abbreviation for species.
30. *Ilex vomitoria* (Yaupon Holly) is/is not a southeastern native.

DOWN:

1. Horizontal underground stems.
9. Colin Powells favorite *Hibiscus* sp.
10. Erect; held --right.
11. Singular abbreviation for species.
13. Common name for *Juncus* spp.; '---' Limbaugh.
15. For online 'help' with E.mail, one might type in '-.---'.
18. An ill mannered Rebecca.
20. Opposite of out.
21. South America; (abb.)
22. Cobolt; (abb.)
23. --monia spp. Ironweed.
25. Aluminium; (abb.)
26. In the South this word is a homonym of 'on'.
27. Cardinals are often times heard greedily chirping to Cedar Waxwing "less (for)you", '--- (for)---', after eating the fermented fruits of this tree.
29. One who is less than truthful might be this.
31. Singular abbreviation for species.
32. No fall garden is complete without the yellows of goldenrods (*Solidago* spp.) and the purples, blues and violets of this genus.
33. Joe --- Weed; *Eupatorium fistulosum*.

**Crossword puzzle by
Lynn Libous-Bailey**

HERB FEST '96

March 23 & 24, 1996

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David Winston
Herbalist, Ethnobotanist,
and contributing author of
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David will share with us his extensive training in Cherokee, Chinese & Western herbal traditions. He is also president of Herbalist & Alchemist, Inc., an herbal company manufacturing over 300 products, and an herbal consultant to many prominent physicians throughout the U.S. and Canada, and founding/professional member of the American Herbalist Guild.



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Adopt-A-Stream program gets public actively involved in taking care of our environment



Bob Brzuszek
Senior Curator
Crosby Arboretum

I, like others, am curiously drawn to water. Perhaps it is as Jung speculated, that bodies of water represent "the dreamer's unconscious." Maybe the ceaseless, silvery flow of a clear stream traces the coursings of our own lives, drawing us ever further to see what is around the next bend. Or biologist J.L. Henderson's view that we came from water, our bodies are largely water, and our blood saline content is amazingly similar to the sea's.

Whatever the reason, mentioning a stream to a Mississippian brings up a rich persistence of memory. Family picnics on sunny days at the local creek, tire swings and the sounds of laughter from children, watching a hand-tied fly dance upon shimmering water, or experiencing the power and beauty of religious baptism at riverside.

Captured in essence by Faulkner and Welt, Mississippi's landscape and culture are woven tightly together to fashion a special fabric of place and time. To avoid a rend in this cloth, it is imperative that we make concerted efforts to maintain the quality of our lands and waters. The fact is that government departments and environmental organizations do not have staff or budget to maintain the bill of Mississippi's environmental health.

With 84,000 miles of waterways, 500,000 acres of lakes and reservoirs, 4.1 million acres of wetlands and 100 miles of

coastline, the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) can only monitor about ten percent of the state's water. It is literally up to you and I to take care of the rest. And good water quality is a keystone to the survival of all plants and higher organisms, including humans.

There is a remarkable group of people who have organized to teach you or your group how to take care of your local streams. Known as the Adopt-A-Stream program, it is sponsored by the Mississippi Wildlife Federation, and is provided with technical support by the DEQ. The program takes its inspiration from the Izaak Walton League, which has administered volunteer stream monitoring in many states since 1927.

Marla Huffstatler, Conservation Education Director for the Mississippi Wildlife Federation, and state coordinator for the Adopt-A-Stream program, says, "This is one of the few hands-on programs in Mississippi where an average citizen can be trained to collect reliable environmental data. People can really make a difference in the quality of their local environments."

Indeed, this is one of the strengths of the program, that a person or group can monitor and take care of a favorite stream, learn excellent information on aquatic biology and chemistry, and have a good time doing it.

The way the program works is this: First, you attend a three-day workshop to become certified as a stream monitor. The workshops are held in various locations around the state, several times a year, and are announced and administered through the Mississippi Wildlife Federation. I have

attended many environmental workshops throughout the years, and this is one of the best. You are being taught by some of the state's finest biological experts.

The method that has been developed to assess a stream's health is simple and straightforward. First, the stream's watershed is identified and mapped. Through this inventory you can identify the impacts of area businesses, industries, construction and agriculture practices and residential housing. Next, baseline data is collected about the stream section that you are monitoring. The streams flow, depths, water colors and odors gives you a reference point that all future data will be based upon.

The next part is fun: Identifying and counting all the stream critters you can find. water quality can be quickly assessed by the presence or absence of caddisfly larvae tucked under logs and sticks, with their strange stick and pebble housing; dragonfly nymphs that belong to the prehistoric age; and mayfly nymphs which emerge into gossamer clouds on sunny afternoons and fill the air with dazzling movement.

Critical to stream quality is the water's chemistry. The amount of oxygen availability, temperature, pH, turbidity and other factors contain narrow parameters for life. Any significant change can point to a possible problem occurring upstream.

What really fascinates me about the Adopt-A-Stream program is that it gets the public actively involved in taking care of a critical part of our environment. The waterbodies of this state belong to all of us, not the commercial interests of a few. I would love to see easy monitoring methods developed for terrestrial environments as well, so would could watch and take care of our local woodlands. Any ideas on this?

To find out how you can help a

stream in your area, call Marla Huffstatler at 601-353-6922, or write Adopt-A-Stream Mississippi, P.O. Box 1814, Jackson MS 39215-1814.

(Note: This article has been reprinted with permission from the **Crosby Arboretum News Journal**.)

Biophilia has MNPS guests

Dear Editors,

I have had some wonderful guests to the Biophilia Nature Center because of your newsletter! I hope our new hours encourage even more visitors. During regular hours there is no admission fee. For private guided tours by appointment, there is a \$2/person charge with a \$25 minimum. Carol Lovell Sass

Editors' Note: The Biophilia Nature Center, located at 6816 South Bayou Drive, Elberta, Alabama, 36530, is dedicated to preserving the diversity of southeastern native plant and animals. The center includes educational displays that encourage active conservation through environmental education.

The gardens include rare and endangered plants, and a live butterfly conservatory. Volunteers time and talent are sought, along with plants and seeds. For \$10, you can join the Biophilia Native Association and receive a quarterly newsletter that includes articles on Gulf Coast wildlife gardening. The telephone number is 205-986-7018.

Carol and her husband, Fred Saas, have a unique way of supporting Biophilia. They give Nature Tours on a 50-foot, 23-ton sailboat called Daedalus. Trips range from three-hour excursions in secluded, undeveloped bays and bayous of the Gulf coast to week-long tours of uncharted jungle rivers and Mayan ruins along the Rio Dulce, Guatemala.

Roadsides should include more natives



Felder Rushing.
Extension Horticultural
Specialist

We were wheeling down the road, maybe too fast, and I saw a lady in her yard cutting low limbs off her live oak tree. I told Nancy, my companion from **Fine Gardening Magazine**, that the lady was made at a branch in the way of her lawn mover; Nancy said I just like to spin stories, but it was a nice one.

So I spun one. I said the lady was on her riding mower, and a branch of the tree knocked off her hat, and she stopped, went to the tool shed for her loppers, and took care of the problem right then and there, being a non-nonsense country gardener.

And to Nancy's surprise, I turned around and went back for confirmation. Drove up the driveway, clipped my pruning shears to my belt (so I'd look like a gardener) and got Nancy to walk with me to where the lady had already started mowing again.

And I was right. told the gardening that we were disputing whey she had cut the limb. She laughed, and said it had knocked her hat off and she took care of it while it was on her mind.

Then she share that the trees had been planted by an uncle some 20 years ago, had to be moved again, but were growing fine. And now the highway department is going to cut them down to widen the road. "It makes me sick," was what she said.

But that's progress, four-laning is, and she's hoping she can get some

compensation for the live oak and the copse of pines that have buffered the road noise all these years.

That got me noticing roadside wildflowers, and how much natural beauty there is already without us having to plant fake ones like you see in town. Don't get me wrong--I love the oxeye daisies along 1-55 in Jackson, and even the little bit of California poppy and blue cornflower is nice. But those aren't natives; oxeye daisy is imported, just like daylillies.

Why not plant the orange daylillies, and let them be called wildflowers? They're tough enough, and manageable, too. And instead of European cornflowers, how about zinnias?

We are blessed (maybe too much) with trees, vines and shrubs, and they have to be constantly kept under control. Otherwise, we'd have sweetgums in the cracks of the pavement and the like. Herbicides and mowing are necessary, no question.

But perfection along roadsides is impossible with current budget and manpower. The state highway department and Natchez Trace folks have to balance maintenance needs with aesthetics--mange the roadsides and make them look as good as possible. Selective thinning of trees, and the use of in-and-out mowing patterns are used quite a bit, to create undulating effects and focal points where maintenance is difficult.

And wildflowers are beautiful "tools" to get people to tolerate less-than-perfect maintenance. They cover up some of the unkempt, which is fine with me and most travelers.

If you'd like to see what can be done with natural beauty in this regard, take a drive along 1-55 from Crystal Springs south--all along there are breath-taking stands of orange Coreopsis (our official state

wildflower) sky-blue drifts of lyre-leaf sage, masses of purple verbena, tangles of white brambles, and all overlaid with white clouds of daisy fleabane.

None of which was planted by the highway department. They just started mowing more wisely, spraying less broadly, and letting what was naturally along the hills and fence rows make a beautiful, low-maintenance comeback. And it does come back, more beautiful than ever, year after year, when managed wisely.

Natives may not be as showy or perfect as a lawn or flower border, but then again those are roadside, not gardens. Making the best use of native and dependable introduced wildflowers is budget-sensible, and must be preferred over alternatives.

(Reprinted from The Clarion Ledger, May 1, 1993).

Field trip planned to Lefleur's Bluff State Park April 13

Spring wildflowers and the new flush of growth of native forest will be the highlights of a MNPS field trip to Lefleur's Bluff State Park Saturday, April 13.

Ron Wieland, Ecologist with the Dept. of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, Museum of Natural Science, will lead the field trip to "rediscover" the natural area of the park along the newly remodelled nature trail. Participants will learn more about the ecology of native forests through the Urban Forestry Grant Baseline Forest Study being conducted in the park by the Mississippi State Forestry Commission. Observe the study plots and discuss some of the interesting characteristics of the forest structure, function, patterns, processes and values.

To reach the park, take the Lakeside

Drive exit off Interstate 55 North. Take the Riverside Drive entrance to the park, and meet at the trailhead at 9:30 a.m. The entrance fee to the park is \$2 per car. Wear hiking boots and bring a sack lunch.

Northern Mississippi field trip planned April 20

The spectacular yellow lady slipper orchid in bloom will be a highlight of the Northern Mississippi Native Plant Society Field trip to Blue Bluff Park in Aberdeen Saturday, April 20.

Following a walk at Blue Bluff Park, the group will visit a fascinating old growth forest at the Wrenwoode Camp area. Wrenwoode Camp is privately owned by the Presbyterian Church, which has been using the area for summer church camps.

Wrenwoode Camp is currently being considered for sale. "Maybe the club can help find a way to conserve this area as it is one of the best natural areas in the state," says Ron Wieland. "Botanists John MacDonald and Charles Bryson have identified a rich flora with eleven rare state listed plants found in the hardwood forest. You will learn names for many of Mississippi's native wildflowers with John, who will be leading the field trip. John has been studying the plants of Monroe County and Camp McCain for the past several years, and is an expert in the field of plant taxonomy."

Be prepared for strenuous walking through the hilly portion of the forest. The hiking trip will be tailored to the particular needs of the participants. Wear pants and hiking boots, and bring a sack lunch.

Meet at Starkville at 9 a.m. (contact John MacDonald at 227-3613 or Ron Wieland at 354-7303) OR travel directly to Blue Bluff Park and meet at 10 a.m. Blue

Bluff Park is about one mile north of Aberdeen. Take Highways 45 or 25 to the east side of Aberdeen to the intersection of Meridian St. Drive north on Meridian St for about a mile, cross Mattubby Creek, continue until you see a sign for Blue Bluff Park on your right. Meridian St. turns into Coontail Road outside of the city limits. If you come to the Rye Road exit on the right, you've gone too far.

Apologies to Life Member Opal Dakin of Raymond, whose name was misspelled in the last issue of the newsletter.

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Flowers can open a children's awareness

By Lynn Libous-Bailey

"It's really important to get involved," everyone told me. Let your child(ren) know that you are interested in what they're doing and what is going on in their classroom. So I did.

In September my daughter entered four-year-old kindergarten. wanting to make her feel a little more comfortable among 19 unknown peers, my involvement in her class began. the letter I received from the school said that any talent of knowledge which a parent had and could share with the class was welcomed. So what does all this have to do with native plants?

I don't have much in the way of talent to donate, but I do have flowers. A majority of them are native. And as my daughter's teacher quickly found out, I love to open a children awareness to the world around them with flowers.

A bit simpler but similar in theory to the Project Wild program in some schools, I was certainly able to donate my plant knowledge and the bounty from my yard to this class. I could give these pre-schoolers examples from nature which are utilized to help them learn fundamental classroom concepts.

All I had to do was combine their learning of the eight crayola 'starter' colors

with native flowers. Having talked with the teacher at open house I found out that for the first couple of weeks they would review a different color each day. This should be simple enough. Pick a bouquet from the yard of native plants using those colors the children had studied in class.

The first day began with the color red following by blue and then yellow. At this time of the year these colors are a piece of cake to come up with. My daughter and I walked around the yard Sunday evening before class with shears in hand while I had her identify for me those colors we needed.

The red came easily enough in the twisted partially open flowers of Turks Cap Mallow (*Malaviscus sp.*) and the large fully opened flower of the Texas Star Hibiscus (*Hibiscus coccineus*). Three stems each satisfied her and she eagerly put them into a purple metal pitcher which I use as an indestructible vase.

Yellow became an "eenie-weenie-miiney-moe" contest. Just which of the tall sunflower species in the yard was to be decapitated? She settled on two stems of the stiff upright hairy sunflower (*Helianthus tomentosus*) and several stems of a smaller flowered multi-branched tickseed coreopsis (*Coreopsis tripteris*). The arrangement was now beginning to take shape. All it needed was a few sprays provided by the airy flowers of the goldenrod 'Fireworks' (*Solidago rugosa* 'Fireworks') to round it out.

Although blue may be a color which is lacking in many yards at this time of year, I have plenty. The problem is that this particular colored flower is attached to a plant with stems and leaves which smell much like a cross between stink bugs and bad body odor. Bog salvia (*Salvia uliginosa*) was the plant which would provide the blue

to round out the three primary colors for this arrangement. It is rank and not native, but it was the truest blue I had blooming and she just had to have it. A note attached to the pitcher let the teacher know it was foliage and not rancid water providing the odor.

Excited about sharing some of 'her' plants with the class, Mabry took the arrangement in Monday. When I picked her up after class the teacher let me know that not only did the children enjoy the different colors and shapes of the flowers, but the odor differences as well. And the unanimous consensus was "Shoo-ww that blue one stinks!"

In the week to follow the colors green and purple were on the addenda. We chose the dangling green seed heads of the woodland river oats (*Chasmanthium latifolium*) to provide color, movement and something out of the ordinary. The children loved them, as did the teacher when I told her she could keep them for drying.

A last minute addition to the green collection included clippings of rosemary, culinary bay and Texas tarragon (*Tagetes lucida*) from the herb garden. My daughter assured me the children would like to smell them because "they don't stink like that blue flower!" Another sense awakened.

When purple day finally arrived I believe I was more excited than my daughter. We selected several stalks of the American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) with its huge clusters of deep purple fruits all along the stem. For a change of texture we picked several stems of newly opened purple New England Asters (*Aster novae-angliae*) as well as a few non-native flower spikes of the fuzzy Mexican salvia (*Salvia leucantha*). It was a beautiful combination.

Orange, brown and black were the last colors in the box to be studied. It was

my daughter who noticed the last cluster of orangish trumpet creeper (*Campsis radicans*) blooming along the grey cypress fence. Brown comes easy this time of the year, and we gathered several stiff fawn-colored flower spokes of the blazing star (*Liatris spicata*) to satisfy that color.

The stiff, now-blackened cones of the purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) were selected to be the representative for the final color group. It was that or the honeydew blackened leaves from the native pecan tree in the back, and I found the former to be more aesthetically pleasing. It all made for a beautiful autumnal arrangement!

If this is what the parental participation in school is like I think that my daughter and I will do all right. I can donate a bit of nature to the class giving them an out-of-the-ordinance learning tool. The first week alone they had three different flower colors, five shapes and one memorable scent. I can take my knowledge and bounty from my yard and together the teacher and I can offer a natural learning tool.

The next several weeks will move the class into the numbers game. It's a pretty safe bet that a battered purple metal pitcher with a stalk of sumac topped with one big cluster of seeds, two still blooming tall black-eyed susans (*Rudbeckia heliopsidis*) and a stem of the white beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana* 'alba') having three clusters of white berries will be carried into class by a children who might just help 19 mother children become a bit more aware of nature.

To be quite honest with you, I can hardly wait until they begin using the 16-color crayolas and start on that new math!

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Name _____ Address _____

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MNPS Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the Mississippi Native Plant Society, which was established in 1980, is to promote the preservation of native and naturalized plants and their habitats in Mississippi. Activities include field trips to locations throughout state, plant rescues, roadside and community wildflower and tree plantings, and educational programs on native plant conservation, ecology, propagation and landscaping.

Mississippi Native Plant Society
6104 Olvida Circle
Ocean Springs MS 39564

