The President's Corner



In just a few days, our annual meeting and spring conference will take place – and this spring it is all about building community.

Dear Friends of NPSNJ,

In just a few days, our annual meeting and spring conference will take place – and this spring it is all about building community. We have fabulous speakers lined up, and hundreds of native plant enthusiasts will gather, both in person and virtually, to learn, share, visit, and grow together. Plants, like people, need communities to thrive – and each of us can make a difference, wherever we are. Not only by using native plants and following ecological principles in our own gardens and properties (Leave the leaves! Save the stems!), but also by serving as examples to educate our communities, and advocating for the protection of native plants and native plant habitats across the state (and beyond). By both planting gardens and preserving lands for native plants now, we are investing in the future of our communities and our planet. One of my very favorite lines from the musical Hamilton is "Legacy? What is a legacy? It's planting seeds in a garden you never get to see." It is a quote that bears embracing by every one of us as we look to the future.

This is, in fact, my last president's letter as I will be stepping down at the upcoming conference when we elect new leaders to the board. The past 2 years leading this organization have been one of the great honors of my life, but it is time for me to spend a little more time tending my own garden (and you can take that quite literally). While I have been president, I have had the support of a truly extraordinary group of individuals, and I cannot thank them enough. Moving forward, I will still be active on the board, and I look forward to working with the new president and officers and continuing to support all of the great NPSNJ teams/committees as well as all of the society's wonderful projects and initiatives. We now have 14 chapters spread out across the state, and we continue to expand our library of educational materials; in addition to our fabulous webinar series, we now offer online and in-person classes, and even have our very own podcast! We are actively engaged with state and federal leaders to advocate for legislation that protects or promotes native plants, we have created a NPSNJ exhibit providing a platform to engage with politicians and green industry professionals at conferences, and we continue to advocate for better availability and use of native plants in landscaping on private and public lands.

There are many things I wanted to get done in the past 2 years that we didn't quite get to – but I know that the great teams that we have in place will continue to grow and move the society forward in amazing ways, with your support and help. It reminds me of another terrific quote, this one from Leonard Bernstein "To achieve great things, 2 things are needed: a plan, and not quite enough time." My time as president is now up, but with the help of each and every one of you, NPSNJ will continue to grow and our communities and the world will be a little bit better for it.

All the best,



Randi V. Wilfert Eckel, PhD

NPSNJ Attends NJ Nursery & Landscape Association Trade Show

By Kim Rowe
Leader-Monmouth Chapter NPSNJ/Co-Leader IGC Committee

By Phaedra Singelis
NPSNJ Essex Chapter Steering Committee Member and IGC Committee Member



The NJ nursery and landscape crowd turned out in force to learn about native plants from NPSNJ speakers at the Total Pro Expo trade show on January 30th and 31st. It was exciting to see the growing interest in adding native plants to garden centers and local landscapes. The event attracted several hundred attendees from New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Connecticut and beyond. The show highlighted a commitment to environmental sustainability and offered the latest in landscaping supplies and practices.



Pictured above: Phaedra Singelis, Bobbie Herbs, Sarah Galloway, Tom Bender and Mike Jacobs.

Native plants were a hot topic at the show held in the NJ Convention Center, Edison. **NPSNJ offered three educational sessions**.

• *"Switching from Invasives to Native Plants: Selection and Care."* President Randi Eckel (Toadshade Wildflower Farm) and Michele Bakacs (Rutgers Cooperative Ext.) recommended specific plants to substitute for popular exotic garden plants, some of which have become invasive.

• *"The Future is Native: What the Native Plant Movement Means for Your Business."* Monmouth Chapter Leader Kim Rowe (Co-Leader IGC committee) and Corresponding Secretary Bobbie Herbs (Rutgers Master Gardener/ Environmental Steward) showed the business case for garden centers and landscapers to offer straight species native plants to their customers.

• *"Going Native: How to Choose and Care for Native Plants in Traditional Landscapes."* Jason Goldman (Founder: Flower to the People, LLC) and Christine Black (Founder: Grow Native Gardens, LLC) shared small ways to start landscaping with native plants.

Other NPSNJ speakers included: Steve Kristoph of Kristoph Nurseries presented an inspiring talk on native trees and shrubs. Professor Bill Errickson, Agricultural Agent, Rutgers Cooperative Ext., Monmouth Co. and Lauren Errickson, Director of Rutgers Gardens talked about natives in the landscape. Carrie Stanker and Daryl Kobesky, nursery owners of Sunset Farmstead gave two talks: one on ecological landscaping with natives and another on attracting wildlife with native plants.

NPSNJ had a chance to show off its beautiful new *Eco Booth* among hundreds of other exhibits. The booth provided a place where interested people could speak more with our volunteers about the benefits of planting native plants. We handed out the Northern and Barnegat Bay versions of the "Going Native" brochure. There was tremendous interest in native plants from landscapers and independent garden center owners alike. NPSNJ members who worked the Eco Booth were: Tom Bender, Phaedra Singelis, Sarah Galloway, Bridget Daley, Megan Stypulkoski, Kim Correro, Elaine Silverstein, Marilyn Scherfen, Bobbie Herbs, and Mike Jacobs.

The entire IGC and Events Committees were central to NPSNJ's success at the two day event. Chapter Liaisons are now reaching out to local IGCs (Independent Garden Centers) in their area to co-host a "Pollinator Day." The aim is to help garden centers and their customers lean more about native plants. If you know a garden center in your area that might be interested in participating, please reach out to your chapter leader.

April is Native Plant Month!



By Herve Barrier
NPSNJ Highland Park/ Middlesex Chapter Leader

NPSNJ has created an iNaturalist.org project called 'Native Plant Month 2024 - NJ' at

https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/native-plant-month-april-2024-nj (project page)

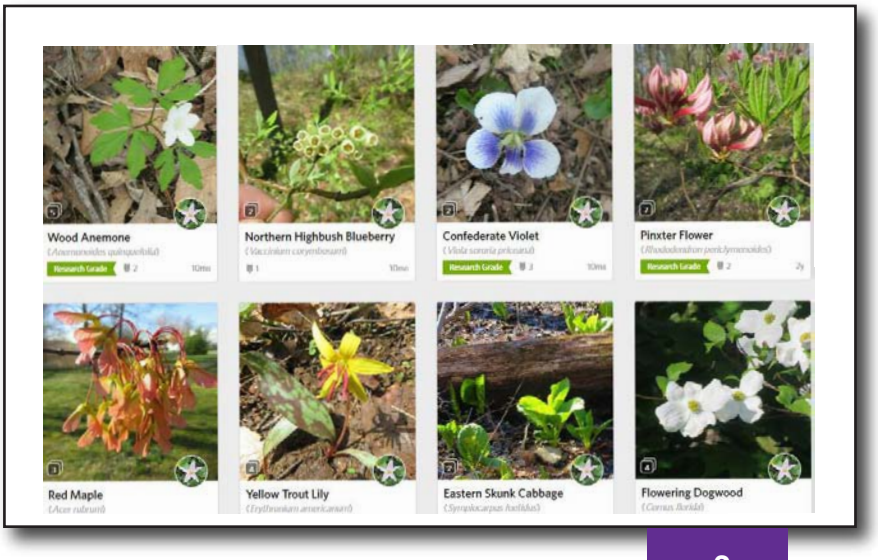
This is a bioblitz, it's following the 3-unity rule:

1) Unity of time: April 2024
2) Unity of place: NJ
3) Unity of action: photograph as many native and non-native plant species as possible and report the observations on **iNaturalist.org**

iNaturalist.org is a free, worldwide, educational internet tool allowing anybody to report wildlife species (including plants), and allowing scientists to use the resulting data. Universities are big users of it. With iNaturalist, anybody can report any species, anywhere in the world, all year long.

The "Native Plant Month" project will be open for observations only during the month of April. During this time period, we can all go to parks or our backyard, take pictures, and post them in iNaturalist to add them to the project.

The objective is to report as many native species as possible and to get as many people involved as possible.



Anybody can participate (members, non-members, family, friends, friends of friends, etc.) Everybody is a naturalist! A non-native plant can be reported as well, since in many cases we don't know if it is native or not until the identification has been ascertained.

What to do:

1) Join iNaturalist.org and start practicing iNaturalist skills, using a smartphone, or a digital camera and a PC.

2) Join, before April, the "Native Plant Month 2024 - NJ" project (note you cannot add observations until April).

3) In April, any observation of a NJ native plant with 2 positive identifications (RG rank) will automatically be added to the project

Notes:

- We have plenty of time to practice iNaturalist.org before April.
- If the species is endangered or if you do not want to reveal the location (e.g., it is in your backyard) you can 'obscure' its location
- Take all usual safety precautions when in nature (e.g., ticks are present all year round)

To participate, go to:

https://www.inaturalist.org/

https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/native-plant-month-april-2024-nj (*our project*)

Remembering Mary Denver,

Founding Member/Leader of Highland Park Chapter





By Randi V. Eckel, PhD
NPSNJ President

Long time NPSNJ member and chapter leader Mary Denver passed away this past fall after a long battle with cancer. I have known Mary for many years through her involvement with the NPSNJ, meeting her first at conferences and later when visiting the Highland Park Chapter (*our oldest extant chapter*) of which she was a founding member and driving force from the very beginning. Mary was a gentle and kind woman who was, at the same time, a passionate advocate for what she believed in. NPSNJ was so very fortunate that native plants were one of Mary's passions. Her quiet and steady dedication to NPSNJ and her herculean efforts at the Highland Park Native Plant Sanctuary (*now named after her*) only hint at the wonderful woman Mary was. At the Native Plant Sanctuary, she literally spent countless hours over the years removing invasive species and replacing them with beautifully and naturalistically designed native plant gardens – even after devastating storms and floods, she simply went back to work repairing whatever damage had been wrought and continued her work creating and maintaining an oasis of beauty and ecological diversity along the banks of the Raritan River. Mary absolutely loved showing the sanctuary to people and discussing what plants should be added to the sanctuary next. Folks both young and old were inspired to get involved by her friendliness, kindness, and dedication. Her passing is a great loss to NPSNJ, Highland Park, and all that knew her. I know I am not alone in saying that I miss her wonderful smile, her embracing hugs, her supporting hands, and the smart passion in her eyes.

Mary Denver's Chili – perfect for a cold winter day. Mary served this at every Highland Park Chapter meeting that I ever attended. It is colorful and delicious, and she always made sure that there was enough for everyone. I think of her every time I make it. *(BTW, This is shared with all of you with Mary's family's permission)*.

This is a recipe that I arrived at after reading several recipes, so you don't have to be exact with all of the ingredients. For instance, I may add more water if the chili isn't moist enough. Sometimes I add veggie broth instead of or in addition to the water. I like the final product to be colorful so I changed 2 green peppers to one red and one green. The corn, carrots, and dark red kidney beans also bring color to the pot. When I take this dish to our meetings, I place it in a slow cooker to keep it warm. I don't prepare it in a slow cooker, although I am sure that it is possible to do so. Have fun making the chili.

--Mary Denver

Mary Denver's Chili Recipe

Sauté until onions are soft and translucent:

- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 3 onions (I use red)
- 3-4 carrots diced
- 1 tbsp chili powder
- 1 tbsp ground cumin
- 1/4 tsp cayenne pepper (I use less)

Add and sauté for 1 min:

- 1 red pepper chopped
- 1 green pepper chopped
- 3 cloves garlic (I use more)

Add and bring to a boil:

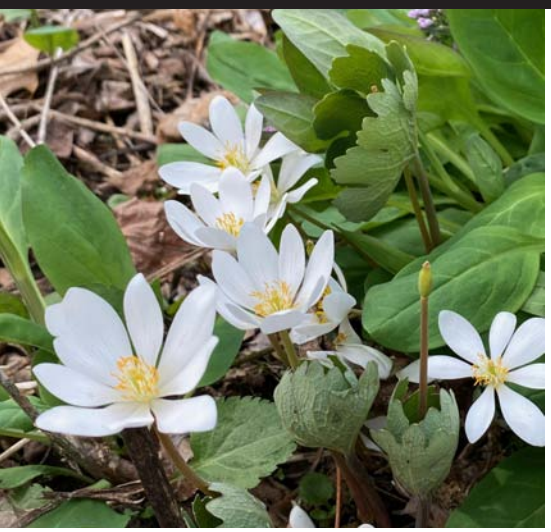
- 3 TB unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1-28 oz can diced tomatoes
- 1 cup water
- 1-15 oz can dark red kidney beans
- 1- 15 oz can black beans

Add and bring back to simmer for 15 min:

- 2 cups fresh or frozen corn
- 1/2 cup bulgur wheat or red quinoa

Salt and pepper to taste. Garnish with sour cream and fresh cilantro.

Bloodroot: Plants and the Ants



By Kathy Trarbach
Hunterdon Chapter

Since the first Earth Day in 1970 and environmental legislation that followed, Americans realize the ecosystem is a delicate balance of relationships; disruption of one species may have consequences for another. I didn't realize how interconnected the system was until I learned about bloodroot and ants.

Bloodroot, *Sanguinaria canadensis*, an early bloomer in Hunterdon County, emerges in early to mid-April before trees leaf out. Each stem wears a basal leaf cloak, which wraps it and the bud until it's ready to open. The flower doesn't produce nectar, but the two to four inch blossom (eight white petals with bright yellow center) attracts bees and flies when it's sunny. No sunshine, no bees? The little blossom closes up to await another day. A day or two after successful pollination, the petals fall off. The stalk and scalloped leaf continue to grow until the plant reaches 12-15 inches.

The bloodroot's elongated seed pod contains 10-15 seeds. After the seeds ripen, the pod splits open and the seeds drop. Each seed has an elaiosome fixed to it, a fatty handle of proteins and nutrients. This is not something the bloodroot needs, but it's attractive to ants, particularly those of the genus *Aphaenogaster.* The ants gather the bloodroot seeds and take them to their nest where the young eat the nutritious appendages. The ants transfer the leftover seeds to their compost pile, planting the seeds in a fertile environment. It takes 2-3 years for a new plant to bloom from a seed; gradually a wildflower patch spreads. In my own garden, I planted one bloodroot. Several years later, another patch emerged 6 feet away from the mother plant. Eventually, another remote patch appeared, and another.

Ants may have greater impact on wildflowers than just seed dispersal. DNA research at Oak Ridge National Laboratory and the University of Tennessee, Knoxville explores this. Ants secrete antimicrobial chemicals to clean themselves, and research suggests that these chemicals may change the microbiome of seeds as well, eliminating some pathogens. Could this lead to healthier plants or better viability? Ants also prefer seeds from some species of trilliums over others, which may increase spread of the favored species to the detriment of the less tasty one.





Ants favor forest floors with the protection of leaf litter. Disturbed forests without leaves and fallen logs host fewer ants. Invasive worms, common in cleared areas, destroy leaf litter, leading to fewer ants and fewer wildflowers. Invasive slugs feed on elaiosomes right where they fall, hindering the ant-driven spread of a colony.

If you want to enjoy bloodroots in your landscape, never dig from wild patches; check native plant nurseries. Bloodroots are native from Florida to Canada in the



eastern US. They grow in undisturbed woodlands near trees and ponds in part to full shade, forming a rhizomatous colony about one inch below the soil level. When bloodroots go dormant around midsummer, a gardener can split the colony. Wear gloves since the reddish sap of the bloodroot can irritate the skin. Preserve the protective leaf litter surrounding the patch to sustain its relationship with the ants.

Celandine Poppy *(Stylophorum diphyllum)*





By Irene O. Sabin
Hunterdon Chapter

Celandine poppies or yellow wood poppies *(Stylophorum diphyllum)* are herbaceous, perennial wildflowers in the poppy family *(Papaveraceae)*. Their native habitat includes the northeastern area of the United States where they grow in humus-rich soil along stream banks or in damp deciduous woods.

Wood poppies grow from thick, fibrous rhizomes and reach 1½ to 2 feet in height and width. Leaves are double pinnate with rounded lobes. Basal leaves are bluish green on top with a silvery cast and fine hairs underneath. Leaves grow in pairs *(diphyllum)* up hairy stems which are topped by yellow to orange flowers. Various species of beetles, flies, and bees visit the flowers which bloom from March through May followed by green, hairy, ovoid seed pods. By mid-summer, the pods burst open to reveal dark brown seeds, each bearing elaiosome, a food rich in lipids and proteins that is irresistible to chipmunks, other small rodents, and ants. Ants carry the food to their nests and discard the seeds which germinate in a new area. Seed dispersal by ants is called myrmecochory.

Wood poppy foliage continues to stay green with enough shade and evenly moist soil. The plants go dormant if the soil dries out or after the first frost until the following spring. Wood poppies have a yellowish orange sap which may irritate and stain the skin. Native Americans used the sap as a dye for baskets, fibers and as war paint. Because of forest clearance, development, and the proliferation of non-native invasive plants, it is difficult to see wood poppies in the wild. However, the plants are available in native plant nurseries and are easy to cultivate in shady perennial beds and borders or left to self-seed in native plant gardens. The flowers and textured foliage often come up at the same time as Viginia bluebells so they make a nice combination. A dappled woodland meadow full of wood poppies, Virginia bluebells, foam flowers and other shade-loving, spring-blooming native plants is a beautiful sight.



In late April, take a trip to Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve (1635 River Rd, New Hope, PA) to see the woodlands filled with Celandine poppies and Virginia Bluebells

Shade Gardening Guide for Spring Native Plants







By Jesse Connor
Southeast Chapter Co-Leader

Easy to maintain spring-flowering perennials with long-lasting foliage.

Barren strawberry – *Waldsteinia fragaroides*
Blue flag iris, dwarf iris - *Iris versicolor, Iris cristata*
Canada Mayflower – *Maianthemum canadense*
Christmas fern – *Polystichum acrostichoides*
Coral bell, alum - *Heuchera sanguinea , H. villosa, H. americana*
Foamflower – *Tiarella cordifolia*
Green and gold – *Chrysogonum virginianum*
Lobed barren strawberry – *Waldsteinia lobatum*
Meehan's mint - *Meehania cordata*
Native pachysandra – *Pachysandra procumbens*
Plantain-leaved pussytoes - *Antennaria plantaginifolia*
Pennsylvania sedge – *Carex pennsylvanica*
Smooth Solomon's seal – *Polygonatum biflorum*
Twinleaf – *Jeffersonia diphylla*
Wild ginger – *Asarum canadense*
Woodland stonecrop – *Sedum ternatum*

Spring ephemerals are harder to find, but definitely worth the effort to locate and establish in your home landscape. These early season-bloomers, many of whose seeds are spread by ants, provide resources for newly emerged bees. It's a good idea to plant other native groundcovers near them to help fill in when the ephemerals die back.

Ephemerals worth growing

Dutchman's breeches – *Dicentra cucullaria*
Mayapple – *Podophyllum peltatum*
Trout lily – *Erythronium americanum*
Virginia bluebells – *Mertensia virginica*
Woodland blue phlox – *Phlox divaricate*

Perennials that tend to stay put or will self-seed moderately.

Cardinal flower - *Lobelia cardinalis*
Foxglove beardtongue – *Penstemon digitalis*
Fringed bleeding heart – *Dicentra eximia*
Golden alexander - *Zizia aurea*
Woodland pinkroot - *Spigella marylandica*
Jack in the pulpit - *Arisaema triphyllum*
Jacob's ladder – *Polemonium reptans*
Shooting star – *Dodecatheon meadia*
Tall meadow rue – *Thalictrum pubescens*
Wild geranium – *Geranium maculatum*

NPSNJ State Programs

By Kim Correro
NPSNJ State Programs

A Celebration of Nature Poetry and Native Plants

April 10th 7:00pm-8:00pm

Museum of Early Trades & Crafts
Education Annex
23 Main Street, Madison, NJ



In celebration of National Poetry Month and Earth Day, come for an evening of poetry and rich conversation that will highlight *Leaning Toward Light: Poems for Gardens & the Hands That Tend Them*, a new anthology of rich contemporary gardening poems edited by acclaimed writer and poetry critic Tess Taylor. The Washington Post calls it "lush" and the Boston Globe hails it as "hopeful." The collection features work by contemporary luminaries Ross Gay, Ada Limón, Jericho Brown, Robert Hass, Mark Doty, Jane Hirshfield, and more. Tess Taylor—herself a celebrated poet, poetry columnist for CNN, and lifelong gardener—will be joined in conversation by The WildStory's co-host Ann E. Wallace, who will read selections from her new poetry collection *Days of Grace and Silence*.

The program will also feature practical tips from native plant expert Dr. Randi Eckel in a highly anticipated, first live Q & A session of "**Ask Randi**."

A reception and book signing will follow.

Copies of *Leaning Toward Light* will be available for sale through The Nature of Reading Bookshop. This event is brought to you by Montclair State University, NPSNJ, The Nature of Reading Bookshop and The Museum of Early Trades & Crafts. It is free and open to the public. Space is limited so registration is required.
https://npsnj.org/event/a-celebration/

NPSNJ Member Programs

Botanical Illustration (Part II), Advanced Graphite and Colored Pencil

April 16, 23, 30 & May 7 (Tuesday evenings 6:00 pm- 9:00 pm) via Zoom.

Cost: $100

Registration opens in mid March.

In this more advanced class we will review and practice what we learned in Part One: establishing correct proportion, creating tonal gradations, conveying light on form, understanding plant morphology, and understanding color theory.

Instructor Katy Lyness will expand on that knowledge by teaching more tools to help with our drawing. For example: one and two point perspective, using a grid to find the correct proportions, and understanding concepts of composition.

Choosing, Planting, and Caring for Native Plants:

A Class with Elaine Silverstein,
NPSNJ Vice President of Chapters/
Co-Leader Bergen-Passaic Chapter

Virtual Event
Starts March 10 @ 9:30 am – 11:30 am

Members only
The course costs $60

For More Info & to Register go to:
https://npsnj.org/event/choosing-planting-andcaring-for-native-plants-with-elaine-silverstein-march-2024/

March 10, 17, 24, and 31, 2024
Sundays 9:30-11:30am

Session 1 Introduction to Native Plants

Session 2 Creating a Native Habitat,
Part 1: Planning and Designing

Session 3 Creating a Native Habitat,
Part 2: Planting and Care

Session 4 Naturescaping:
Landscaping from Nature

About the Instructor: Elaine Silverstein is certified in Sustainable Landscape Management by the New York Botanical Garden, where she earned the Urban Naturalist certificate and continues to study botany, ecology, and landscape design. She maintains a horticulture practice in Bergen County.

Spring Ephemeral: Virginia Bluebells *Mertensia virginica*

By John Suskewich
Essex Chapter



One of the best spring ephemerals for the garden is *Mertensia virginica* or Virginia bluebells, a very handsome plant. This is a native herbaceous perennial, not a bulb like English or Spanish bluebells both of which can be invasive. It is easily grown in part or even full shade in regular soil, but handles full sun handily in one garden I know of, which is pretty wet, especially in spring. *Mertensia virginica* usually grows one to two feet high, with clumps becoming about that size in width. It seems to have no serious pest or disease problems.

Virginia bluebell is a plant with many virtues. Above all, is the color of the flowers, pinkish when opening but becoming an incredibly pure sapphire blue, the hue so many gardeners lust after and usually find only in "almost impossible to grow in New Jersey" plants like delphiniums and gentians. The trumpet shaped flowers occur in dangling terminal clusters and appear in March and April most springs. They are attractive to a wide range of pollinators, such as bumblebees, sphinx moths, and –allegedly, but not in this gardener's experience – hummingbirds.

The foliage is also attractive. The broad, smooth, lettuce-like leaves have a bluish cast (glaucous) and are several inches long and wide. And, once the flowers fade and the stem withers, they disappear as well, which is another asset. The whole plant accommodatingly exits the stage to make room for late spring and summer leaves and flowers. In my garden, ferns, monarda, and mountain mint replace it in June. So, for anyone trying to plan a succession garden, *Mertensia* is extremely useful. Virginia bluebells is also a good self-seeder, forming dense colonies in a few years of that euphoric blue without becoming a pest.







Photos by Deb Ellis

Marsh Marigold *(Caltha palustris)*



By Irene O. Sabin
Hunterdon Chapter

Marsh marigolds *(Caltha palustris)* are members of the buttercup family *(Ranunculaceae)* and are not related to ornamental marigolds which are in the aster family *(Asteraceae)*. Marsh marigolds are herbaceous, perennial wildflowers that grow in open to partly shaded wetland locations like marshes, bogs or the muddy edges of ponds and lakes.

Marsh marigold plants usually reach one to two feet in height and width and form mounding clumps of glossy, green, basal leaves that are oval, round or kidney shaped. The 1/2 to 1-1/2 inches cup-shaped flowers have 5 to 9 petal-like sepals which look yellow to humans but contain ultraviolet pigments, called "bee's-purple," that guide insects to nectar and pollen. The main pollinators for marsh marigolds are native bees and hoverflies in the *Syrphidae* family. The reproductive organs are in the center of the flower and the seed bearing fruits that form after pollination are called follicles. Raindrops trigger the follicles to release their copious seeds. Birds and small rodents feed on the seeds. The golden blooms are in their glory from mid-April through May and into June until they die back from dry summer heat and remain dormant until the following spring.

IIn the home landscape, marsh marigolds can be used for rain gardens, pond edges or native and woodland gardens in wet areas. Marsh marigolds are useful for wetland restoration projects. Their fibrous roots and hollow stems take up large amounts of water and nutrients. The plants can filter out pollutants, excess nutrients and inhibit the growth of algae. They provide shelter for small aquatic animals like frogs.

Marsh marigolds spread quickly by rhizomatous roots and are self-seeding but can be controlled by cutting off seedheads before they mature or digging up and dividing individual plants for use elsewhere. Propagation is easiest by division. Propagation by seed requires mature seeds that have not dried out, and a period of cold stratification for germination. Plants from seeds may not bloom in the first year. Wearing gloves while working with the plants is recommended because, like other species in the buttercup family, they contain protoanemonin which may irritate skin. Raw parts of marsh marigolds are considered toxic if ingested.

Yellow marsh marigolds are native to North America and Eurasia. The botanical name provides an accurate description: *Caltha* – cup or goblet and *palustris* - of the marsh or swamp. Marsh marigolds are thought to be an ancestral survivor of meltwater torrents after the last northern hemisphere glaciation.



Is it Non-native Lesser Celandine or Native Marsh Marigold?

Lesser celandine, also called fig buttercup *(Ficaria verna)*, formerly *(Ranunculus ficaria)* is a Eurasian plant in the buttercup family. It was introduced to the US as an ornamental spring ephemeral.

From March through May, attractive flowers with 7-12 bright yellow petals bloom on stems above dense, dark green mats of kidney or heart shaped leaves. Above-ground portions of the plant die back by early June. Lesser celandine invades stream banks, forested floodplains and other areas preferred by native spring ephemerals, which cannot compete with the thick vegetative layer of this invader. Lesser celandine is very prolific and can reproduce by tuberous roots, underground bulblets, bulbils on stems above the ground, and seeds.

These plants are difficult to remove by digging because any remaining root material can regrow new plants. It is important to identify lesser celandine correctly before removal because there are native plants that look similar, especially during early leaf stage.

Marsh marigold prefers wet areas and could be mistaken for lesser celandine. Marsh marigold has yellow flowers that look like large buttercups blooming in April and May. It spreads by seeds and rhizomes, not tubers, and plants form clumps that are easy to remove by digging.

Yellow Trout Lily, *Erythronium Americanum*

By Hubert Ling, PhD
NPSNJ Horticultural Advisor and Former President

Millie Ling,
NPSNJ Former Webmaster



April is the month when our native plant garden comes alive. One plant that we look forward to seeing again each year is the beautiful yellow trout lily, *Erythronium Americanum*, which is easy to grow.

The trout lily is in a large group of plants, the monocots which include grasses, palm trees, orchids, and lilies. Like many other lilies, trout lily has 3 petals, 3 sepals, 6 stamens, and a pistil divided into 3 chambers. Since the petals and sepals in lilies are similar in size and coloration, these plants are referred to as having 6 tepals. The tepals of trout lily are a bright yellow on the inside and a darker reddish brown on the outside. During nighttime, the 1 inch flowers close up so that only the reddish brown outer surface is seen.

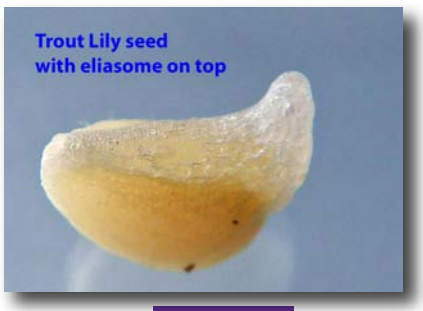
Trout lilies survive winters as corms buried 5-12 inches in the ground. In spring, a large corm may send up several shoots; generally each small shoot from young corms will only form a single small, green and purple mottled leaf. This mottled leaf is colored like a brook trout hence the name. Corms are white and oval somewhat, reminiscent of a tooth. When corms are 4-8 years old, larger shoots are produced which may produce 2 leaves. Only shoots with 2 leaves will produce flowers. To encourage your trout lily to bloom in four years, plant your corms over a large piece of slate buried horizontally about 5 inches under the surface; your





trout lily will respond to restricted root growth by blooming early. Mature blooming plants are 6-12 inches high.

Even after 8 years, flower and seed production is often sparse; areas of a colony where most shoots have large double leaves are uncommon. Thus, places where the forest floor turns a bright gold from numerous flowers are a sight to be treasured. The seeds which are produced have lipid rich, fleshy surface structures called elaiosomes. These structures are a favored ant food and trout lilies reward ants for distributing seeds with this tasty snack.



Most reproduction in trout lilies is asexual; corms send out underground stolons which swell to form additional corms. In late spring, after trout lilies have all died back, a new set of stolons emerge from the corms. These grow to the surface, twist along the leaf litter and then penetrate back into the ground. These unusual above ground stolons are termed “droppers” and may aid the plant in colonizing pockets of soil in rocky areas.

Our native yellow trout lily is a true woodland spring ephemeral which shoots up quickly in early spring before the canopy completely forms to block the light. The plants grow, flower, set seed, and wither down to the corms long before July1.

Give trout lily a space in a shaded area of your garden; they will reward you with an early splash of color every spring.

Condensed from the April 2017 edition of “Gardener News.”

Also, be sure to visit: www.AwesomeNativePlants.info

Discovering Native Spring Flowers "in the Wild"

By Deb Ellis
Essex Chapter Leader

My love for native flowers began as a child. I was lucky to grow up near an apple orchard in Madison, Wisconsin, where we kids roamed freely. We found large patches of violets and one time, a patch of trilliums! I loved to pick bouquets for my mom, so I was disappointed when after I picked the trillium, I was told they were endangered and should not be picked. A few years later, the orchard was razed for development so my dad and I rescued those trillium before the bulldozers came and their offspring live in my garden today.

Can my experience in 1960's semi-rural Wisconsin be replicated in 2024's densely-populated New Jersey? I'm here to tell you –it can. Many spring ephemerals and other spring flowers grow in county and state parks throughout NJ. And even in suburban/urban locales, like most of Essex County, there are spring natives growing in city parks and fields – if you know where to look and keep your eyes open.

Cheer up a dreary mid-March day with a walk by a stream to search out skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*). Its flower is unique because it is designed to attract fly pollinators by looking (and smelling) like rotting meat. It's "thermogenic" – it can warm the air around it and even melt snow.



"If you are afflicted with melancholy at this season, go to the swamp and see the brave spears of skunk-cabbage . . . . They see over the brow of winter's hill. They see another summer ahead."

Henry David Thoreau, March 10, 1853





It's not an ephemeral because its leaves stay into the summer, when it looks like cabbage.

In mid-April, in the moist woodlands, look for diminutive and ephemeral trout lilies (*Erythronium Americanum*). They often grow in large patches with many leaves and few flowers. Its name derives from its mottled leaves resembling trout scales and its flowers looking like lilies.

You can also find delicate spring beauties (*Claytonia virginica*) in mid-April. They often "hide in plain sight," their grass-like leaves blend into parks and lawns but you can spy their white blossoms. In Montclair, there are hundreds on the high school grounds and in Newark, they grow under the cherry blossoms in Branch Brook Park. Scientists have documented that more pollinators visit spring beauties than any other spring flower. In a bit of plant magic, its pink stripes reflect UV light and guide pollinators to the center.

Last but not least, our state flower, the purple common violet (*Viola sororia*) is the easiest to discover because it thrives in many conditions. We love it for its beauty and also because it is ecologically valuable as caterpillar food for many species of butterflies and moths, including the great spangled fritillary.

I wish you happy hunting for our spring natives! I hope that you will be as thrilled as I was as a small child to discover these beauties.

Spring Ephemerals in Our "No-Mow" Lawn!



Camassia scilliodes ,wild hyacinth migrating into the lawn

By Jon Gibbons
NPSNJ Horticultural Advisor
Candide's Garden Creator

Like many others concerned about the environmental footprint of turf grass, at *Candide's Garden* in Lake Como, we advocate reducing your residential lawn to the area necessary to withstand heavy foot traffic associated with, say, ball games or frequent walking. Within that grassed area, we advocate installing a "no-mow" lawn. As a result, mowers don't spew carbon dioxide exhaust into the air, watering is needed infrequently or never; fertilizer and toxic applications to kill bugs and diseases simply aren't necessary.

But to do even more, we can incorporate blooming plants to support pollinators and other beneficial insects. Using spring ephemerals and other low growing natives in the lawn is a way to do this without creating a meadow, which could defeat the foot traffic requirement and possibly transgress an ordinance or two. Ephemerals also appear in early spring and then recede before warmer temperatures encourage folks' frequent use of the yard. And because these plants aren't decapitated by a mower, they are allowed to live their lives!

A favorite practice with conventional lawns is to plant non-native spring ephemerals, like daffodils and tulips, in informal arrangements. They are lovely when they first bloom; however, the luster fades as we wait for the leaves to turn brown and recede, returning the nutrients to the ground to store for next year. All this time, regular mowing avoids the planted area. An unsightly un-mown area develops, until mercifully, these non-native ephemerals disappear, and blanket mowing can resume. With the no-mow lawn, the grass remains the same height, whether under the plants or out in the open.

In *Candide's Garden*, our no-mow lawn was installed in 2014. The next year, a few inherited daffodils and grape hyacinths accompanied some clover colonizing in random places. Unfortunately, some wild garlic intruded and we've been battling it ever since. We started by planting some crocuses and tulips. Meanwhile, we started populating the forest floor in our woodland border with native ephemerals. But we didn't realize the opportunity next door to the no-mow lawn! Fortunately, the woodland plants didn't miss this trick – eventually they started migrating into the lawn. The first explorer was *Camassia scilliodes* - beautiful native hyacinth. Non-ephemerals such as native *Iris cristata* - dwarf bearded iris, and *Hydrastis canadensis* - goldenseal, are just starting to make inroads. They will be joining other low-growing wildflowers, such as strawberry and woodland phlox.

So, now homeowners can bypass our process of discovery, skip to the back of the book, and litter their no-mow lawn with native spring ephemerals. Ephemerals native to NJ, such as bloodroot, eastern shooting star, and Virginia bluebells, will provide more benefit for our pollinators and still disappear during the summer season. This example illustrates one of the basic intentions of *Candide's Garden* – developing useful landscaping solutions which make room for the new kid on the block – our environment.

2024 Plant of the Year Nominees-Backyard

By John Suskewich



Great Blue Lobelia, *Lobelia siphilitica* is the blues brother of the remarkably red cardinal flower, *L. cardinalis*. They are both part of the very garden worthy bellflower family, *campanulaceae*. In the wild, where it is thrilling to come upon, great blue lobelia is most often seen in part sun to part shade, near streams, sloughs and other wetlands, telling you that in the garden it prefers moist soil. Where content, it attains a height of two to three feet, colonizes through self-seeding and in most gardens persists for years. The summer flowers of great blue lobelia are various shades of violet blue, lipped, lobed, and arranged on a long stalk. They are an important food source for several native bees, bumblebees, and hummingbirds.



Blue Mist Flower, *conoclinium coelestinum* is a very pretty plant that looks like a blue boneset or snakeroot, or a hardy, taller version of the annual ageratum sold in garden centers. *conoclinum coelestinum* blooms late in the season, is very easy to grow, and adds a touch of sapphire to the fall flower palette. Height can be a foot or two, and breadth, well, one almost fatal flaw of this plant is its aggressiveness, because where it's happy it spreads through rhizomes and self-seeding. If you are good at weeding, or have other aggressive plants that can duke it out with mistflower, it's worth having. It attracts many native autumn pollinators: bees, butterflies, and skippers, and displays a strong degree of deer-resistance.



Swamp Rose Mallow, *hibiscus moscheutos* is the gorgeous, hardy native relative of the gorgeous tropical hibiscus grown in greenhouses. In its natural setting, swamp rose mallow is found in sites that range from moist to wet, but established garden plants can handle average soil, unless there's a drought when a glug from the hose might help. This hardy hibiscus luxuriates in the torrid days of summer, and in some years the new growth doesn't even emerge until June when the days really, really start warming up. The salad plate sized flowers are very impressive, and range in color from white to deep pink. The plant itself can attain heights of over six feet, and it has a few pest problems, notably Japanese beetles. Other gardeners in the neighborhood will drool with envy at your well grown specimen of *hibiscus moscheutos.*



Eastern Prickly Pear Cactus, *opuntia humifusa* has a real high cool quotient. One of the few hardy succulents native to New Jersey, it needs to be sited carefully in a very well-drained location, in gravelly or sandy soil, preferably in full sun. The height is usually less than a foot as the pads, which are swollen stem-segments, not leaves, are pretty prostrate. Probably not a good plant where curious kids hang out because those pads are covered with tiny little bristles that can stick to your skin and are annoying. The yellow flowers open in June and July, each lasting but a day or two, and are followed by an edible fruit that Native Americans ate, either fresh or dried. In the Ramapo Mountains, above Hawk Rock, there is a spot called Cactus Ledge, a sunny glade covered with this plant that in early summer is a sight to behold.

2024 Plant of the Year Nominees-Rare and Special

By John Suskewich

Pink Lady's Slipper, *cypripedium acaule* may cause a plant lover's endorphins to really kick-in as they go for a walk sometime in May. The pink and tan flower has an unusual moccasin shape and dangles from a stem that rises from a pair of veined basal leaves. It has a unique design feature for pollination by bumblebees, which requires them to follow a one way path through the flower, forcing insects to take a pre-determined route past its reproductive parts, sort of like the way Ikea makes you travel past all their sales displays before you get to the exit. *cypripedium acaule* is not common but can readily be seen at various places in New Jersey, such as near Ramapo Lake in Bergen County and at Cheesequake Park near the center of the state.



Scarlet Indian Paintbrush, *castilleja coccinea*, a biennial plant is one of the few New Jersey representatives of the Orobanchaceae or "broomrape" family (not my idea). According to MOBOT, it is primarily found "in prairies, rocky glades, moist and open woodlands, thickets and streambanks." What look like flowers are actually very bright, very colorful, very vermilion bracts that contain the actual flowers, which are tiny and greenish. Because it is semi-parasitic and grows best near a companion plant, scarlet Indian paintbrush is reputed to be tough to establish in a garden, but it is striking, vivid and probably worth the effort. To see it growing in the wild would be worth the effort too, even if it meant getting tangled up in the "razor wire" of wild greenbriar.



Photo by H&M Ling www.AwesomeNativePlants.info

Yellow Fringeless Orchid, *platanthera integra* is a very rare, exceedingly exquisite denizen of the acidic swamps and bogs of New Jersey's Pine Barrens. From mid-July to mid-August from a base of small narrow leaves, this gem sends up a stem a foot and a half high, clothed in a few more small narrow leaves, and topped with an inflorescence maybe 3" long of delicate, fringeless! And unlike some of the other representatives of this genus, yellow to orange flowers. Always uncommon, its population decline over time has been attributed to habitat loss, especially fire suppression practices that allow it to become "shaded out." This is another orchid pollinated by bumblebees.



Photo by H&M Ling www.AwesomeNativePlants.info

Missouri Gooseberry, *ribes missouriense* is a native ornamental deciduous shrub that in summer produces a small fruit, edible after you dump enough sugar on it like other gooseberries and currants. The plant grows about three feet high, prefers at least some sun, has lobed palmate leaves, and wields sneaky, nasty thorns along the arching stems that'll scratch you good like an un-clawed cat. It can be found in thickets, near wood edges, and around dry glades. The flowers are small, clustered, and drooping, and are followed by tart green fruits. Maybe you can make a kind of cassis out of them, like my grandmother made with blackcurrants. Probably not a candidate for a garden since its considered an "alternate host for white pine blister rust" like other Ribes.

