



The President's Corner

Our Native Plant Society of NJ is taking a much more active role in our stated goal of education, appreciation, and protection of NJ native plants. We have an active legislative committee composed of Dr. Kazys Varnelis and Tata Howley and NSPNJ has voted to take positions on 3 NJ plant bills. Look for our positions on Constant Contact.

We have also, for the first time, spent our hard earned funds on protecting the beautiful and rare Pine Barrens Swamp Pink. This conservation project is headed by Mike Hogan; he is arranging for us to hopefully visit this unique plant April 30th, 2022.

Our native plant Seed Exchange will for the first time feature over 100 native species some of which are very hard to obtain. We welcome Toadshade Wildflower Farm and Duke Farms as corporate seed contributors and thank our numerous private donors. Our Seed Exchange can rapidly add thousands of plants to your native gardens at almost no cost. There is no better way to know and love your plants then to raise them from seeds. Entry to this unique program is a donation of just one or more packages of any NJ native plant seeds which almost all of you can obtain; so plan to join in next year.

God's little acre, our Krajci Preserve is looking a lot better after our September "Weed and Feed" program. Thanks to the many volunteers who traveled over an hour to this isolated location near Hopewell NJ. We removed an incredible number of woody invasives weeds and replaced them with dozens of desirable natives. In our feed segment of the program we all had more than enough of pizza, salad, and chicken wings and prizes. If you missed it sign up early next time.



If we are missing any opportunities to promote native plants contact any chapter leader and they can pass along any great ideas to our leadership. Hope to see you all at our special Fall/Spring Annual Meetings which have a great line-up of speakers and activities. Check it out at www.npsnj.org

Many thanks to Chapter Leaders, Executive Board, Committee members and many general members for their contributions of thought, time, and money without which we wouldn't have a Native Plant Society of NJ.

Yours,

Hubert Ling
president@npsnj.org



Biodiversity *IS* what it's all about

By Steve Fiedler
Southeastern Chapter

We all have a need, sometimes unrecognized, to reconnect with nature in a very substantial way. Along with the exercise and “getting some fresh air”, we need to realize in our lives and in nature that “variety is the spice of life”.

We are losing the battle of maintaining that spice of nature, biodiversity. Biological diversity is that intricate web of life where each strand is connected to something else. It is estimated that there are 9 million species of plants, animals, single cell organisms and fungi; of which we may lose around 150,000 of these species colonies per year.

Although there are some natural reasons, we as humans have an outsized influence; by sheer population numbers and growth rate, increased consumption of resources, as well as the diminishing returns from those very resources we depend upon. Some examples:

- **Habitat Loss:** Fragmentation of habitat disconnects the ability of species to interact as part of a whole. Instead we have pockets of “survivors” who have then-diminished capabilities and futures. Along the way, there is functional harm to soil, water systems and the exchange of nutrients. There can be no progress in restoring biodiversity without coming to grips with habitat loss and the subsequent unraveling of the interconnected web.

- **Invasive Species:** Humans have introduced a “Pandora’s Box” of non-native plants, animals and other organisms into places not adapted for them. The ecosystem’s “checks and balances” system is therefore disrupted and weakened. Pollinators can’t find their host plants to feed or lay eggs on. Birds and other animals try to feed on fruits that often give them no sustenance and in some cases they are toxified by them. These creatures pass undigested seeds and materials through their guts, to other locations; further exacerbating the problem. Invasive vines take down native trees. Invasive shrubs proliferate and crowd out areas from useful native plants. Invasive grasses like bamboo send out intricate rhizomes that ruin entire ecosystems and property values; a glaring example of the damage done above and underground by invasive plants.

- **Resource Extraction:** Taking out too many marine and land creatures can also upset the predator-prey balance and drive many to extinction. This can happen extremely fast, the crashing of a species, from over-harvesting and then extinction by overwhelming predation or disease. Beyond the situation of living organisms, the earth’s resources are finite. Often these resources are lost by burning or compromised in landfills. Renewable resources and a complete re-thinking of manufacturing and recycling are needed for a more sustainable future.

- **Pollution:** Dosing our water, air and soils with chemicals and trash upsets the delicate “sweet spot” where many species exist. It also sets up a dynamic where we wind up consuming, in our food, such material as micro-plastic waste, herbicides, pesticides, and heavy metals.

- **Climate Change:** Global warming, from rising levels of atmosphere-altering gases, is causing massive shifts in species migration. This throws off the timing of food availability and habitat for all creatures, notably birds, butterflies, moths and thousands of other pollinators. In the ocean, climate change effects are escalating: acidification; changes in salinity as well as sea-level rise due to glacial melt; coral reef bleaching; increased moisture and temperature-driven storms, and alterations of traditional ocean currents causing displacement and diminution of marine species.

*We must do better
in protection,
and you can be part
of the solution.*

Needless to say it is the pollinators, on which we largely depend for our food supplies that we seem to destroy with particularly great efficiency. We must do better in protection, and you can be part of the solution. If you are a renter, you can participate by planting native pollinator-attractant plants in containers on your apartment porch or deck. Resist the urge to use broad spectrum systemic herbicides, like glyphosate, that can kill beneficial native plants as collateral damage; and the generalist pesticides, like the neonicotinoids, that can kill beneficial insects indiscriminately. If you are able, please participate in a community pollinator garden project. If you would like more information for a solid plan of action, visit www.homegrownnationalpark.org

Self-Nurture through Nature

By Hara Rola
*Jersey Shore Chapter
and avid forest bather*

Being an environmentalist and native plant advocate can, at times, be wearing when one is trying to breach a wall of societal misunderstanding and resistance about regaining ecological balance. Subsequently, one needs to do self-care to revive before getting back on the advocate's playing field to continue tackling issues and educating misinformed citizens about the best practices for a functional and

a walk in the woods have been studied by Japanese medical researchers since 1984. They refer to the practice of entering a forest to boost health as "shinrin-yoku," which translates as "forest bathing." In Japan, a doctor may prescribe a visit to a forest as part of a patient's therapy.

When a person is in the presence of trees, they are exposed to air borne chemicals called phytoncides (wood essential oils) that protect the trees from microbes but they have immunity boosting and physiological healing properties for humans as well, according to Dr. Qing Li, assistant professor of the department of Hygiene and Public Health,

Nippon Medical Center, Tokyo, Japan.

Just as important is the relaxation response triggered by the sights, sounds, and scents of a natural area. Therefore, mental, emotional, and spiritual health is enhanced also, reports Yoshifumi Miyazaki, Director of the Center for Environmental Health and Field Sciences at Chiba University, Chiba, Japan. He notes, "When we are exposed to nature, our bodies go back to what they should be." Forest bathing's benefits show us that humans cannot remain healthy without a healthy natural world. A critical reason alone to preserve and protect remaining natural areas.



Forest bathing adds a layer of health protecting and stress reducing elements that work in concert with other health supporting efforts such as exercise, diet, socialization, and spiritual focus to create overall well-being. It has also served as a valuable health protecting modality during the current pandemic.

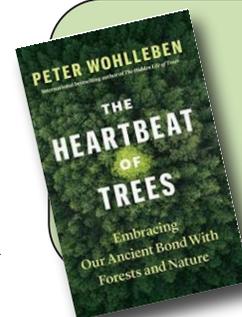
So, be sure to take the time to visit a forest frequently and immerse your body into its vaporous healing bath. Breathe deep among the trees. While there, slow down and quietly wander and observe your surroundings and let your senses go into overdrive. Relish the beauty of the grassy openness of an adjacent meadow and enjoy the subtle sound of a babbling brook. Let the information gathering part of your brain take a rest, and rather, assert its emotional and imaginative aspects. Our green mother wants to take care of us as much as we want to care for her. It's the ultimate symbiotic relationship that we can engage in and it adds up to free medicine with no negative side effects. So, dive in and indulge yourself.



healthy ecosystem, such as convincing your community to buy into native plant gardening.

Many of us do our part to nurture and heal natural spaces. Well, please allow Mother Nature do the same for you. In the busyness of life, we may neglect to care for ourselves. However, we can't properly take care of nature and all the other things we need to do if we don't take care of ourselves simultaneously.

When you are stressed or not feeling well and want to improve your overall well-being, go spend some quiet time in one of those natural areas you worked hard to preserve, restore and protect. The healing benefits of



Get in touch with the forest with Peter Wohlleben's newest book



A Case Study of Narrowleaf Ironweed (*Vernonia lettermannii*) 'Southern Cross'

By Jane Kinkle
Essex Chapter

Last year I purchased a narrowleaf ironweed plant (*Vernonia lettermannii*) and fell in love with this tough native perennial wildflower in the Asteraceae family. Narrowleaf ironweed is a late summer/early fall bloomer with dense clusters of deep purple flowers that look like tiny daisies. Its numerous stems emerge from the crown covered from top to bottom with narrow leaves. Narrowleaf ironweed is a low maintenance plant. It prefers rich moist acidic soils but will grow in average moist to wet soils in full sun – even in my Caldwell clay! Its long taproot makes it drought tolerant.

Narrowleaf ironweed is an impressive meadow plant. It is gorgeous when surrounded by native grasses, black-eyed Susan, coneflower, aster and goldenrod. I am using it in my home pollinator garden and in the sensory mini-garden at the Caldwell Pollinator Garden for its feathery leaves which are lovely to touch. Narrowleaf ironweed would also be great in a rain garden. Unlike its relatives New York ironweed (*Vernonia noveboracensis*) and Tall ironweed (*Vernonia gigantea*) whose stems can achieve heights of six feet or more, the bush-like narrowleaf ironweed plant typically reaches only two to three feet in height and three feet in width, thus its nickname “dwarf ironweed.”

Since I have now committed to planting only straight species in order to provide the best possible foraging experience for the pollinators in my area, I wondered if the narrowleaf ironweed I purchased before I even knew what a straight species was, was a straight species! I only remembered that my plant was *Vernonia lettermannii*. Luckily, I save my plastic plant ID stakes. I dug through my collection

hoping that my ironweed was not the popular cultivar ‘Iron Butterfly’. I saw that my lettermannii was labeled *Vernonia* hybrid ‘Southern Cross’. I was sad to discover it was a hybrid, but I continued to look for more information. My hybrid seems so much like the straight species described in the literature.

A New Gardener's Dilemma:

Can a Natural Hybrid be a Straight Species?

In reading through a few articles about narrowleaf ironweed I found that when Brent Horvath of Intrinsic Perennial Gardens made the discovery of this hybrid ironweed among *Vernonia lettermannii* seedlings, some natural hybridization had taken place. So, I wondered if my ‘Southern Cross’ is a natural hybrid, could still be considered a straight species? Hybridization has been taking place among plants for a very long time. Could ancient hybrids be the straight species we know today? A few articles mention that ‘Southern Cross’ came from seed sown as narrowleaf ironweed. I think I also read that it grows true from seed, but I could not find that reference. I emailed Mr. Horvath with my questions, and he responded. “It is a natural hybrid with *lettermannii*, but I’m unsure of the other parent. So seedlings would not be true to type but variable.”

Then I emailed Dr. Susan Hamilton who wrote about narrowleaf ironweed in 2012 for the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture newsletter. *Vernonia lettermannii* was her August Plant of the Month. Dr. Hamilton is on the faculty in the

University of Tennessee Department of Plant Sciences and also serves as Director of the UT Gardens. I told her about my concern - that my ‘Southern Cross’ could not be a straight species. She agreed and stated that even wild hybrids cannot be considered straight species. End of story – almost!

I am going to keep my ‘Southern Cross’ in my pollinator garden for now and console myself with information from an article from the Piedmont Master Gardeners Newsletter which references Doug Tallamy’s research that “Changing plant habit, such as making a shrub more compact, had no effect on insect feeding.” The size of “Southern Cross” definitely makes it more welcome in a small garden. And like other ironweeds, *Vernonia lettermannii* ‘Southern Cross’ attracts a wide range of pollinators. On a late summer day, a narrowleaf ironweed plant can be covered with bees. Tiny skipper butterflies also find it irresistible! The flowers provide sustenance for our pollinators in the fall when summer bloomers are finished.

So, if I have not yet convinced you to add narrowleaf ironweed to your garden, consider another nice feature of this plant – it provides great winter interest. If you don’t cut it back in the fall in order to provide shelter for overwintering pollinators, you will be rewarded with a lovely outdoor bouquet of dried narrowleaf ironweed flowers whose sturdy stems maintain their upright posture all winter long. But just try to find the straight species! That is my plan.

Important Note: Do not confuse narrowleaf ironweed with similar looking threadleaf bluestar (*Amsonia hubrichtii*). Both plants are about the same size, but bluestar has leaves that are even more narrow and feathery – almost needle-like.

Reference

<https://www.reference.com/science/plants-adapt-cold-weather-6a9ecd79de2e5450>



Pine Barrens Gentian

(*Gentiana autumnalis*)

By Bobbie Herbs

Pine barrens gentian contrasts with the expected colors of fall, blooming from September to early November in New Jersey. The blue flowers aid insects in finding nectar sources when foliage turns golden, red and orange. These are rare plants, yet can still be found in the wetlands of New Jersey's Pinelands. Adapted to acidic, sandy, nutrient-poor soil in fire-prone areas, Pine barrens gentian communities have been heavily diminished by fire suppression, off road vehicles, invasive plants and shifting natural water systems due to civilization and development. The plant is protected as threatened or endangered by the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan and is listed as a Species of Special Concern by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. As a globally rare species the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection has Pine barrens Gentian prioritized for recovery.

Habitat

Wild fires helped maintain the early succession environment pine barrens gentian prefer, where soil is disturbed, canopies cleared, and fire ash provides nutrients. Plant colonies are found primarily in open, sunny, wet pine barrens and bogs on the coastal plains of New Jersey, Virginia plus North and South Carolina. Scientists are studying the use of prescribed burns and clearing to evaluate the conservation impact on this rare plant. These are difficult plants to propagate due to the precise soil, water and nutrient composition required for seed germination.



Flowers

Flowers are trumpet shaped in communities of eye-catching azure blue. From 1-3 flowers arise from each stem. Each flower has a 4-5 lobed calyx (sepal) that is no longer than 1". The 4-5 flower petals fuse at the base and separate from the middle of the flower to the top forming the trumpet. Their show can be considered stingy, flowers open from late morning to early afternoon only in full sun. Colors range from purple to blue with whitish-green strips or spots in the throat, which serve as 'nectar guides' directing insects to pollen which help them over-winter. CU Maurice River notes, on very rare occasion this plant may be found with white corolla or white in green (albescens) or white and blue (albocaerulea) or purple or lilac (Porphyrio).

Leaves and Plant

The pine barrens gentian can achieve 24" in height, but typically reaches one foot tall. Leaves have no hairs and are arranged opposite with 7-15 pair per stem. Each leaf is 1-3" long and less than 1" across elongated, linear with an entire margin.

Odds and Ends

Pine barrens gentian was not properly named until 1971 using an example from South Carolina. Originally discovered by William Bartram, he sent a drawing to George Edwards, a British naturalist and ornithologist, who published "Autumnal Perennial Gentian of the Desert" in his Gleanings of Natural History, 1758.



Resources:

The United States Botanic Garden

<https://www.usbg.gov/plants/pine-barrens-gentian>

Pinelands Preservation Alliance

<https://pinelandsalliance.org/learn-about-the-pinelands/ecosystem/pinelands-plants-overview/plants-of-the-pine-barrens>

<https://pinelandsalliance.org/science-rocks-the-pinelands-2/>

CU Maurice River

https://www.cumauriceriver.org/botany/Gentiana_autumnalis.html

NJ.com

https://www.nj.com/warrenreporter/2014/09/a_beautiful_pine_barrens_late-.html

Native Plants of the Carolinas and Georgia, Name That Plant,

<http://www.namethatplant.net/plantdetail.shtml?plant=602>

Phillips 66 Mini-Grant

First Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Hunterdon County



By Linda Bradway
Hunterdon Chapter

The members of FUUFHC were thrilled to receive the \$500 grant from NPSNJ. The major challenge of renewing the garden bed alongside our Old Stove Church was to remove Canadian anemone, *Anemone canadensis* that over the years had run wild in the garden, overtaking almost everything but the Joe Pye Weed which was dominating its own side of the garden. Many spring days were spent digging out clumps of these aggressive beauties and moving them to other sites on the property where they were free to run wild.

Our next challenge was to purchase the selection of native plants that were part of our grant application. After many frustrating hours of searching for native plants in our local nurseries I happily came upon Ginos Native Nursery outside of New Hope, PA. This small but amazing nursery had everything we were looking for, nice healthy, good-sized plants at very affordable prices. Their selection of trees, shrubs and perennials was a native gardener's dream come true!

Our next step in renewing the garden was to move some native plants growing in the garden to more appropriate places and to make room for our newly purchased treasures. Although the soil in the garden was a little better than typical garden soil, we were able to improve it by adding compost left over from the church's pollinator and wildflower gardens that were planted two years ago.

With the help of many volunteers from the church, our "Planting Day" went extremely well and we were able to get all 38 shrubs and perennials nicely settled in their new home. A good drink of water for the plants, and volunteers alike, and we were almost done.

The following week a very generous church member delivered 4 yards of wonderfully rich composted mulch, and again volunteers spent the morning spreading the mulch around the newly planted bed. Now two months later everyone seems to have adjusted well to their new home, with the exception of the lovely Sweet Fern, *Comptonia peregrina*. It just may have been

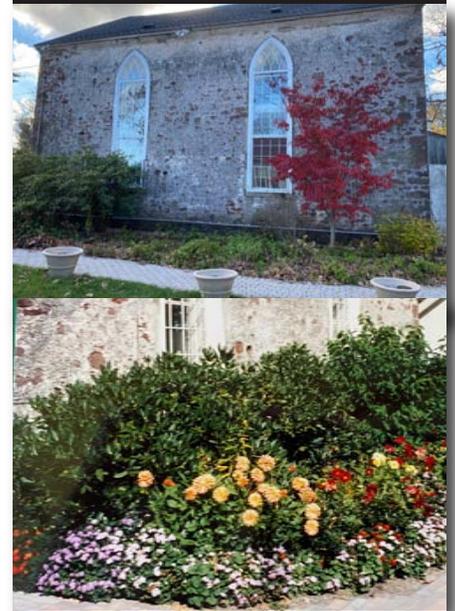
too sunny or not enough moisture for it to survive.

The biggest challenge going forward is to keep a handle on the Canadian anemone and Joe Pye Weed that continues to pop up around the garden trying to take hold of the garden once more. But with weekly weeding parties the hope is that we will finally be able to remove all left over remnants of these plants and succeed in con-

verting the previously over run garden with a lovely, fairly maintenance free, native plant garden, thanks to the generosity of the Native Plant Society of New Jersey.



Before the Native Planting



The original garden was overrun with Canadian anemone. Bottom photo is an early photo of all the dahlias in the garden--beautiful but not native and very high maintenance.

Phillips 66 Mini-Grant

Borough of Island Heights Environmental Committee and Green Team



Many thanks to Scout Troop #50



...after a heavy rain

By Mary Judge
Jersey Shore Chapter

The Borough of Island Heights Environmental Committee and Green Team was fortunate enough to receive one of the Native Plant Society's \$500 grants to fund additional and replacement native plants for an existing native plant "bioswale" in the Island Heights municipal complex. A Sustainable Jersey 2012 grant originally provided funding to convert existing parking lot medians into bioswales to help absorb and treat stormwater runoff before running off into the adjacent Toms River (where the river meets the Barnegat Bay).

The area is approximately 3,033 square feet and contains one very large and three smaller medians. The bioswales that were installed in these medians now include native trees, small shrubs, groundcovers and native perennials, as well as clean fill, river rock and shell pathways for crossing the median without disturbing the plantings. Ideally, parking lot swales would be built at the same time as a parking lot in order to ensure as much stormwater as possible is directed into the

swales, but we did not have this luxury. A volunteer engineer calculated that approximately one-fourth of the runoff from this very large, waterfront parking lot is taken in and treated naturally by the bioswale instead of running off directly into the adjacent Toms River from two storm drains located in the parking lot.

Over the past eight years, it became clear that some species fared better than others in this difficult site and a decision was made to build on this, as well as to include more flowering native perennials, to call attention to, and beautify the project. (New plants were marked with recycled plastic cutlery from a former Native Plant Society Annual Meeting to make sure they were watered-in sufficiently!)

The planting was scheduled to take place as part of the Borough's Earth Day celebration and Boy Scout Troop #50 was invited to join other Borough residents in lending a hand after their campout in the adjacent field the night before. The boys and their troop leaders were extremely helpful in removing trash from the

site, planting the new native plants, mulching, watering, and weeding. Before the work began, As Project Manager, I gave a welcome to the Earth Day attendees and explained the bioswale project and its environmental impact on this waterfront site. Trash collects in the swales and is regularly removed by hand by volunteers; the stormwater is cooled, and the native plants help to filter out pollutants in the water. A K-4 planting mix of sand, silt and clay (found naturally throughout Ocean County) was used to replace the compacted soils left after the 1995 construction of the parking lot and stormwater easily infiltrates this material.

Interpretive signage was installed as part of the original grant, explaining the purpose of a bioswale and native plants. There is no home-delivery of mail in Island Heights and residents must come to the Post Office in the municipal complex to pick up their mail. The Post Office is also popular with out-of-towners, who want to avoid the more crowded Toms River Office. The complex is a popular waterfront site for charity races, fundraisers, concerts, and recreation, and also contains the town hall, and police and emergency management departments; therefore, there is quite a bit of visibility for the project.

Keeping a project like this planted, maintained, and functioning properly would not be possible without the support of generous grantors and willing volunteers. The Native Plant Society grant was very much appreciated!

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Phillips 66 Mini-Grant

Whittemore, Community Culture and Conservation

EDITOR'S NOTE:

As the Steward at Whittemore, Dawn was recently presented "The Friends of Whittemore Award" for her dedication and service. She has spent countless hours clearing the property of invasive plants, planting native plants and organizing other volunteers in her effort.



By Dawn Pogosaew *Hunterdon Chapter*

Over this past winter, we have started removing the predominate understory of invasive shrubs and vines. The battle continued most of the summer but should be under control and manageable this winter. Volunteers created a mulched path through the area. Only a few native species were present under the dense understory this year which includes, Ragged Fringed Orchids, several different Sedge Species, Blackhaw Viburnum, Cedar and Oak.

We have propagated and planted seeds of Asters, Amsonia Tabernaemontana, Twinleaf Miterwort, Richweed, and Bur Sedge. Donations included Mayapples and an Itea shrub from Hubert and Millie Ling, and a fern from an Odrick resident. Wild ginger, Horsetail, Blue cohosh, Chocolate root, Cinnamon Fern, Golden Ragwort, Blue Mist flower, a Green Dragon, Spice bush, Winterberry Holly were all planted. We are planning on acquiring several species of ferns for planting in the spring of 2022, as well as add labels.



Phillips 66 Mini-Grant

Native Plant Garden at the Somerset County Historical Societies' Van Veghten House



By Olinda Young

The Van Veghten House, headquarters of the Somerset County Historical Society, sits on a bluff overlooking the Raritan River near the Van Veghten Bridge into Manville, NJ. The property consists of one acre partially on the bluff and partially down a hill into the floodplain of the river. South and east it borders county park land; north and west are warehouses and other buildings in an industrial park.

The landscaping at the west end of the house included several 5-6 foot overgrown yew bushes that were at least 75 years old. They were cut down in November 2020 and the roots were soaked with vinegar in an attempt to weaken the roots over the winter. This opened up the view of the brick work on the house and also provided a perfect spot for new plantings in the spring: The bed is approximately 6 feet wide and extends the width of the house. The house structure shades the bed in the morning, but there is full sunlight in the afternoon. Despite gutter downspouts at each corner, a slight slope toward the river provides good drainage.

Preparation began in earnest in early April 2021, when the first attempt to remove the stumps and roots in the proposed garden bed began. The first attempt to pull them out with a pickup truck and chain ended with a broken chain. But after some digging around the bases and trying again, two stumps were pulled out. The other two stumps weren't removed until early May, because of rain and the need for the soil to dry.

As planting was on hold until danger of frost in Central Jersey was over at the end of May, in the next couple of weeks several members turned the soil twice with hand spades. This took a while because of rain and the need to wait for the soil to dry. When that was completed, another member brought aged manure from their farm to enrich the soil.

On the first Saturday in June three committee members drove to a nursery to buy plants. They selected a dozen or so specimens including phlox, mountain mint, 4 kinds of heuchera, monarda, coreopsis, baptisia, aster and helianthus. Several

members also donated things from their gardens including black eyed susans, butterfly weed, and morning glories. Unexpectedly, we dropped two pumpkin seeds in the bed and decided to leave them to see what would happen. Then the site was mulched and for a week or two a member came to water regularly so the roots could get well established.

Then the deer discovered the site. Sunflowers, coral bells, black eyed susans, and morning glories became tasty treats. Although the sunflowers seem to have totally disappeared, the others have regrown a bit shorter than usual.

During August, the mulch kept the weeding to a minimum and the pumpkin vines took over. Fortunately the leaves shaded most of the bed protecting the nursery plants from the scorching heat. A basketball sized pumpkin grew much to the delight of observers. On August 7th, the Historical Society introduced the garden to the public at the first official program since Covid hit. The program that day included a brief five minute talk about what Native Plants are, what we planted, and why people should consider growing them. In addition, a self-guided tour of the yard, called WalkAbout was created.

Edges of the garden were touched by flood waters from the Raritan when Ida came through in September, but nothing was irrevocably damaged. The basement and two of the rooms in the oldest part of the house were inundated, but things are still drying out and a professional historical architecture engineer will be checking for unseen damage. Makes for an exciting chapter in the story of our Native Plant Garden.



Wreath Goldenrod

Solidago caesia



Photo by Scott Detwiler

John Suskewich
Essex Chapter

All goldenrods have their virtues, but for many gardeners wreath goldenrod takes the gold. *Solidago caesia* is an herbaceous perennial, from the important family *Asteraceae*, that is one of New Jersey's most useful and beautiful native plants. Sporting a long chaplet of petite, clear yellow flowers, emerging zig-zaggedly from the axils along the gracefully arcing stems, wreath goldenrod blooms from late summer into fall, when pollinators are getting in their last desperate licks and slurps. Bees and butterflies descend on the plant in October as if it were "last call" at the only open saloon on the block. Not many other native plants display this degree of elegance with such adaptability to a wide range of garden conditions.

Wreath goldenrod can handle almost any degree of moisture except sopping wet, grows beautifully in sun or part shade, and plays well with other natives since it is clump forming, not a running bully.

Typically, it grows two to three feet tall and spreads about that much. Hale and hearty, it is usually pest and disease free and performs fine in zones 4 to 8.

According to the Missouri Botanical Garden *Plant Finder*, the name of the genus comes from Latin words that refer to the alleged healing properties of some species, *solidus* meaning "whole" and *ago* meaning "to make," a horticultural portmanteau that doesn't make a whole lot of sense to me, but then I'm not a taxonomist. The other common name is blue-stem goldenrod, which explains the application of the specific

epithet. *Caesia* means "light blue," apparently referring to the color of those glabrous stems, which look green to me, but I'm not an optometrist either.

Finally, I cannot duck from refuting the canard that goldenrods cause hay fever. This old wives tale has long been propagated not only by old wives, but also by my back-seat gardening husband, who likes to blame goldenrod for his autumnal sinusitis. This is not the case. Being smothered in bees indicates a plant is sowing its wild oats through insect pollinators not the wind. It is the pollen of ugly ragweed that is usually the cause of October sneezing. So there is no reason not to make room for beautiful, late-blooming wreath goldenrod in any planting of natives. It well deserves the goldenrod crown of laurel.



Pollinator City

The Golden Rod
it's buzzing with bees
shear wings glistening
they're all over it
like a busy urban center
climbing, clinging
sipping nectar of the gods
bathed in yellow pollen...
wind nor hot sun
dissuade the foragers
a collective of bees
from bumble to sweat to honey
they work side by side
each visitor focused
practice insect etiquette
no wars waged here
there's plenty of blossom
to fill tiny needs...
their final nips
a flowery feast
one of abundance
autumn's last hurrah
before the curtain falls
upon the cold stage
winter intermission

Hara L. Rola
2021