

This is the Horticulture Committee's tenth Quarterly Bulletin. Previous issues can be found on our GCM website. A directory is also posted there to make specific articles easy to find.

Spotlight on Native Plants

To help promote the Horticulture Committee's theme of ***Educating and Encouraging the Use of Native Plants***, this "Spotlight" will be a regular feature in our quarterly bulletins. Here are two shrubs that provide benefits during winter.



Red-Twig Dogwood (*Cornus sericea*)

One of the best shrubs for winter interest, *Cornus sericea* is native to Connecticut and much of North America. Synonymous with *Cornus stolonifera* (its former name), it is commonly known as Red-Twig Dogwood or Red Osier Dogwood.

This multi-stem deciduous shrub grows 6 ft - 8 ft tall and can spread to 7 ft wide. It is best grown in full sun to part sun, in organically rich moist soil. Also, it performs well in wet locations, near ponds, or along streams. It is salt tolerant and can combat soil erosion. Within your landscape, *Cornus sericea* is excellent massed as a group, effective as a shrub border, dynamic placed in front of evergreens, and beautiful in naturalistic plantings where it can be allowed to spread.

Reddish stems carry tiny, fragrant white flowers that appear in clusters in late spring. Flowers give way to drupes in summer, and this fruit is attractive to birds. Fall foliage is red to purple, and the stems turn vibrant bright red in winter. These brilliant red stems are particularly showy against a snowy backdrop!

The brightest stem color occurs on young stems. You can prune 20-25% of oldest stems in early spring to stimulate growth of new stems to display the best red color.

Helping pollinators, *Cornus sericea* is a host for the Spring Azure Moth and it attracts bees. Dogwoods nourish specialist bees and generalist bees.

Other types of red stem dogwoods that are **NOT** native:

- *Cornus sanguinea* comes from Europe.
- *Cornus alba* cultivars such as *Cornus alba* 'Siberica' and *Cornus alba* "Westonbirt" are NOT native. (*Cornus alba* is commonly called tatarian dogwood and is native to Asia.)

An interesting note: Indigenous People of North America used the wood of *Cornus sericea* for bows, the stems to make baskets, and the bark to make a natural dye.



Black Chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*)

Aronia melanocarpa provides multi-season interest. This upright, spreading deciduous shrub is native in Connecticut and Eastern North America. It grows 3 ft - 6 ft tall in full sun to part sun locations, in moist to average garden soil. (Note: best fruit production is in full sun.)

Native to low woodlands, near swamps, and in thickets, this plant has lovely features throughout the seasons. Showy flat-topped clusters of white flowers with pink anthers bloom in May. Glossy, oval dark green leaves of summer turn crimson red in fall. Black autumn berries are the size of blueberries. These berries persist into winter and provide a food source for songbirds. Its multi-stem bark is reddish-brown.

Aronia melanocarpa is versatile in your landscape. Use it as a specimen, in shrub borders, for rain gardens, in open woodlands, at margins of a pond or stream, or in naturalized areas. It is tolerant for flood, drought, and salt; plus, it is good for erosion control and soil stabilization.

In addition to its berries for birds, *Aronia melanocarpa* assists other pollinators. It is a host plant for the Coral Hairstreak Butterfly and Large Lace-Border Moth and attracts bees.

The name is derived from “melano” meaning black and “carpa” meaning fruit. The common name of chokeberry refers to the tart taste of the berries, which are edible but bitter when eaten off the plant. The fruit can be used in jam and jelly.

Note other varieties: *Aronia arbutifolia*, called Red Chokeberry, has red berries. *Aronia prunifolia*, known as Purple-fruited Chokeberry, has dark purple berries.

Provided by Denise Forrest

The Correct Way to Leave Stems for Native Bees

When is the best time to cut plant stems? Cut back no sooner than 2 years – ideally never cut down!

Research provided by the Tufts Pollinator Initiative describes the need for a **multi-year process to support native bees**, based on their life cycles.

Approximately 30% of New England’s native bees build nests above ground. A great way to support them is to leave dead plant stems standing in your gardens. Bees will lay eggs and add provisions for offspring in hollow or “pithy” stems.

Year 1: Native plants such as Joe-Pye Weed, Elderberry, Wild Bergamot, Mountain Mint, and Swamp Milkweed produce hollow or pithy (soft spongy tissue) stems suitable for nesting bees. Bees will not nest in actively growing stems. At the end of the growing season (December through March), stems should be cut back to 6-18 inches tall. Use a sharp tool to ensure a clean cut. These cut stems create homes for next year’s bees.

Year 2: Bees active during this year will nest in stems left standing, lay eggs in the stems, plus provision each egg with a nutritious ball of pollen and nectar. Inside the stem, bees will develop from eggs into larvae and adults hibernate through winter. Bees won’t emerge from stems until the next growing season. Remember to cut back new green stems of the plants produced this year for next year’s bees.

Year 3: In spring of Year 3, stems produced in Year 1 still contain bees; stems produced in Year 2 do not contain bees yet. Leave both generations of cut stems standing throughout the year. Spring-active bees will emerge from Year 1 stems by June, whereas fall-active species might not emerge from Year 1 until August or September. During this time, new bees will nest in Year 2 stems, so leave them standing!

Though this is a long time to leave some stubble in a garden, **it is the only way to ensure that native bees find safe, undisturbed places to nest**. And keep in mind that other garden plants can hide these cut stems during the growing seasons.

Example: Stems cut back in December 2022 provide homes for twig-nesting bees during the 2023 growing season. Leave those stems until the end of the 2024 growing season to ensure all bee offspring have emerged!

Provided by Denise Forrest

Insect Repellent Clothing Can Protect Against Ticks & Bugs

Clothing can be treated to repel ticks, mosquitos, and other biting insects. Pre-treated new clothing is an easy and safe way to get protection without applying repellent directly on your skin.

This is a great gift idea for gardeners, hikers, and everyone who enjoys being out within natural environments.

The active ingredient, Permethrin, is a form of a naturally occurring repellent found in the chrysanthemum flower. A process binds the Permethrin securely to the fiber of the clothing fabric to provide durable, long-lasting protection against ticks and other insects. The process is registered with the EPA.

Insect Shield LLC is the original manufacturer. They have their own products, as well as supply to brands such as No Fly Zone, Bugs Away, and Bug Off for companies such as LL Bean, Dog Not Gone, and REI.

Pre-treated items include socks, shirts, vests, pants, hats, scarves, cuffs, gaiters, and more – for adults, kids, and pets. It is recommended to wash treated clothing separately and line-dry for maximize effectiveness. Treated clothing is supposed to be effective for 70 washings. (Please note that there are alternate do-it-yourself sprays; or you can send your own clothing to Insect Shield for treatment.)

For several years, I have purchased products from the Dog Not Gone website – various socks and wrist cuffs for my husband and myself, and gaiters for my son. If you want to see items in person, my son has bought sturdy socks for hiking and mountain biking at the REI store in Milford.

There are a number of sources, but here are three that I have used:

www.dognotgone.com

www.insectshield.com

www.rei.com

Provided by Denise Forrest

Flower & Herb Seed Ball Gifts

WHAT YOU NEED

3 CUPS SOIL

3 CUPS PLAIN FLOUR

3/4 CUP WATER

WILD OR DOMESTIC SEED FROM YOUR GARDEN (BUTTERCUP, CAMOMILE, THYME, MARIGOLD, ZINNEA, COSMOS, CLEOME, LETTUCE, PARSLEY, OR OTHER HERBS)

DIRECTIONS

MIX THE SOIL AND FLOUR IN A MIXING BOWL. SLOWLY ADD WATER TO THE MIXTURE WORKING IT WITH YOUR HANDS UNTIL IT BECOMES STICKY AND DOUGH-LIKE. ROLL INTO GOLF BALLS, FILL A TRAY WITH THE SEEDS AND ROLL THE WET AND MUDDY SEED BALLS AROUND UNTIL COVERED. LEAVE TO DRY UNTIL QUITE DRY. WHEN THROUGHLY, DRY WRAP IN COLORFUL TISSUE PAPER AND TIE WITH RIBBON AND ADD DIRECTIONS. IN THE SPRING, DROP BALLS WHERE FLOWERS OR HERBS ARE WANTED. (GREAT FOR CHILDREN TO DO.)

Provided by Judy Whitehead

CT Native Plant List – a sampling

How can you help your backyard wildlife? Plant native plants!

Maintaining a manicured lawn decorated with ornamental plants used to be the norm, but many animals disappeared as we took away their food sources and shelter. But, we can bring them back! Planting native plants provides food for the most important component of the food web - insects! An array of plant-eating insects, like moth and butterfly caterpillars, are a major food source for backyard birds. Even those that feed from bird feeders depend on these insects to survive. Here's a partial list!

Perennials

Wild red columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*)
Bearberry, kinnickinick (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*)
Wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*)
Butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)
White wood aster (*Aster divaricatus*)
New England aster (*Aster novae-angliae*)
Marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*)
Wild geranium (*Geranium maculatum*)
Cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*)
Solomon's plume (*Maianthemum racemosum*, syn. *Smilacina racemosa*)
Partridgeberry (*Mitchella repens*)
Wild blue phlox (*Phlox divaricata*)
Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*)
Foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*)

Source: <https://ctstormwatermanual.nemo.uconn.edu/a-plant-list/>

Provided by Judy Whitehead

Additional native plant websites:

CT Agricultural Extension Station (CAES): <https://portal.ct.gov/caes>

Xerces Society: www.xerces.org

Pollinator Pathways: <https://www.pollinator-pathway.org>

Native Plant Trust: <https://gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org>

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center: <https://www.wildflower.org>

US Dept of Agriculture (USDA) Plants Database: <https://plants.usda.gov>

UConn Plant Database: www.plantdatabase.uconn.edu

UConn's Ladybug: species list: <https://www.ladybug.uconn.edu/FactSheets/gardening-for-bees-2.php>

CT Audubon Society: <https://www.ctaudubon.org>

Provided by Sue Kelley

Join the Pollinator Pathway

The Town of Madison has its own Pollinator Pathway website: <https://www.pollinator-pathway.org/madison>. Catherine Ferguson wrote a nice Q&A about the organization in our December 2021 issue (on GCM's website). Kellie Brady, a club member, is the club's liaison if you have any questions.

The Pollinator Pathway is a group of organizations promoting native plants and pollinator-friendly land-care practices to create a lot of safe oases for our native bees, butterflies and a whole host of other pollinators that are crucial to the health of our ecosystem. It's easy. There are no fees. You just need to:

1. pledge to ADD native plants
2. SUBTRACT a little lawn
3. AVOID yard chemicals, especially pesticides, and
4. LEAVE the leaves

Help spread the word and please get on the map to show your support.

Provided by Sue Kelley

Tri-Club "Gardening with Beatrix Potter" Education Exhibit

The April 11, 2023 Tri-Club Flower Show theme is: Gardening With Beatrix Potter: A Tale of Three Garden Clubs. In addition to Horticulture and Botanical Arts (Design & Photography), there is a new category: **Education**. **Leete's Island** is doing an exhibit titled: A Tale of Like'n Lichen. **Madison's** exhibit is titled: A Tale of Making Space for Pollinators in Your Garden." **Guilford** hasn't provided a topic yet.

If you would like to work on this Exhibit, please send me an email kelleys4@gmail.com. Education Rules say this can be the work of more than one individual so we will work as a team. We are encouraged to use some fresh plant material and the table size is 4' x 4' x 29"H (card table). This promises to be a fun and creative project.

SOME INTERESTING INFORMATION ABOUT BEATRIX POTTER 1866-1943

Helen Beatrix Potter was born in London, the older of the two children. The Potters lived a comfortable life and mingled with politicians, writers and artists and enjoyed drawing and painting immensely. Beatrix and her brother Bertram spent a lot of time together playing with creatures they found around

their property and in the woods. Beatrix and Bertram would often bring these creatures home and draw or paint them. Their collection included a hedgehog, some rabbits, bats and mice, as well as a few insects.

Beatrix's interest in natural science was encouraged when her uncle who was a chemist gave her permission to use his microscope and other equipment. She developed a keen interest in botany (study of plant life), mycology (study of fungi) and entomology (study of insects). What fascinated Beatrix the most were fungi. Her drawings showed, in detail, how lichens, a common type of fungi found on rocks and trees, were not one but two different organisms (alga and fungus) that lived together. From this discovery, she formulated her theory of symbiosis - two different organisms live by benefitting the other. Women were not allowed to attend meetings of The Linnaean Society of British Scientists so she submitted her study "On the Germination of the Spores of Agaricineae" through her uncle.

Beatrix was very frustrated with not being accepted into scientific circles and started to concentrate on her drawing and writing instead. She was a self-taught artist and had the ability to illustrate using pencils, oils, watercolor, pen and ink. She also followed her father's footsteps in developing her talent in photography.

She became famous for the characters she wrote about and illustrated in her much loved children's books, i.e., Peter Rabbit, Benjamin Bunny and Jemima Puddle Duck to name a few. The Tale of Peter Rabbit was published in 1902 when she was 36 years old. All in all, she had 28 books published. Over 150 million copies have been sold in 35 different languages.

As her books gained popularity, she channeled all the profit towards a large property called Hill Top which she purchased in 1905. Situated in England's Lake District, this was her first farm. She enjoyed the quiet and solitude of the thirty-four-acre property. Aside from being a farmer and landowner, Beatrix also became recognized as a sheep breeder. She never lost her love for nature and became an advocate of traditional farming and the preservation of the wild environment surrounding the area.

She continued buying patch after patch of land as she continued enjoying living surrounded by nature. The British Natural Trust eventually became the recipient of her donation of 4,000 acres of land which includes 15 farms and cottages. Private landowners setting aside land for "the public good" was a virtually unheard of conservation tactic in her day.

Provided by Sue Kelley

Future Issues

If you would like to submit information for a future Horticulture Bulletin or have a topic you would like us to research, please send them to **SUE KELLEY** at kelleys4@gmail.com.

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