

Working With the Wild Things

You need not be a purist to appreciate the value of a garden rich in wildflowers. If you are not inclined to remove your non-native plants, you can always add cultivars of our natives or just consider the questionable one as having been native a few states away.

The important thing to remember is that the wildflowers and shrubs and trees fit our ecology! They grow the best without extra water, fertilizer, or effort: they have been acclimated to their site to ensure survival. As a bonus, many are free!

Goldenrod appears here, there and everywhere this time of year. If those guests in my garden are taller than I am and still weeks away from flowering, I pull them out. There are usually plenty left to admire as a contrast to the blue mistflower, *Eupatorium coelestinum* syn. *Conoclinium coelestinum*, also called hardy ageratum, which it does look like but to which it is not related. Blue and yellow is a combination that says fall as clearly as any other fall colors.

When the mistflower finishes blooming it is easily pulled out and it will return another year either from its rhizomatous roots or from its plentiful seeds. Incidentally, goldenrod, *Solidago*, is as American as apple pie and no, it does not give you hay fever. Its pollen is too heavy to fly but must be delivered by insects. The free goldenrod is a regular visitor but the shorter cultivar I purchased died, of neglect I suspect. Some plants seem to lose their hardiness when breeders attempt to civilize them.

Every year I am blessed with pretty things the birds planted. They are a surprise because they appear in an unexpected place. Several years ago I planted a few bulbs of *Lycoris radiata* (British soldiers, red spider lily, naked lady) near the equally red 'Knock Out' rose. *Lycoris* is related to narcissus and other members of the poisonous to critters *Amaryllidaceae* family so being uneaten it multiplies. Last year a single bloom appears at a distance and this year there are four in that site.

Fall asters are another wonderful genus in their native species. If you find them too tall for your border you can cut them back by half to encourage bushiness as you do with other fall bloomers. Don't cut them back after the 4th of July lest you inhibit bud formation. If their vigor or flowering diminishes they can be divided in early spring every third year. They appreciated good soil and respond to adequate watering, especially when first planted.

If you would like to see native species, flowers, grasses, and shrubs, in their fall glory, visit the Williamsburg Botanical Garden. Butterflies are featured! Because these beloved butterflies require sun to warm their wings, mud puddles to furnish minerals essential for sperm and egg production and precisely the right host plants for nectar and larval food, great care has been taken to provide them with a perfect home. This two acre treasure is open sunup to sundown most days but for particulars contact www.williamsburgbotanicalgarden.org.

GOOD NEWS

From the September Bay Journal comes the report that a barren spot on the Great Wicomico River located between the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers has become home for 185 million oysters, the largest group anywhere on the Bay. It is too soon to call this reef project a success since

time, disease, and continued pollution may diminish the potential of this effort as a lasting solution. And the not-so-good news: In a paper released by The Nature Conservancy it has been reported that 90% of oyster reef habitat in Chesapeake Bay has been lost. Throughout the world the loss has been 85%. Many factors are involved but all of them, in one manner or another, can be attributed to growth. Isn't it strange that when we speak of uncontrolled growth in a cancer cell we recognize it for the problem it is, but 'growth' when we speak of numbers of cars, houses, people, varieties of soda pop and breakfast cereals, it generally seen as a 'good', even a necessity?