

The Blazing Star



NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTH AMERICAN NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Native Plant to Know

Hairy beardtongue

Penstemon hirsutus

by Emony Nicholls

The *Penstemon* genus is a large one scattered throughout North America. With over 270 species, bloom colours range from purple to red to white. The best known is *Penstemon digitalis* or foxglove beardtongue with its white flowers and leaves turning a deep red in the fall. The lesser-known but equally lovely relative is *Penstemon hirsutus*, hairy or northern beardtongue. This short penstemon is distinguished by its downy stem but the common name actually refers to the tufted sterile stamen.

While the rest of the genus can be fussy, *P. hirsutus* is foolproof. Tough as nails, these little plants thrive on the juniper alvar shrubland at Carden Plains in depths of less than a third of a metre (one foot) of soil. Wedging themselves into cracks and crevices, hairy beardtongues keep company with lichens and mosses. Some neighbours include upland white aster (*Solidago ptarmicoides*), poverty grass (*Danthonia spicata*), tufted hairgrass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*), gray dogwood (*Cornus racemosa*), fragrant sumac (*Rhus aromatica*), eastern white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*), downy arrowwood (*Viburnum rafinesquianum*), eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) and common juniper (*Juniperus communis*).

Surrounded by patches of dark-

coloured, exposed limestone bedrock, hairy beardtongues manage to survive intense summer droughts as well as flooding in the spring. Consequently, they are popular with gardeners who have even the most inhospitable soils, including hard, dry clay. I once planted *P. hirsutus* in a south-facing bed made up of construction fill – clay and gravel – and the little plants put up several spikes of bloom their first season. Needless to say, they have become a popular rock garden plant.

Penstemon hirsutus grows naturally from Maine west to Wisconsin and south to Virginia and Kentucky, in zones 3 through 8. Aside from alvars, natural habitat for the hairy beardtongue includes well-drained dry woods, rocky fields, dry, grassy meadows and bluffs. It does well in full sun to part-shade. Ideal for the front of the flowerbed, *Penstemon hirsutus* grows to the sedate height of one-third to two-thirds of a metre (one to two feet), to a maximum of

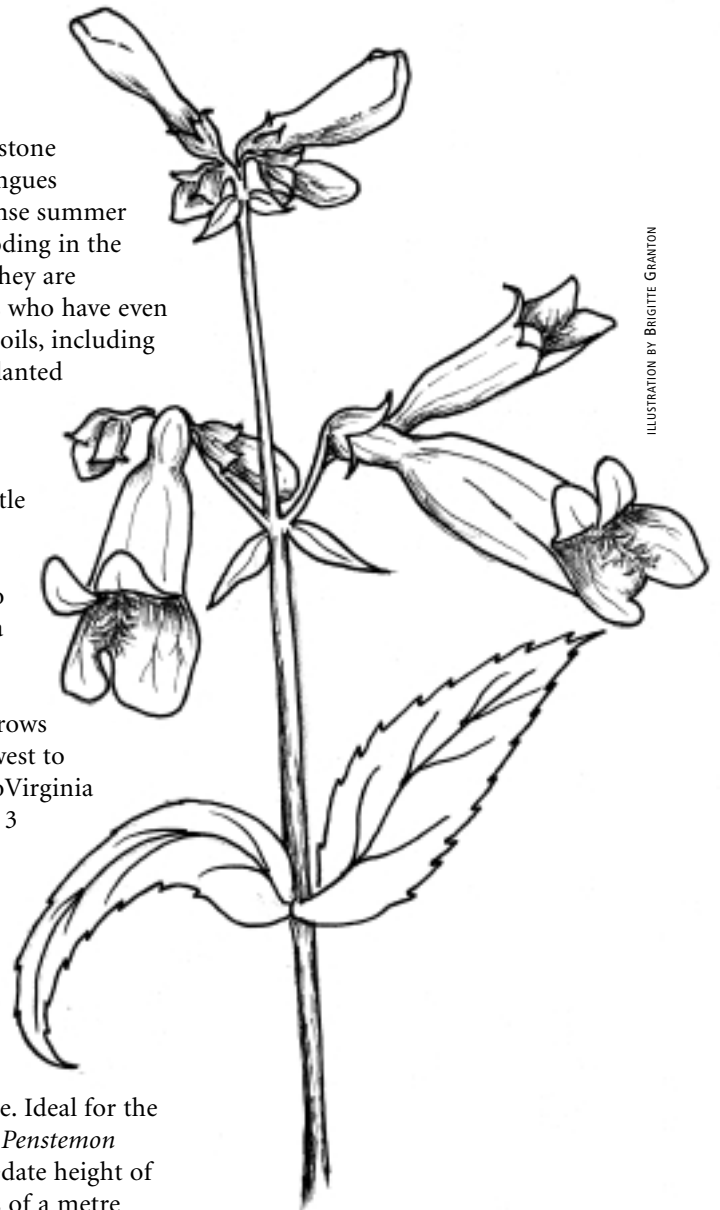


ILLUSTRATION BY BRIGITTE GRANTON

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The *Blazing Star* is . . .

The *Blazing Star* is published quarterly (April, August, November, February) by the North American Native Plant Society (NANPS). Contact editor@nanps.org for editorial deadlines and for advertising rates. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and not necessarily those of NANPS.

The North American Native Plant Society is dedicated to the study, conservation, cultivation and restoration of North America's native flora.

Winter 2008
Volume 9, Issue 1

Editor: Irene Fedun
Production: Bea Paterson

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Donations to the society are tax-creditable in Canada.

NANPS Membership: CAN\$20/YEAR
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Letter from the Presidents

Increasingly, information about climate change occupies media reporting, citing changes that are deep and pervasive. The summer rains we were once accustomed to are frequently replaced by a new norm of alternating droughts and torrential storms. Lawns, in this changing context, are totally incongruous. Understanding the necessity for alternative landscaping must inform existing by-laws and guidelines, if we are to limit resource-hungry and wasteful practices. Deb Dale's plight (see fall 2007 issue of the *Blazing Star*) underscores this need to re-educate, refocus, and support change towards a "new" aesthetic.

To focus better on issues of change and controversy, NANPS is organizing a number of events and activities. In January, NANPS presented at the Guelph Organic Conference, with Larry Lamb, Douglas Counter and Deb Dale speaking out about the "Challenges of Naturalized Gardens in the City: Bureaucrats, By-Laws and Light" (see our website, www.nanps.org, for petition sign-on). We also hosted a booth for the second year, and benefited from networking opportunities. Very importantly, NANPS is initiating meetings with several key City of Toronto staff members about amending the Weeds and Grass, and Property Standard by-laws. Situations like Deb Dale's should not happen again; by-laws need to reflect the new environmental demands.

The City of Toronto continued to harass Deb, calling her twice before the Property Standards Committee to defend (successfully) her woodland gardens, and now insisting that the needles under her pine tree constitute a "fire hazard". Following that allegation, Deb launched legal action. She needs our help...

The City's most recent response to the legal action has been a second "Demand for Particulars". In order to meet this new demand (a highly unusual request at this stage of the legal process), Deb is requesting that

anyone who may have spoken with or received a written response (e.g. email) from Bill Blakes, or any other city staff member or Councillor, to please copy her at nanps@nanps.org with this information. The City is demanding specifics that include name, date/time of call as well as exact words regarding various allegations. Any information you can provide is most welcome. Thank you.

No matter the location, urban or rural, native plant gardeners can actively promote increased visibility of this changing aesthetic. Be part of this change! Expand and diversify the native plant community in your area or garden, and diversify the connection between species. Look for the updated **Seed Exchange** list enclosed in this mailing. Visit our annual **Plant Sale** on May 10th with web sales opening in February. It promises to be better than ever. Recycle your rain water with a **Bog Garden** kit (still available for purchase by Toronto residents). Provide that example for others so that they can see and learn to appreciate this connection between people, plants, insects and birds. A spring **workshop** as well as **excursions** are currently being planned. Sue Gulley is heading the **Plant Rescue** committee and will be contacting landscape architects for appropriate sites in the GTA (Thank you, Sue!) as well as looking for volunteers. We again invite your submissions to our annual **Native Plant Garden Awards**... Enter and share your experiences, knowledge and vision... last year's applications were amazing! (See *Creating a Healing Landscape* article on page 10 and visit www.nanps.org for more photos).

In the move to connect, conserve and restore native flora, especially in our urban environments, 2008 could prove to be an exciting time for transition. Please continue to check our **website** at www.nanps.org for information on upcoming events.

Miriam Henriques and Harold Smith

Sowing the Seed

by Irene Fedun

If Ruth Zaugg needed any convincing to put in a native plant garden, moving onto a .9-hectare (2.2-acre) property covered in Kentucky blue grass clinched it for her. It took eight hours to mow that lawn. Mind you, Ruth already knew the joys and benefits of native plant gardens; she'd planted indigenous plants among the drought-tolerant cultivars at her former home in Toronto. But that yard was tiny compared to the spaciousness of her new property in Caledon, Ontario.

In 2001, when Ruth and her husband moved into their new home, she determined to start with "islands of natives" or "garden rooms", as she calls them. The first would be a meadow over the septic bed and it would be huge - 280 square metres or 3,000 square feet. Ruth laid down black tarps secured in place with rocks and bricks but to her horror weeds started growing right through the plastic. Dandelions and Canada thistles (*Cirsium arvense*) poked their way up and had to be dug out manually. This was backbreaking work since the soil on the Zauggs' property is heavy blue clay that hangs on like concrete - especially when the ground is dry - to anything hardy enough to spring from its depths. Persistence paid off, and Ruth finally rid herself of most of the aliens after leaving the tarp on for six months.

When planning this bed, Ruth theorized that with the wind usually from the north the seeds of plants

grown on the northern and western edges of the bed would blow into the centre. The problem was the prodigious weed seed bed that extended far beyond the boundaries of the meadow. Massive quantities of unwanted soon-to-be plants floated in. Paths laid thick with pine needles were meant to choke out the undesirables, but that didn't work. Weeding has become Ruth's most common, if not favourite, pastime.

Over several seasons she added seedlings and the older plants started to reseed. Among her favourites in this meadow are the golden Alexanders

most of southern Ontario in 2007, the meadow remained a kaleidoscope of colour.

It's interesting that different gardens have problems with different weeds or invasive natives (sadly, indigenous plants become weeds if we have them where we don't want them). Ruth's property, large as it is, has different "challenges" in different beds. In the round bed at the front of the house, the foreign orange hawkweed (*Hieracium aurantiacum*) and the native golden Alexanders ("That's the downside of letting them go to seed," sighs Ruth) have overtaken other



PHOTO COURTESY RUTH ZAUGG

Dark-eyed Junco eating seeds from great St. John's wort (*Hypericum pyramidatum*)

(*Zizia aurea*), eastern columbines or *Aquilegia canadensis*, an important early bloomer for returning hummingbirds, hoary vervain (*Verbena stricta*), bumblebee-pollinated prairie smoke (*Geum triflorum*), the beautiful upland white goldenrod or *Solidago ptarmicoides*, hairy and foxglove beardtongues (*Penstemon hirsutus* and *digitalis*) and balsam ragwort (*Senecio pauperculus*). The ragworts have proven the hardiest and most prolific.... along with the weeds. Many more forbs have been added over the years. Despite the drought that plagued Caledon and

plants. Still, the bed displays several goldenrods that she likes, especially *Solidago rigida* (stiff goldenrod). "I love their exquisite flowers, they are quite large for a goldenrod, and bumblebees love them," says Ruth.

Two milkweeds do well here. The first is butterflyweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), Ruth's pride and joy since this plant is known to prefer sandy soil. The second is the remarkable whorled milkweed (*A. verticillata*) whose pine-needle leaves emerge in whorls of three to six from the central stem. Delicate white flowerheads often

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NANPS PLANT SALE

SATURDAY, MAY 10, 2008 - 10AM - 3PM
MARKHAM CIVIC CENTRE
101 TOWN CENTRE BLVD, MARKHAM

Biologist and native plant nurseryman Paul Heydon will speak on Exciting Gardening Opportunities with Native Plants at 1pm.

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cluster in the leaf axils. The tall hyssops (*Agastache* spp.), great pollinator plants, take centre stage. Diminutive blue-eyed grasses (*Sisyrinchium* spp.) linger among the taller plants. The meadowrue (*Thalictrum pubescens*) seemed to die one year, but then came back stronger than ever the next.

At the back, in the "swamp", Ruth and her husband built a pergola and she promptly filled it with columbines, queen of the prairie (*Filipendula rubra*) which seeds readily in these perfect conditions, more stiff goldenrod, and the brilliant purple ironweed (*Vernonia altissima*). Prairie cinquefoil (*Potentilla pensylvanica*), oddly situated considering its name, is also happy here. In the corner Ruth has also planted a spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*), notable for its early yellow flowers and the spicy aroma its branches give off when bruised. A blue-beech (*Carpinus caroliniana*) purchased at NANPS annual Plant Sale fulfills the tree component. Most of the property has dry soil and it's so large that watering everything regularly would be a nightmare. Keeping a few prized, moisture-loving plants together in one spot ensures that they can be easily watered during drought. All the other plants are on their own.



Golden Alexanders after icestorm

The undulating property had spruces (*Picea* spp.), willows (*Salix* spp.) and crabapples (*Malus* spp.) in addition to the lawn when Ruth first bought it. She set about planting a great diversity of native trees, choosing larger trees since whips would not give her shade in her lifetime.

Luckily, a local wholesale nursery sells its stock to the general public late in the season at discounted prices. Also, each year the Town of Caledon offers native trees and shrubs subsidized by Halton/Peel Woodlands and Wildlife Stewardship program. Ruth planted maples (*Acer* spp.), ashes (*Fraxinus* spp.), hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*), and a butternut (*Juglans cinerea*) that turned out to be a bitternut - hickory, that is (*Carya cordiformis*). Ruth discovered this when Paul Heydon and Tom Atkinson came for a visit, looked at the tree's label and inspected the leaves.

Many of Ruth's plantings come from seed that she collects from her own plants, from local parks, or exchanges with other participants in NANPS annual Seed Exchange. Ruth happily rhymes off the established plants she has grown from seeds given to her by other NANPS members: *Solidago rugosa* from Alexandrina Canto-Thaler, sky blue asters (*Aster azureus*) from Miriam Henriques, and too many to name from Darcie McKelvey.

Scattered around the dozen or so beds are broken clay pots that provide shelter for toads. Painted turtles from ponds all around come and lay their eggs in the lawn. Mostly these are dug up by raccoons but one group hatched in the neighbour's yard



Ruth's meadow in summer with wild bergamot and foxglove beardtongue in foreground

and, hours later, made it to the nearest pond. Foxes are often seen, no doubt hunting the rabbits that routinely browse the shrubs. Rabbits love the heath asters (*Symphyotrichum ericoides*) Ruth grows in the meadow. It took a few years for them to bloom; they kept getting eaten down to the ground. A flock of wild turkeys regularly visit, taking dust baths or sunning themselves on the hillside, and fireflies come out on glorious summer nights. Ruth leaves her natives standing over the winter for the chipmunks, squirrels, rabbits and birds. Dragonflies are abundant all summer long. On two occasions she has found little dens in the spring, lined with fur and dried grass. A hummingbird moth visited her garden last year and was photographed on wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*), ironweed and common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*). As Ruth says, "This planting is not just for me, it's for the planet. After all, birds can't survive on petunias and hostas. In summer, when I stand on the lawn I hear nothing. When I stand by the meadow, it hums and buzzes with life."

"Life, that's what gardening is all about."

To view more photographs from Ruth Zaugg's garden and other images of native plant gardens and landscapes, visit the website at www.nanps.org.

Irene Fedun is the editor of the Blazing Star.

Wildlife Waystations

by *Mariette Nowak*

Songbirds in migration are not fussy about vegetation type. What's critical to them is the structure of vegetation (this could also be termed vertical layering). Mature forests and their surrounding habitats are organized appropriately with tall trees giving way to understory trees, shrubs, vines and nectar plants (often wildflowers). These varied habitats provide food and shelter to long-distance migrants. Many birds are attracted to the thickets (dense masses of fruiting vines, shrubs, briars and brambles) found in forests. For example, mourning warblers prefer the shrubby thickets while magnolia warblers like both tall and understory trees.

Property owners can do their bit to help migrating birds by restoring vertical layers. This can be done by planting a hedgerow. Plant the centre or tallest part first with, for example, a few scattered oaks (*Quercus* spp.) or tulip trees (*Liriodendron tulipifera*).

Buy the more natural clump forms rather than the standard single-trunk forms. On either side and among the taller species, plant flowering and evergreen understory trees; dogwoods (*Cornus* spp.) are among the best. Add lots of fruiting shrubs and vines, offering as much variety as possible. Good choices are viburnums (*Viburnum acerifolium*, *V. dentatum*, *V. nudum*, *V. rufidulum* are four excellent options), hollies (*Ilex deciduas*, *I. glabra*), eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), willows (*Salix* spp.) and American elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*).

Do not be discouraged if your yard is small. Scientists are finding that even islands of habitat in cities or rural areas can provide life-saving sustenance for ravenous migrants. On small properties just leave out the tall trees. Focus on more compact varieties of understory trees and shrubs. And provide nectar plants in the form of native wildflowers, such as eastern columbine (*Aquilegia*

canadensis), Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*) and fringed bleeding heart (*Dicentra eximia*). Autumn food is equally important. For seedeaters the following herbaceous plants are excellent: asters (*Symphotrichum* and *Eurybia* spp.), lance-leaved and whorled coreopsis (*Coreopsis lanceolata* and *verticillata*), purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), Joe-Pye-weed (*Eupatorium* spp.), sunflowers, especially *Helianthus angustifolius*, spiked blazing star (*Liatris spicata*), ironweed (*Vernonia noveboracensis*) and rough goldenrod (*Solidago rugosa*).

This article was adapted from one written by Janet Marinelli called Rest Stops for the Weary originally published in Audubon 2001. Janet has written extensively about the role gardens can play in conserving plants and animals. Her latest book, Plants, (published by Dorling Kindersley) features 2,000 plants that are imperiled in the wild but alive in gardens, and discusses how gardeners can save them.

Calendar of Events

March 12-15, 2008

VI INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON THE NATIVE FLORA OF ARID LANDS
La Paz, Baja California Sur, Mexico
For more information contact
florasilvestre2008@cibnor.mx

March 29, 2008

22ND ANNUAL LAHR SYMPOSIUM,
NATIVE PLANTS: CULTIVARS CONSIDERED
US National Arboretum,
Washington, DC
Visit the website at
www.usna.gov/Education/events.html.

April 17-18, 2008

TRILLIUM SYMPOSIUM
Brandywine Valley, Delaware
Visit www.trilliumsymposium2008.org.

May 10, 2008

NANPS ANNUAL PLANT SALE
Markham, Ontario
Visit www.nanps.org for details.



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The Laws of Nature: *Naturescaping in an environment of rules and regulations*

by Douglas Counter

As more municipalities across North America embrace the wisdom of incorporating native plants into their public green spaces, some of these cities and towns are actively encouraging landowners to replace water- and fertilizer-hungry turf lawns with natural plantings, or naturescaping, employing native plant species suited to local growing conditions. The rationale behind this is obvious: turf lawns exact a toll on our environment. They consume precious water resources, particularly troubling in deserts, drought-stricken areas and urban centres that rely solely on groundwater for municipal water needs. Pesticides and chemical fertilizers used on lawns are carried by storm water runoff into streams, lakes and oceans, contributing to a decline of wildlife habitat. Gas-powered lawnmowers pollute the air. Lawns also reduce biodiversity, replacing regional difference with a monotonous sameness.

With global warming, loss of habitat and urban renewal firmly in the public consciousness, cities and towns across the continent have adopted policies that actively support the tending of natural gardens on private and public land. Unfortunately, while a handful of jurisdictions have amended their "tall grass and weeds" by-laws and ordinances to support their environmental policies, many native plant gardeners continue to run afoul of local weed laws.

Municipalities first enacted weed laws in order to protect the public from negligent landowners whose untended properties, it was believed, could attract vermin and mosquitoes, or present a fire hazard. Over the past few decades, a handful of precedent-setting court battles have overturned some of these unfounded and outdated laws.

One of the first pivotal cases was that of *New Berlin v. Hagar*, in 1976. Donald Hagar was sued by the City of

New Berlin, Wisconsin, for violating its weed law by cultivating a meadow on his multi-acre property. He fought back, employing a number of expert witnesses who successfully refuted the City's claims that his natural landscape was a health hazard. In the landmark decision, the Court agreed that natural gardens do not attract rats or vermin, they don't create fire hazards, nor do they present a pollen problem to those suffering allergies. Consequently, that weed ordinance was struck down because it violated the Equal Protection Clause by being "too thin" to be rational.

In Canada, a few cases have been won over the past decade, two by natural gardeners against the City of Toronto. The battles were won, but apparently not the war. As readers of the *Blazing Star* know, last August, Toronto resident Deb Dale found her 12-year-old native plant garden (planted on her property and the adjacent city boulevard) razed by an over-zealous city works crew. Obviously, exemptions for natural gardens written into law and legal

precedents don't mean much when municipal staff pay them little heed. (See *Toronto City Staff Level Native Plant Garden* in the fall 2007 issue of the *Blazing Star*.)

While the City of Toronto has actively promoted naturalization on public and private lands for well over a decade, and the City's tall grass and weeds by-law was amended to exempt natural gardens from the height restriction placed on turf lawns, that municipality's natural garden exemption process is fraught with red tape. Upon receipt of a complaint and subsequent inspection of a property, the Municipal Licensing and Standards Division (MLS) sends a violation notice to the homeowner. The notice mentions the natural garden exemption, which the homeowner then has to request through a letter to the City. MLS then requests a Parks and Recreation Division staff member with horticultural expertise visit the property to inspect (the property must not contain any noxious weed species as listed in the provincial Weed Control Act). However, in the past the



PHOTO COURTESY DOUGLAS COUNTER

Douglas Counter and his father, Victor, challenged the City of Toronto's by-laws – which seemed to ban natural gardens from city-owned boulevards – in order to protect their native plant infiltration garden in the drainage swale in front of their home. The Ontario Superior Court ruled that citizens have a constitutional right, protected by the freedom of expression clause in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, to express their pro-environmental beliefs on the city boulevard in front of their homes (a precedent), and urged the City to develop and implement "coherent plans with specific guidelines to deal with the critical issue of natural gardens and their enormous environmental significance".

Parks inspector did not, in general, ask that the homeowner be present during the inspection to answer questions about the garden and communicate his/her maintenance plan, the latter being a crucial determining factor in receiving the natural garden exemption. (It appears that this policy is changing, no doubt in response to the strong public reaction these cases increasingly attract.) A report is written up and submitted to the local Community Council, making a recommendation on whether to grant a natural garden exemption or not. The homeowner has the option of appearing before the Community Council to defend his/her gardening practices. Community Council then makes a recommendation to full City Council. If Council grants an exemption, the violation notice is cancelled; if not, a second notice to comply is issued. (The City levies a \$200 fee for each appeal.) If the homeowner fails to comply, the City can send in a crew to cut the garden and bill the homeowner for the removal. The small number of local native plant gardeners who have even heard of this exemption process consider it arduous, time-consuming and completely at odds with both the City's own environmental policies that actively promote natural gardens and the legal protections granted to natural gardeners by several Ontario Courts.

After discovering all this last fall I began my quest to find a North American jurisdiction where the

stated municipal policies that encourage naturascaping are actually supported by the local by-law/ordinance enforcement regime. While my search wasn't as fruitful as I had hoped, it seems that the most proactive municipalities are those that either employ staff members with horticultural expertise to respond to complaints against naturalized properties in the first place, or do not prosecute "aesthetic" complaints at all.

The City of Vancouver, British Columbia, has created several programs that encourage the planting of gardens on both private and public land. Although that city's programs do not specifically promote local native rain forest species because of the extreme fluctuations in temperature and rainfall (wet winters/dry summers) typical of urban properties and boulevards, Vancouver excels at taking an approach that is forward-thinking in terms of policy, education and enforcement. Their Green Streets Program (<http://vancouver.ca/engsvcs/streets/greenstreets/general.htm>) encourages residents to adopt local traffic bulges (traffic-calming boulevard bulges at road intersections) and traffic circles, planting them with drought-tolerant gardens. A pilot project in the Kensington-Cedar Cottage neighbourhood that saw the creation of 35 boulevard gardens over a two-year period led to the development of

the Blooming Boulevards program. This program encourages residents to garden on the public boulevards (between curb and sidewalk) in front of their homes. The project illustrates the power of gardening and transforming green space through community involvement. To its credit, the City of Vancouver created reasonable and clearly defined guidelines for both its Green Streets and Blooming Boulevards programs and publishes them on its website (<http://vancouver.ca/engsvcs/streets/greenstreets/guidelines.htm>, <http://vancouver.ca/engsvcs/streets/greenways/guidelines.htm>). Consequently the City has encountered very few problems.

Vancouver also encourages natural gardens on private property. One of the main factors behind citizen complaints related to natural and native plant gardens – unsightliness – isn't an issue in Vancouver. City staff only concern themselves with legitimate health and safety issues (traffic sightlines, tripping hazards); they don't enforce aesthetic complaints of citizen-created gardens on private or city property, reasoning that gardening styles are simply matters of personal taste. How enlightened!

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NANPS needs Volunteers!

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Green Living Show on April 26-28 – Booth staff required

NANPS Plant Sale – setup & table staff required for May 9 & 10, and driver & assistant to pickup plants from suppliers Friday, May 9th. Rental cube van supplied. High school students wishing to fulfill their 40-hour community service requirements are welcome to volunteer.

Weed Eradication at Shining Tree Woods on Saturday, May 24th (rain date: May 25th) – volunteers are needed to help lay out paper rolls that are then covered with leaf litter to smother garlic mustard.

Contact volunteer@nanps.org or call 416-631-4438 and leave a voicemail message.



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The City of Port Moody, also in BC, takes a progressive stance on native plant gardens. It became the first municipality in the province to adopt Naturescape BC principles for all publicly-owned lands and to encourage those principles on private land. Naturescape BC encourages the use of native plants and plant communities to create wildlife-friendly, low-maintenance landscapes on both public and private land. In the event of a complaint against a native garden, a responding inspector would team up with an Environmental Technician who is trained in Naturescape BC principles. Because there has been broad support for the program – which encourages the replacement of turf lawns with native plantings – from council on down to the community level, the City has received no complaints about native plant gardens since the program was adopted 8 1/2 years ago. If a complaint were to be received, the City would enforce legitimate health and safety concerns only, but "aesthetics are not an issue".

The City of Portland, Oregon, has adopted a number of supportive programs. On the municipal level, Portland has implemented a Green Streets program aimed at handling stormwater on-site through the use of "vegetated facilities". The City has also adopted a Naturescaping program to assist residents in reducing water use, chemical use, and storm water runoff. One way they do that is by encouraging residents to replace turf lawn with "naturescapes". Portland organizes an event called "Welcome the Rain" that offers workshops on green roofs, rain gardens, and biking in the rain, all aimed at helping people appreciate this abundant resource. The City of Portland works with the East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District (EMSWCD) to manage its naturescaping program. In instances where a complaint is received about a native garden, staff

trained in naturescaping principles from the EMSWCD are asked to inspect to determine whether the property owner is indeed naturescaping. Depending on the outcome of the inspection, *education* of the homeowner or the complainant is the goal, not aggressive action against the naturescaper.

The City of Seattle, Washington, has implemented a stormwater management program aimed at improving local salmon habitat. Under the program (called SEA Street, for Street Edge Alternatives), residential streetscapes have been re-engineered to mimic nature's functions. Paved road surfaces have been reduced, and planted swales have been created along road edges to act as stormwater infiltration gardens. The new "natural" design has seen runoff reduced by 98%. Complementing this program, the City has created the Creek Steward program, which addresses the use of native plants and the conversion of lawns to native gardens. The City's natural yard and garden programs encourage the practice of "right plant/right place" plant selection using native and drought-tolerant species. The municipal code does not contain any specification for vegetation height or type which would work against the



PHOTO COURTESY CITY OF VANCOUVER ©

The City of Vancouver, BC, has embraced boulevard plantings as a means to reduce storm water runoff, calm traffic, and enhance communities through volunteer civic beautification projects.

adoption of native or naturalized landscapes on private property. The City only acts on complaints of noxious weeds and legitimate safety issues.

The City of Novato, California, which has strict water usage laws to deal with water shortages, has implemented a Cash for Grass program that *pays* homeowners to replace their water-thirsty lawns with native low-water-use plants (\$50 per 100 square feet or 9.29 square metres of lawn area removed, up to a limit of US\$400). The City has also developed a Native Plant Pilot program with financial incentives aimed at getting six highly-visible residential properties to remove their lawns and replace them with low-water-use native

plants. These community demonstration sites promote the use of native plants as an attractive water-efficient landscaping option.

With the rapid loss of habitat all around us, future weed laws must actively promote natural landscaping. To this end, Bret Rappaport and Bevin Horn have created guidelines that can be used by municipalities to craft weed by-laws/ordinances that "represent a step toward a more benign relationship between our yards and Nature". (See their article, *Weeding Out Bad Vegetation Control Ordinances*, at www.for-wild.org). Their proposed guidelines are:

1. The ordinance should protect the fundamental right of residents to choose their own landscaping;
2. The ordinance should apply equally to all residents;
3. Any restrictions should have a rational basis related to the protection of public health, safety, or welfare;
4. The ordinance must not legislate conformity nor allow residents to exercise control over their neighbors' landscapes;
5. The ordinance should not require the filing of an application, statement of intent or management plan and there should be no review or approval fees assessed against residents who intend to engage in legitimate natural landscaping;
6. In order to avoid harassment of natural landscapers, the city's "weed commissioners" who will enforce the ordinance, and thereby differentiate between those people who are growing permitted natural landscapes versus those with unpermitted growth, should be trained to distinguish between the two;
7. Enforcement of the ordinance should be undertaken through due process of law which guarantees individuals the right to fair adjudication of their rights; and
8. The ordinance should actively address the problems of environmental degradation brought

about by the proliferation of high maintenance monocultural landscapes, and the indiscriminate use of toxic chemicals in landscape management. It should encourage preservation and restoration of diverse, biologically stable natural plant communities, and environmentally sound practices.

A Model Setback Ordinance

A model ordinance included in Bret Rappaport's law review article takes the approach of a setback. Setback ordinances usually stipulate an area measured from either the front or perimeter of the lot in which the vegetation may not exceed a given height. The vegetation within the yard behind the setback is unregulated. According to Bret, setback laws are easy to understand and enforce, and offer a workable compromise, creating a tended look that satisfies neighbours' concerns about aesthetics.

1. **Prohibition.** Untended, rank and unmanaged growth of vegetation on any property within the city which is visible from any public way, street or sidewalk, is declared to be a public nuisance and may be abated in accordance with the procedures set forth in articles 2 and 3 of this ordinance. This prohibition shall not apply to vegetation native to [state or region] provided there is a setback of not less than four feet (1.3 metres) from the front line of vegetation not in excess of 18 inches (45 centimetres), exclusive of trees and shrubs.
2. **Procedure.** The city shall issue a written citation to a landowner whose property is in violation of article 1 of this ordinance. The citation shall inform the landowner of the basis of the citation and shall include the following information: 1) the date of any inspection and the name of the inspector; 2) the names and addresses of any neighbors of the landowner with whom the city had contact regarding the alleged violation of article 1 of this

ordinance. The citation shall be adjudicated in accordance with the provisions of art. ___ [relating to adjudication of traffic offenses].

3. **Abatement and penalty.** Upon a finding of guilt in accordance with article 2 of this ordinance, the landowner shall have 28 days in which to abate the nuisance. If he/she does not so act, the city may take whatever action is necessary to abate the nuisance. The cost of such abatement shall be assessed against the landowner and shall constitute the fine.

The more complex the weed law or the exemption process for natural gardens, the more problematic they are for gardeners *and* municipal staff. Simplicity is key. As Sandy James, City Planner and Greenways Planner at the City of Vancouver, reminded me, "We don't enforce untidiness of gardens on private property, that is a matter of taste." For the health of both our environment and the natural gardeners who are leading the way in changing the "turf lawn" status quo, we can only hope that more municipalities will adopt such supportive policies and enlightened enforcement procedures.

Douglas Counter is a past board member of NANPS. He tends a native plant tall grass prairie garden in west Toronto.

WINTER 2008 QUIZ

Question # 1:

Name a tree whose leaf is in the shape of a star.

Question #2:

Which tree requires high temperatures such as those created by a wildfire for its cones to open?

Question #3:

Name a native plant (or two or three) whose seeds are spread by ants.

Look for the answers at www.nanps.org.

Creating A Healing Landscape

by **Maria G. Cattell**

Maria Cattell and Jack Mongar (her late partner) won the North American Native Plant Society Restoration Garden Award in 2007 for the creation of Hillside Haven Sculpture Gardens in Millersville, Pennsylvania.

It began in fall 1997...or was it 1947 when I grew my first wildflower garden with plants dug from our woods and re-planted near the old farmhouse, my childhood home? Had I been preparing for this moment for 50 years, gardening and loving woods and streams, the sky overhead, wind blowing through trees? Or did it begin in 1990, the first time I visited the native plant gardens of the Mt. Cuba Center for the Study of Piedmont Flora in Delaware (www.mtcubacenter.org)? There I had an epiphany that gave me a new vision of gardening with native plants.

What began in 1997 was an idea. Jack and I were walking his newly purchased acre of former pastureland, now grown into woods with tall native trees—sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*), tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), black walnut (*Juglans nigra*), box elder (*Acer negundo*), sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*), beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*), pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*). The undergrowth was so thick you could hardly see through it: huge native vines, grape (*Vitis* spp.) and poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*), and invasives like ailanthus (*Ailanthus altissima*) and garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*). Jack, who was English, wanted to "tidy up" the woods. He imagined a park of stately trees and greensward. I thought of the woods and fields where I roamed as a kid, a few miles to the west. "This could be a wonderful woodland garden," said I, just dreaming. "Especially with bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*) and *Trilliums*." Jack liked the idea, and we were off!

We uprooted, cut down, burned. Vistas opened up, rock faces were exposed, the shape of the woods emerged, paths were laid out. A deep gully was cleared of rubbish and became The Glen. Over the next three years we ordered thousands of plants wholesale: alumroots (*Heuchera* spp.), foamflowers (*Tiarella* spp.), wood poppies (*Stylophorum diphylllum*), phlox (*Phlox* spp.), wild stonecrop (*Sedum ternatum*), various ferns, and many others. We bought potted shrubs and trees: bayberry (*Myrica pennsylvanica*), bladdernut (*Staphylea trifolia*), virburnums (*Viburnum* spp.), hydrangeas (*Hydrangea arborescens*, *H. quercifolia*). Creating the gardens was a cooperative venture. We were lucky to have two gardeners, Dot Stepenaski and Mary Jane Kauffman. Dot, Mary Jane and I planted; Jack became the great eradicator of weeds. I'd say, "Jack, there's a lot of honeysuckle at the top of Mayapple Hill," and he'd get down on his knees and work until it was gone. My son Kevin and his wife Paula lined two ephemeral streambeds with stones and built stone walls and a bridge. We made a treehouse and sitting places. We called it the Woodland Garden.

To the west our gardens become the Wilder Woods, with thousands of mayapples (*Podophyllum peltatum*) on one hill and steep rocky slopes tumbling down to the Little Conestoga Creek. When we removed invasives like honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*), multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*), garlic mustard and burning bush (*Euonymus alatus*), natives appeared: thousands of trout lilies (*Erythronium americanum*), bloodroots (*Sanguinaria canadensis*), spring beauties (*Claytonia virginica*), and toothworts (*Cardamine concatenata*). It was a renewal. A huge patch of wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*) runs along the stream. On the limestone cliffs grow eastern columbines (*Aquilegia canadensis*), early saxifrage (*Saxifraga virginensis*) and various ferns, including walking

fern (*Asplenium rhizophyllum*), almost rare in Lancaster County. Beechdrops (*Epifagus virginiana*) grow among beech trees. Some natives grow too vigorously but I prefer cleavers (*Galium aparine*), clearweed (*Pilea pumila*) and pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*) over alien invasives.

There are natives too in the sunnier areas: majestic Joe-pye-weed (*Eupatorium* spp.), beardtongues (*Penstemon digitalis*), trumpet vine (*Campsis radicans*), butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), eastern prickly pear (*Opuntia humifusa*), rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*), cheery black-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia hirta*), and small trees like dogwoods (*Cornus florida*), redbuds (*Cercis canadensis*), magnolias (*Magnolia virginiana*) and the graceful silverbells (*Halesia carolina*).

I whittle away at the still-too-large lawn. Why not make a meadow? For one, this landscape doesn't want to be a meadow. It wants to be a forest. Secondly, I don't have the time, energy or help to get rid of the lawn. It's enough to deal with weeds and keep

Visitors' responses to Hillside Haven

"I'm awed by what you've done, and I love your wild style. It's glorious."
Karen Alderfer, native plant gardener, Washington Boro, Pennsylvania

"That was exciting."
Ken Miller, Millersville University botanist, after finding walking fern on granite outcroppings above the river

"I'm impressed with what isn't here, like garlic mustard."
John "Mothman" Laskowski, biologist, Halifax, Pennsylvania

"What a place for contemplation."
Sr. Anne Hodgson, nurse, Lancaster, Pennsylvania

more than half a mile of paths in walking condition—especially since Jack’s death in 2004. These days I am grateful to get help from my granddaughters Paris and Madrid Jaramillo-Cattell and other young people—Aaron Chu, Mike Rosado, my nephew Jared Gleaton, and the Whitney boys, Hamilton, Taylor and Harrison.

Early on we placed Jack’s abstract woodcarvings in the gardens. Jack and his daughter Sue Jappie made a labyrinth for meditative walking. We named our creation Hillside Haven Sculpture Gardens. It is clear from the responses of visitors that we have fulfilled our intention of creating a healing landscape.

Sometimes I get discouraged. In 2006, flooding from a historic rainfall (one foot or 30 centimetres in a few days) wreaked havoc with newly renovated paths. Last year state road crews sprayed herbicides on a stand of

tall tickseeds (*Bidens polylepis*) just about to burst into bright yellow bloom, then mowed them down, leaving an ugly mess. But the biggest drag is the invasives. In the past few years chickweed (*Stellaria* spp.) has smothered the woods. Ailanthus seedlings are everywhere. Kudzu (*Pueraria lobata*) has been reported in southern Lancaster County. I despair... but then spring comes. The woods brighten with the yellow haze of spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) blossoms, elderberries (*Sambucus canadensis*) unfurl their leaves, and hope returns. Lighthearted again, I get my hands into the soil and feel renewed.

My father taught me the basics in his vegetable garden. Over the years I learned much from reading, classes and conferences. I figured poisons couldn’t be good for any living thing and decided to garden organically. Like most gardeners, I grew what I

liked. Now my favorite teacher is nature, who doesn’t plant things in rows or by threes, remove leaves or clear garden "debris" in the fall. The woods have brushpiles, snags and fallen trees, and garden cleanup is done in the spring, with last year’s dead stems becoming mulch. I used to have compost piles but now I compost in place. Kitchen scraps, last year’s dead plants, fallen tree branches, leaves—all go right onto the gardens. I’m still



PHOTO COURTESY MARIA CATTELL

Labyrinth, beech trees and Little Conestoga Creek

learning, still working out this new ecological aesthetic based on respect and cooperation rather than control.

As a kid roaming the Susquehanna River hills, I sensed something greater than myself, some mysterious energy that I called Mother Nature or just Ma and—because I loved the classical myths—Gaia, the great mother, and Persephone, bringer of spring. I have felt this connection to the Earth in Arizona’s Sonora Desert, the ancient Grecian temple of Delphi, the smoky mists of Victoria Falls in Africa, and of course, in my garden. The work is hard, physically, but it’s an integral part of my spiritual practice.

Maria Cattell is a writer, anthropologist, mother/grandmother, Quaker and knitter. She welcomes visitors to Hillside Haven.

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Continued from page 1

almost a metre (three feet). *Penstemon digitalis* and *hirsutus* make a good team by blooming one after the other from June into mid-July in zones 4-5.

Slowly forming dense clumps, the pale purple flowering spikes are often from the same rhizome and should be divided every four to six years. The narrow, almost toothless leaves are opposite and range in size from five to 10 centimetres (two to four inches) with wavy edges. The leaves are light to dark green, and grow almost up to the flower head but diminish in size as they climb. The flower heads are similar to snapdragons with violet flowers, ranging from pink to pale purple, and white lips with five petals fused into a tube. Blooms are 2.5 centimetres or one inch long and tiered on slender, erect, branching stalks. The flowers lose their freshness in mid-July and tend to fade into the background with only their reddish leaves in fall providing colour.

The flower mouth is nearly closed by the arched base of the lower lip but open enough for bees to enter and collect their pollen. These flowers attract small and large carpenter bees, bumblebees, and hummingbirds. The Baltimore butterfly uses hairy beardtongue as a nectar and larval source.

I suggest removing seedheads to minimize the rapid spread of these plants. Or donate the seeds to NANPS annual Seed Exchange. Propagation is a breeze with almost 100% germination rates; most of the work lies in the thinning of seedlings. The books say cold-moist stratification but in my experience just plain cold-dry does the trick.

Hairy beardtongues are not exceptionally showy plants but their ease of propagation, attractiveness to pollinators and pretty summer flowers make them a favourite with me.

Emony Nicholls owns Wild Ginger Native Plant Nursery.

Bog Garden Kits

Toronto residents can order a bog garden kit, including 15 native plants, sewer cap, complete instructions & one year membership/renewal to NANPS for the bargain price of only \$30, under a grant received from the City of Toronto/Toronto Region Conservation Authority. This offer expires March 10th so don't delay! Visit www.nanps.org, Plant Sale Advance Order Page, to order or fill in the form below and send a cheque to NANPS postmarked no later than March 10th. Only a limited number of kits are available!

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