

The Blazing Star



NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTH AMERICAN NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Native Plant to Know

Fraser magnolia

Magnolia fraseri

by Tom Atkinson

The magnolia is a tree of ancient lineage. If you live in the southern USA, the type magnolia would be the bull bay or southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*). In the northern USA or in the more temperate regions of Canada, the most common magnolia is the saucer magnolia (*M. soulangiana*), the one with the chalice-like, rose-coloured flowers that are a clear sign that spring is upon us. And there are so many more, from large shrubs to large trees. One of the latter is the cucumber magnolia (*M. acuminata*), the only one indigenous to Canada.

In the mid-to-southern stretch of the Appalachian Mountains, and in the adjacent Blue Ridge mountains, is found a magnolia of merit. The Fraser magnolia (*Magnolia fraseri*) is a small tree (nine to 15 metres or 30 to 40 plus feet in height, if found growing naturally in its range).

Also known as mountain magnolia, it grows in a very restricted area. Its natural range is centred along all but the peaks of the mountains as they stretch from West Virginia to the very north of Alabama. It is hardy much further north, and a specimen grows in Canada's capital, Ottawa, where winters can be severe.

The lustful gardener may feel obliged to coddle any specimens of

Fraser magnolia s/he grows to ensure success. That said, one of the attractions of this magnolia is its hardiness; this may seem an unusual way to praise a tree, but if you garden where winters can be severe, this feature commends itself. Aesthetically, the tree will never rival other magnolias. But what sets it off are flowers,

leaves and bark.

The upright flowers are fragrant and a dazzling white. The leaves are "eared" or auriculate. That is, where the leaf stem meets the leaf itself, instead of there being a smooth transition forward from stem to leaf edge, that edge does a 180 degree bend backward on both sides, before curving around

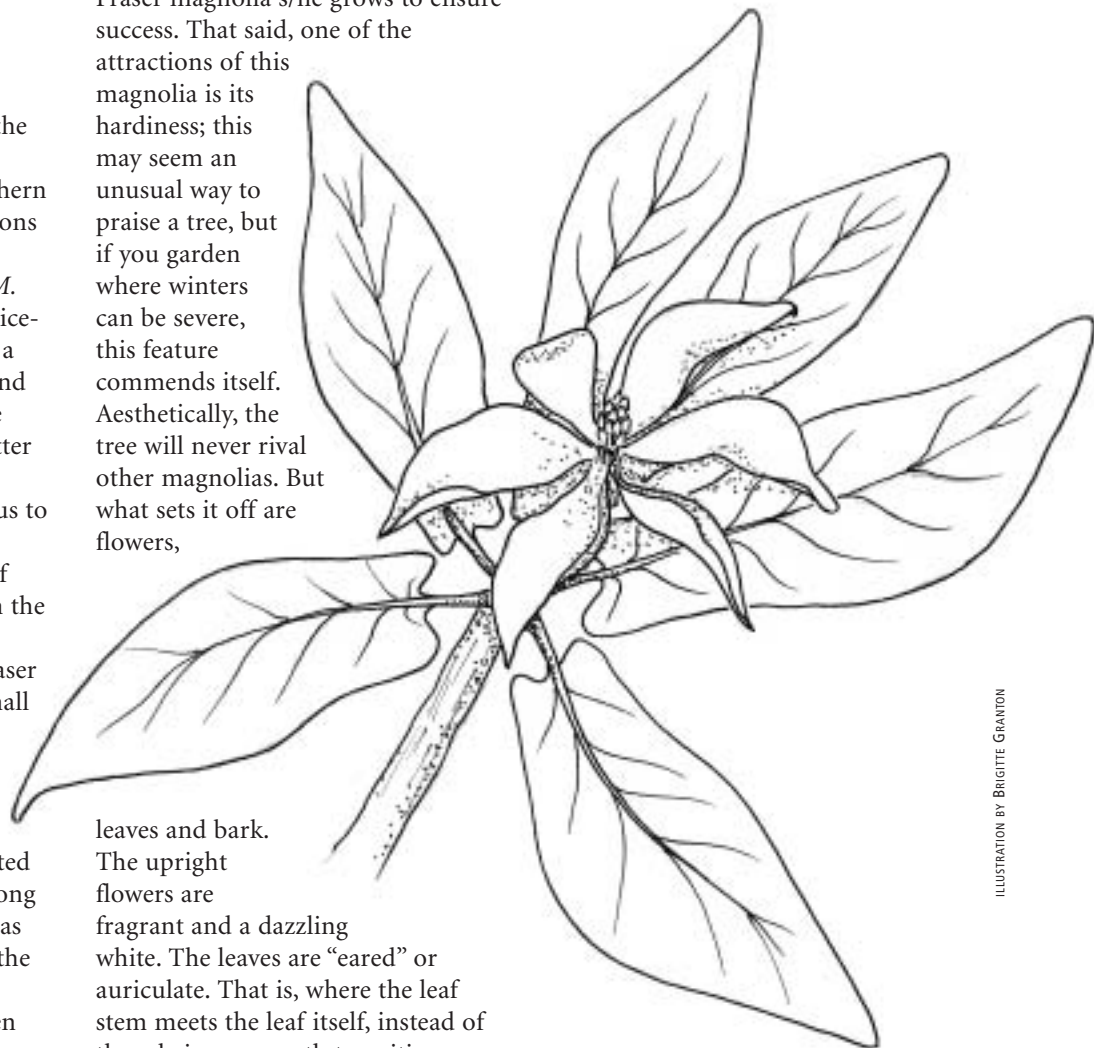


ILLUSTRATION BY BRIGITTE GRANTON

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The *Blazing Star* is . . .

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NANPS NATIVE PLANT GARDEN AWARDS

The North American Native Plant Society held its first annual Garden Awards this summer with delightful results. The winners of the Restoration/Large-scale Garden Award are Maria Cattell and Jack Monger of Hillside Haven Sculpture Gardens in Millersville, Pennsylvania. The Community Garden winner is Dagmar Baur and the Bain Apartment Co-op in Toronto (see article on page 3). And

Honourable Mentions in the Suburban Groundbreaker category go to Deb Chute of Richmond Hill, Ontario and Bonnie and Michael Chow of Kitchener, Ontario. Congratulations to all. We hope you will be offering garden tours next summer!

To all NANPS members: the Native Plant Garden Awards will be given out annually. Please continue taking photographs of your gardens!

Fall 2007 Seed Exchange

Enclosed with this issue is the list of seeds currently available. Please ensure that you have your order in for this batch of seeds by January 10th, 2008. Our intent is to mail out seeds by the end of January so that members can stratify those that need a cold winter to inspire germination.

A list of seeds left over from the

January mailout will be published in the winter issue of the *Blazing Star* for distribution by early April.

Note: there are limited quantities of some species. First come, first served. Where seed quantities are limited, all donors will be served first in the order that their requests are received. You can choose up to 30 packets of seeds.

Letters to the Editor

The *Blazing Star* received two letters in response to Graham Buck's article *A Black Walnut Garden: The Juglone Zone*. Marjorie Rogers-Carswell of Exeter, Ontario writes that she has a purple flowering raspberry (*Rubus odoratus*) "growing vigorously" under a black walnut (*Juglans nigra*). And Tom Atkinson of Toronto, Ontario mentions that the statement "At Clear Creek, the canopy is composed entirely of black walnut trees" is incorrect. It is more accurate to say, "At Clear Creek, in the savannah to the west of the pits and

mounds field, the canopy is composed almost entirely of black walnut trees. The pristine forest is maple (*Acer* spp.), beech (*Fagus* spp.), oak (*Quercus* spp.), basswood (*Tilia americana*), tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) and so on."

We welcome letters about your experiences with growing black walnut trees and their understorey, as well as comments about all articles that appear in the *Blazing Star*. Please send your letters to editor@nanps.org or mail them to NANPS Editorial, PO Box 84, Station D, Etobicoke, Ontario M9A 4X1.

Memorial Donation to NANPS

Jackie Davies of Port Burwell, Ontario has sent a donation in memory of her aunt, Mary Ricci, age 104, who died in July 2007. An avid gardener, Mary continued to supervise the

management of her own garden until three years ago. She loved flowers and considered them her friends.

Many thanks from NANPS for this donation.

Bain Co-op Gardens

by Dagmar Baur

The Bain Co-op, built in 1912 on a five-acre site in Riverdale (east Toronto) to house the poor, is now home to over 500 people. The historically significant buildings were built on an erstwhile swamp with a stream meandering through it. Around the turn of the century the site was filled with local rubble and

annual flowers from the corner store. Out of thriftiness I became interested in perennials, expecting an abundant and colourful return on my investment every year. However, like the annuals, most of the perennials vanished. I wondered why. That's how my personal journey began.

A book called *Wildflowers of the World* gave me my first "Aha!". I discovered that I was planting flowers

environments in the process.

In the late '70s I started gardening in the South Oaks Courtyard with the eagerness of the newly converted. But I wasn't able to implement my idea of having a Carolinian forest garden with native understorey until the early '90s because we had no dedicated beds. Tearing up the sidewalks gave us large pieces of concrete which we used to make raised beds. For all this I needed



PHOTO COURTESY ROBERT KENNEY

South Oaks Courtyard in 1991



PHOTO COURTESY ERIC BELDOWSKI (WWW.BELPHOTO.COM)

South Oaks Courtyard in 2006

the nearby Don Valley Bluffs clay brought in by horse and cart.

When I moved into the Co-op 36 years ago I was a landed immigrant originally from Poland. I knew nothing about Bain's fascinating history. Around me I saw dust or mud, depending on the season, surrounded by cyclone fencing and asphalt. It was grim and begged for green transformation. In February 1974 the landlord announced that the property would be converted to condominiums and told the tenants to leave or buy their dwellings. In response the tenants organized themselves, persuaded the City of Toronto to purchase the land and the Bain Apartments Co-operative was formed.

Participation is expected in a co-op and like many of my neighbours in the '70s, I dutifully purchased bagged soil of uncertain provenance and

from different environments and expecting them to grow: a swamp denizen beside a desert plant, for example. No wonder no one was happy. Many "Ahas!" followed in my awkward attempts to make my plant friends comfortable.

Then I joined the Mycological Society of Toronto to recapture my childhood joy in walking through European forests with my father picking mushrooms, nuts and berries. When mushroom picking for food you really have to know what you're doing. In order to become a good mycophage you have to pay very close attention not only to details of the mushroom, but also to the surrounding environment, habitat, substrate, trees and physiography. The more I learned, the more questions came up. So I joined the Toronto Field Naturalists and other organizations learning much about native plants and their

the approval and support of my neighbours.

And I had to overcome objections: "The children will hurt themselves on the stones", "Gardens interfere with soccer", "A native plant garden is just a style of gardening like Japanese or English country gardens"... But I persisted. I chaired committees, I took a leadership role in community processes and I attempted to convert the uninitiated. Eventually I realized that when I rhapsodized too long about the wonders of the wild, the eyes of my listeners glazed over. Not good. Had to make it short and sweet. Guiltless people proved to be equally unsuccessful.

My first real success came when I gave a neighbour my spiel about bugs, i.e. that insects that need to interact with alien plants can be as far away as China or Peru... Her eyes opened with the joy of illumination. She happily

took my native offerings to her garden.

As they've grown, the plants themselves have converted onlookers. People knock on my door and ask me their names. They are stunned by the beauty of the eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) in spring and the blossoms on the flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*). Children love the sweet, wild strawberries (*Fragaria vesca*) sheltering beneath the trees. I see passers-by stop and drink in moments of tranquility that this native garden offers. Right now, in October, I am sitting by large windows overlooking the garden and I see the pagoda dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia*) is suffused with red and gold. Its berries nourish many species of birds. Beneath the trees my friends, the mayapples (*Podophyllum peltatum*), Canada anemones (*Anemone canadensis*), golden Alexanders (*Zizia aurea*), bottlebrush grass (*Equisetum sylvaticum*), baneberries both red and white, (*Actaea rubra* and *pachypoda*) and too many more to mention, are going to sleep. I will await their return impatiently next spring.

Several factors influenced the development of the Bain gardens. The first was community composting, the second was a community redevelopment project started in 1991. I led the process for Bain with David Orsini of Sunarts Design. Broken sidewalks were replaced with red brick and many new gardens were created with recycled concrete from the old sidewalks. Lush, award-winning gardens replaced cyclone fencing, asphalt and dustbowls in all the courtyards. Both the soil from composting and the creation of dedicated beds were key to the successes that followed.

The community took on many environmental initiatives including planting native trees and shrubs to support the urban forest as well as energy retrofits, reducing water consumption and recycling of books, music, clothing and household goods.

The history of the Bain community and its gardens has been one of many struggles – claiming the right to garden, figuring out how to work together and learning decision-making through meetings. Before 1976 the courtyards were mostly empty spaces with scraggly hedges and token annual beds. Member gardening was forbidden by the landlord unless it supported the status quo of annuals and grass. Children did not have access to the lawns! But once the Co-op was formed, the membership allotted space for gardening, recreation and play areas for children in equal parts.

The majority of Bain courtyards are now beautiful and practical. Native plants and trees are spreading to all

market. The thriving gardens in the neighbourhood are a testament to the success of co-operative and democratic practices.

Penelope Hobhouse, in her book *Gardens of the World*, beautifully expressed the value of green spaces: “The public space was an arena of co-operation and exchange, a shared garden to benefit the community as a whole - a peaceful common ground.

There seems to be no greater magic for the urban dweller than the sudden glimpse of greenery set within the rigid confines of the city. That brief verdant sight can often provoke a stirring for the natural world transforming even a single moment to one of optimism and assurance which gives hope to life.”



PHOTO COURTESY ERIC BELDOWSKI

Redbud shades the garden at Bain

the courtyards and to the larger community. Seeds are blown about by the wind and take hold in other places. We are documenting these processes and know, for example, that an American elm (*Ulmus americana*) that once grew several streets away but is no more is parent to the elm in the South Oaks courtyard. What's more, I donate plants to other members of the Co-op and local schools, and I also sell them (a great fundraiser for the Bain gardens) at a local farmer's

Dagmar Baur accepted the North American Native Plant Society Community Garden Award for her work in developing the Bain Co-op gardens at NANPS Annual General Meeting in October. She finds comfort in the fact that 100 years after being totally eradicated some of the plants that grew in and around the swamps at Bain are being replaced. For more information or to see photographs of the gardens visit www.100bain.com or the Bain Tree Tours at www.treetours.to/bain-coop

PlantWatch Newfoundland and Labrador

Do you love plants? Have you ever wanted to participate in a scientific study? This program is the perfect fit for you.....

PlantWatch is part of Canada's national NatureWatch series of volunteer monitoring programs designed to help identify ecological changes that may be affecting our environment. It relies on 'citizen scientists' to record the flowering times for a group of chosen plants.

Although many of the species listed occur throughout the country (bunchberry or *Cornus canadensis* is one example), coordinators of the program have chosen to monitor them only in designated provinces or territories. Newfoundland has the distinction of being the only province where observations of sweet gale (*Myrica gale*) are recorded in the PlantWatch program. Sweet gale is a deciduous shrub that grows around ponds, rivers and bogs. It also goes by the names bayberry and, in French, *bois-sent-bon* (literally, wood smells good). One of the first to bloom, in late April to early May, it produces non-drooping catkins as its flowering structure. The male catkins (yellow with reddish scales) and ruby-red female catkins usually occur on separate plants. PlantWatch coordinators recommend that observers tag a male shrub then watch to see when the catkins shed pollen in three places, known as the First Bloom, and then Mid-Bloom when 50% of the male catkins have lengthened and shed pollen.

This program began in Newfoundland and Labrador in 1998 using the Alberta Wildflower Survey as a model. In 2000 Environment Canada's Ecological Monitoring and Assessment Network (EMAN) recognized the importance of this data and developed PlantWatch as part of the NatureWatch series that includes such fascinating programs as WormWatch and FrogWatch. PlantWatch soon became a national program with coordinators in all provinces and territories.

PlantWatch allows observers to learn more about Canada's botanical diversity. Perhaps more importantly, the data collected enables scientists to track the effects of climate change. The plants chosen for the program vary from province to province to territory but all bloom in the spring in response to rising temperatures, and all have a short blooming period. The list of 30-plus plants includes some non-natives although most of the common and easily identifiable trees, shrubs and perennials are native to Canada. The plants chosen for Newfoundland and Labrador include rhodora with its large purple flowers (*Rhododendron canadense*), larch or tamarack (*Larix laricina*), the conifer that loses its needles every fall, the pretty white starflower (*Trientalis borealis*), bluebead lily (*Clintonia borealis*), wild strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*) and red maple (*Acer rubrum*), a tree often found in swamps and moist soils.

Since 1998 volunteers within the province have recorded over 1,270 observations of blooming times. Yearly results can indicate whether one spring is warmer than another but long-term data is needed to determine whether these changes can be attributed to climate change. The project is still in its very early stages.



PHOTO COURTESY MADONNA BISHOP

Sweet gale

To become a citizen scientist for PlantWatch visit www.naturewatch.ca/english/plantwatch. In Newfoundland contact Madonna Bishop, regional coordinator for PlantWatch, at 709-737-3328 or mbishop@mun.ca.

Plantwatch Newfoundland and Labrador is supported by Memorial University of Newfoundland Botanical Garden, Environment Canada's Ecological Monitoring and Assessment Network and EMAN North, and Nature Canada.

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Toronto City Staff Level Native Plant Garden

by Deb Dale

Since 1995, I have nurtured a native plant garden in Toronto, growing indigenous species from seed, rescuing plants from development sites, swapping them with fellow wildflower enthusiasts, purchasing from ethical native plant nurseries and the annual sale of the North American Native Plant Society.



Before

variety of birds, butterflies, bees and other pollinating insects.

The garden provides an opportunity for area residents to view native plants in an accessible urban setting, reducing the impact on truly wild places. Most importantly, the local children love it...sometimes picking, and often trampling some of my precious blooms...but always appreciating this small patch of

lawn jockeys. I had been violated by the City of Toronto.

Not only were wildflowers, grasses, ferns and seed pods destroyed, but shrubs and trees - well beyond the indices of any complaints relating to "tall grass and weeds". Even a sign saying "Pesticide free—safe for all living things" was taken.

I'm saddened that whoever lodged the complaint couldn't find a way to



After

PHOTOS COURTESY DEB DALE

My garden contains many plants unfamiliar to the public, including a range of rare species - virtually all locally native. Since they are so foreign to most people, I find it necessary to promote them. My garden may be the only place my neighbours and their children will ever experience native species.

Admittedly it's not to everyone's taste, but whose garden is? The neighbourhood tends to either plain turf or a colourful cacophony of bloom accorded by Eurasian species. My own garden was designed with the needs of nature in mind. It has received numerous compliments over the years. The beds shift slowly through the seasons, with patches of colour appearing and fading as the plants set seed. It features a range of greens and textures rather than ongoing bloom. It is alive, hosting a

wildness so close to home.

In late June I received an advisory notice from the City of Toronto - simply a notification that a complaint had been lodged. I immediately informed the area bylaw officer that my garden contained neither weeds nor tall grasses as stated in the notice, and as a natural garden was accorded protection under the City's own Grass and Weeds Bylaw 489-2, Section B (2). I invited the officer to meet with me and tour the garden, as he had not yet visited the property. I heard nothing more and assumed that the officer had visited and dropped the complaint accordingly.

On the evening of August 21, 2007, I arrived at my home to find more than a decade of effort cut to the ground - my front garden had been razed. No, I was not the victim of vandalism from overzealous, misinformed, vigilante

accept values that were apparently different from their own. And I'm outraged that the City of Toronto would support such gross intolerance.

It's truly disheartening that species that have existed here for thousands of years are being wiped out, especially when it's done by people who should know better. I don't expect City staff to recognize all 2,000 plant species native to Ontario. I do expect them to be able to recognize the species (@20) listed under the Ontario Weed Act, and to be able to tell the difference between a shrub and a tall grass. Had they been able to do that, it would have been apparent that my garden was not in contravention of any bylaw.

Some of the plants have inconspicuous blossoms whereas others only bloom for a short period of time - this does not make them weeds. My front garden had hundreds

of species, literally thousands of individual plants. It had turf grass pathways and a central lawn. Although the plants were rather droopy because of the drought – the worst since 1959 – it was obviously a tended garden. I only spot water in the front garden because these plants are drought-tolerant. Dry periods encourage them to send their roots deeper, and the plants recover quickly after a rainfall. It rained heavily two days after this happened...continuing through the weekend.

In 2002, The Ontario Superior Court of Justice upheld the constitutional right of individuals, protected under section 2b of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (freedom of expression clause), to express environmental beliefs through the planting of a natural garden on city road allowances - *public land* (a legal precedent in Canada). Etobicoke resident, and a past NANPS Director, Douglas Counter, and his father, Victor, launched the case when the City of Toronto threatened to remove the native plant infiltration garden from the boulevard stormwater drainage ditch in front of their home. (The Counter judgment can be viewed at: www.canlii.org/on/cas/onsc/2002/2002onsc10323.html.) This followed the 1996 case filed by Sandy Bell of Toronto in which the City had fined her for “excessive” grass and weed growth, exceeding 20 centimetres (eight inches) in height. The Bell victory - a legal precedent in which environmental beliefs were first recognized as a *Charter*-protected form of expression – resulted in an amendment to the City of Toronto's Grass and Weeds By-law, providing an exemption for natural gardens. Toronto continues to actively promote natural gardens through the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and its funding of Evergreen and NANPS Downspout Bog Gardens Program, a fact apparently lost on its enforcement branch.

I never expected everyone to love

my garden. It's not necessary or possible for people to embrace the diversity of beliefs existing today. What I do expect is for my personal beliefs and property to be respected and free from ongoing harassment. I certainly don't expect the City of Toronto to act in contravention of its own policies and engage in the destruction of private property.

Some of the plants may re-sprout, but what was a maturing virtually maintenance-free garden is now open to invasive weeds and turf grass and is going to be very labour- intensive for years to come. I shudder to think what

I discovered earlier in August among my four milkweed (*Asclepias*) species.

To me, the garden was beautiful. Every time I walked through it there was something new...a flower, butterflies, pollinating insects, new sprouts, fruit, seed heads... It was my area of rejuvenation, a connection to Mother Earth, my joyful penance for the harm done by people. I miss it terribly.

Deborah Dale has sat on the Board of Directors of the North American Native Plant Society for the past nine years. She is the Treasurer and a past-President of



PHOTO COURTESY DEB DALE

Woodland sunflowers blooming in Deb Dale's front yard before they were mowed down by the City of Toronto

weeds may have been introduced by the City equipment. The shrubs and trees are likely dead, and I'm looking at years before replacements or re-sprouts come anywhere near to what I had, *if* I can obtain them. The store of seeds intended to help birds, chipmunks, and other wildlife through the coming winter, are gone. As is the cover needed to sustain smaller creatures...including the much beloved Monarch butterfly whose eggs

the Society. She is conducting public seminars on behalf of NANPS, funded by the City of Toronto and the Toronto Region Conservation Authority's Community Program for Stormwater Management. These seminars are designed to introduce the concept of native plant bog or rain gardens using precipitation diverted from residential downspouts. Her own bog garden was included in the destruction.

Continued with commentary on pages 8 & 9

Continued from page 7

Sheila Colla, a Ph.D. candidate in Biology at York University, wrote a Letter to the Editor published in the Toronto Star on August 29, 2007. It was one of many letters written to Toronto newspapers in support of naturalized gardening. All three major newspapers and countless local papers as well as radio stations and TV news programs covered the story. Here is an excerpt from Sheila's letter:

Real beauty is much more subtle than we've been taught. It is most apparent when we observe the delicate balance of nature in action. It is in watching the uniqueness and complexity of the relationships formed thousands of years before we even got here. The cooperation between the milkweeds and monarchs, the sumacs and songbirds, the goldenrods and hymenopterans ensures the long-lasting integrity of our "home and native land". The city's mowing of Dale's natural garden because of its unsightliness saddens me immensely as it illustrates how far removed we have become from the beauty of our natural ecosystems.

Harold Smith and Miriam Henriques, co-presidents of the North American Native Plant Society, in a letter to Toronto Mayor David Miller:

It is public knowledge that the City is seriously underfunded. Cries for support around urban tree by-law infringements go unheeded due to staff shortages. Why is it that there are resources to destroy what is most needed? Why are City supervisory staff not trained to know the difference between a native plant garden and a neglected turf-grass lawn, the real purpose of the Grass and Weeds By-law? And why is such drastic action taken without first conversing with the homeowner? Surely Ms. Dale's credentials would have resolved the matter. Now the City has sent Ms. Dale a notice of further action on her property which we assume will be the back yard.

Believing that the City of Toronto, the North American Native Plant Society and Deborah Dale all have environmental sustainability as a common goal, Harold and Miriam strongly recommended the following:

- 1) Clarify existing by-laws and the individual's rights that are already legally established. It is imperative that such wasteful, useless and anti-environmental acts like this, of personal and public consequence, be avoided.
- 2) Recognize that a naturalized garden exemption is unnecessary since a citizen's right to express

his/her environmental beliefs through a natural garden is protected by the Charter. It is a waste of time and money policing what is already protected.

- 3) In response to neighbour complaints about "tall grass and weeds", have qualified Parks & Forestry personnel with the proper botanical knowledge and who know the difference between weedy neglect and naturalized gardens investigate such complaints, instead of relying on untrained Municipal Licensing and Standards staff.
- 4) Work with knowledgeable environmental groups. Many of these groups have access to expertise and can volunteer time. Buy into this and you will have a vast resource of knowledge and volunteer support. We all have a stake in this process.
- 5) Promote a City of Toronto Green Standard! Support those endeavours that are dedicated to restoring habitats, preserving water, eliminating chemical toxins and pesticide use, and creating a healthier and "greener" place for all. Designate these endeavours by way of a plaque, letter, and/or signage to promote public awareness, appreciation of, and most importantly, community celebration of our natural heritage! Allow for creativity and diversity in our City.

Calendar of Events

November 27-29, 2007

FOURTH PACIFIC NORTHWEST NATIVE PLANT CONFERENCE
Eugene, Oregon
Contact Richard Zabel, Western Forestry and Conservation Association at 503-226-4562 or richard@westernforestry.org.

February 21-24, 2008

13TH WATER CONSERVATION/XERISCAPE CONFERENCE
Albuquerque, New Mexico
Conference from February 21-22nd followed by a two-day Expo. Register at www.xeriscapenm.com.

February 23, 2008

THE JOY OF GARDENING SYMPOSIUM
Rock Hill, South Carolina
Sponsored by the Master Gardeners of York County. Call 803-981-5303 or e-mail Yorkjoyofgardening@yahoo.com.

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

NANPS AUTUMN QUIZ

- 1) Name two favourite red native flowers much loved by hummingbirds.
- 2) Which woodland plant is often called blue-bead lily?
- 3) Which tree has bark that looks like burnt corn flakes?
- 4) Which tree has twigs that taste like spearmint?

For the answers look to our website at www.nanps.org. We welcome submissions for quiz questions. Send them to editor@nanps.org.

THE PLOT THICKENS

On October 29th, Deborah Dale was asked to appear before the Property Standards Committee - Scarborough Panel (without a single City Councillor present) to defend herself against the latest infraction: "weeds, dense undergrowth and dead branches".

Doug Buck, a native plant gardener in Toronto, attended the meeting and had these comments: "Deb's slide show was beautiful, but tended to show individual plants and not the gestalt. Briefly, the City was unable to present a scintilla of evidence that there were weeds growing on her property. (I don't think any of them understand that any perennial looks pretty ragged after blooming, and that not everyone's garden is full of annuals.) The Chair of the meeting expressed concern about creating a precedent wherein property owners would want to park 30 cars on their front lawn or grow marijuana plants. He was assuming a breach of a law that had never been explicated, let alone proven.

The Committee members have asked that this all be brought forward once again in another meeting at the end of November. In the interim, City staff have been asked to re-inspect the garden, presumably to search for minor by-law infractions after the fact. Lawyer Bryan Dale, Deb's brother, argued that evidence was

supposed to have been presented today, not four weeks from now. This pattern of delays is only too familiar to anyone forced to defend their native plant garden. November is obviously a poor month to evaluate a garden in Ontario.

The Committee chair asked that a City plant expert and a legal department representative be brought to the next meeting. I asked that it be someone with knowledge of native plants, but the City said that they could not guarantee that."

The next Committee meeting to evaluate Deb Dale's native plant garden will be held on Monday, November 26th at 9:30 AM at Scarborough Civic Centre. Anyone who is able to do so is asked to come out and support our individual right to plant indigenous plants in our gardens and public spaces. Please also direct letters of support to the committee secretary, Betty Bushe, at bbushe@toronto.ca, fax 416-396-4301 or call 416-396-7088.



Cup plant (Silphium perfoliatum)

PHOTO COURTESY JAMES DALE



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Douglas COUNTER, who won a long battle to preserve his own boulevard garden in Toronto, setting a legal precedent, has these last words:

It's long overdue that municipalities update their antiquated "tall grass and weeds" by-laws in order to enshrine a regulatory regime that not only ends the senseless persecution of native plant gardeners, but actively supports, encourages and even rewards citizens who undertake these kinds of positive initiatives.

Report from the Germinating Trenches

by Darcie McKelvey

Finally! I have succeeded in germinating *Jeffersonia diphylla* (twinleaf). This has been a pursuit of mine since 2003, and every year I have tried, with seed from NANPS, North American Rock Garden Society (NARGS), New England Wildflower Society (NEWFS) and Ontario Rock Garden Society (ORGS), all to no avail. Finally a dear friend with a wonderful garden called me in June, 2006 and asked if I wanted some fresh seed. This seed was so fresh, it came complete with the original capsule, which looks like a cone-shaped clay pot complete with a lid. She was also thoughtful enough to provide me with some of her garden soil from the area where twinleaf grows well, in case the gibberellins (plant hormones) in the soil were the hidden ingredient necessary to inspire germination.

In pursuit of science, I divided the seed into three groups of 25. One group was bagged in damp vermiculite, another group was sown in a pot containing the soil provided by my friend, and the third group was sown in a pot containing my own woodland soil. This was June 10, 2006. The two pots went outside on the shade table, and the baggie was kept in a warm situation until October. At that time, the baggie was inserted into the refrigerator. The two pots overwintered outside.

Radicals began appearing in the vermiculite group on February 28th, 2007. Twenty were potted up over the next month, and started producing a twin leaf (just one double leaf in all cases). However, although the germination rate was high (80%), some of the ones grown in this fashion went dormant after only two months. Whether they will revive next spring or I have killed them remains to be seen. In August, I still have leaves on a very few plants (four–five).

The ones planted and over-wintered outside did well in germination rates (about 60%) with no discernable

difference between the pots with parent soil versus my own woodland soil. They did not emerge until May, but now in August are still intact with leaves, although the leaves are yellowing. I am embarrassed to say that they are still in their original pots,



Prairie smoke

overcrowded for sure. What is my lesson in this? The key to germinating seed from *Jeffersonia diphylla* is fresh seed, properly cared for (kept moist) thereafter.

There are some species which I grow year after year - really I cannot get enough of them in my garden. Every year I grow milkweeds *Asclepias tuberosa* (butterfly milkweed) and *A. incarnata* (swamp milkweed), both with low germination rates for me. Also every year, I try one of the *Liatris* (blazing star) species. I chose *Liatris aspera* (rough blazing star) this year because it tolerates a drier environment than *Liatris spicata* (dense blazing star) and I have found it to bloom in year 2, which has not been the case for me with *Liatris spicata* or *cylindracea* (cylindric blazing star). There is always space in my garden for summer / fall bloomers that don't have yellow flowers.

Thinking of keeping the bees happy,

I am always interested in growing more plants that bloom early in the season. I am wild about *Geum triflorum* (prairie smoke), although I sometimes lose them after transplanting them into my garden. I think I must be more careful to ensure the crown is above soil level, as my suspicion is that they will rot like rock garden plants if their crown is kept moist or wet.

Aquilegia canadensis (eastern columbine) does not do well for me when I treat it as a meadow (sun) plant. I think my sandy soil makes existence precarious for these pretty plants, as I see them flourishing in a friend's sunny garden and she is fortunate enough (!) to garden in clay. In order to give them the best chance, I sandwich them under other plants, such as *Anemone canadensis* (Canada anemone), or put them in sites that are shady for at least part of the day and cross my fingers. I refrain from planting any other columbines in my yard to ensure my seeds remain "*canadensis*."

Another early-flowering plant that I've been very happy with is *Blephilia ciliata* (downy wood mint). It has several tiered flower clusters, somewhat like spotted horse mint (*Monarda punctata*), and has proved to be dry-tolerant in hot sun and easy-going. In July, I was afraid my small population had flowered themselves to death, as the basal foliage totally disappeared leaving only the dried flower stalks. This caused panic, and I started some more seedlings in the refrigerator on July 23rd, trying to simulate winter. Now the foliage on my garden plants has resurfaced. This is good, as the seeds in the pot I took out of the refrigerator mid-August could not be fooled and have not germinated well.

I am getting good at growing *Bouteloua curtipendula* (side-oats gramma). If I put the seed in the slow setting of a blender for two minutes, the actual seeds are set free from the casing. They look like small kernels of

PHOTO COURTESY RON HEWORTH

rice, only orange in colour. When I have sown it *in situ*, *Bouteloua curtipendula* has germinated fairly well in areas that offer shade for part of the day, but not so well in full sunny sites. Lately, I have been filling an entire flat with soil, and spreading the seed on top. When I want to put it in the garden, I cut up slices of grass as if I was serving a piece of cake.

Another grass native to Ontario that

I really like is *Muhlenbergia mexicana* (leafy satin grass). It is a useful height in my garden 75 centimetres (30 inches), very pretty colour and bulks out a little every year. It even re-seeds, a definite plus.

Every year in the fall when I'm madly transplanting my seedlings into the garden, I promise myself I will not grow so many species next year. Then the fall issue of the *Blazing Star*

arrives and I see the listing of what is available. I simply cannot resist. I'm off to the races again like an addicted gambler. To all of you who take the trouble to collect your native seed, I express my gratitude.

Darcie McKelvey lives and gardens in Tottenham, Ontario.

New & Noted

The Wild Trees:

A Story of Passion and Daring

By Richard Preston

New York: Random House, 2007

ISBN 978-1-4000-6498-2

Hardcover, \$32 (CDN), 294 pages

Richard Preston's bestselling book *The Hot Zone*, a non-fiction page-turner about efforts to contain an Ebola virus outbreak, reads like a thriller. One can imagine his publisher's response to the news that he wanted to write a book about the coast redwood trees of Northern California – at first glance, a niche subject at best, with little probability of popular appeal. But Preston is a writer with a rare touch, someone who can turn any topic into literary gold. His book *The Wild Trees: A Story of Passion and Daring* is a riveting account of the largest and tallest trees on the planet and the efforts of an unusual collection of scientists/adventurers who scale these giants to learn their secrets.

You might think that there are few places in the world, and certainly not in California, that remain uncharted territory. But in the canopy world at the tops of these trees, where soil has been accumulating for centuries in crotches lush with ferns, huckleberries, salal, rhododendrons and insects unknown to science, there have developed “gardens in the sky” that few people have seen, much less studied. Preston joins a quirky collection of passionate tree climbers and scientists who explore this new world: “The forest canopy is the earth's

secret ocean, and it is inhabited by many living things that don't have names, and are vanishing before they have even been seen by human eyes.”

The Wild Trees is science writing that reads like an adventure story. There's plenty of danger – tethered to thin branches 90 metres (300 feet) above the ground, these tree-climbing scientists seem more than a little reckless at times, and Preston's narrative technique heightens the fact that even a small mistake can lead to death. There's plenty of mystery – by one estimate, there's about twenty billion cubic metres of unexplored space (“wild nature”) in the remaining redwood forest canopy on the North Coast. There's even plenty of mystery on the ground – hiking through the dense valleys on their way to the tall-tree groves, the scientists discover that the U.S. government maps of the area are inaccurate. In effect, this is a hike through a blank on the map of North America.

What Preston does best is to enchant the rainforest world with wonder. He writes of a tree with 220 trunks and a canopy so dense with foliage that you could put on a pair of snowshoes and walk around on top and play Frisbee. (My favourite description is of a night the researchers spent sleeping in hammocks at the top of a 1,000-year-old tree – during a storm. Actually, my favourite story is of two researchers having, um, intimate relations in the canopy...) Preston writes of forests where a 300-year-old tree is young.

Where a fern mat in the canopy weighs two tonnes after a rain. Where aquatic creatures live their entire life cycle in the canopy. (And how did these crustaceans get up in the canopy anyway? Perhaps by swimming up the streams of water dribbling down the bark? Dropped by an osprey? Nobody knows for sure.)

Reading of the scientists' adventures, I couldn't help feeling gratitude that this bestselling author had turned his attention to the unlikely pursuit of joining these climbers up the tallest trees on earth, and that he has shared what he and they saw up there with us earthbound creatures.

Review by Lorraine Johnson

Lorraine Johnson is the editor of a recent collection of essays, The Natural Treasures of Carolinian Canada, published by James Lorimer and Co.



Wildflowers of the Rocky Mountains, written by Dr. George W. Scotter with photography by Halle Flygare, first published over 20 years ago, has been re-released in a revised and expanded edition. In addition to the stunning colour photographs and thumbnail sketches of almost 400 plants, the book offers distribution maps and definitions of botanical terms, and discusses the geology and vegetation zones of the Rockies. Published by Whitecap Books, www.whitecap.ca.

Continued from page 1

again and continuing on to the tip. This feature is quite pronounced.

For those who love our beeches (*Fagus* spp.), the smooth grey bark is how we learn to identify the tree. Now,



Even cats endorse Fraser magnolia

if you are in the Blue Ridge Mountains and accompany your tour leader along a choice trail he has selected, he may pause at a good-sized beech. But when he asks you if you can identify the tree, you wise up and sense that there is a twist involved. The astute in the tour group look up, see the few coarse branches, and think "Hey, this is no Beech!" When the limbs are bare, and you scan the buds, it becomes evident that a magnolia is at hand. If it is summer, consult the leaves. The first time you see a goodly sized Fraser magnolia it is breathtaking.

The best seed source I have found for magnolias is the Magnolia Society International. I acquired wild-collected seed for Fraser magnolia from them in spring 2000. The seed came from high in the hills of West Virginia. I prefer wild-collected seed for reasons which include the sheer romance of collection, as well as knowing you have the real McCoy. The seeds germinated nicely, there was no fungal-induced die-off of the seedlings (which can be a problem

and bears your attention), so I was quite pleased.

My experience with woody plants that do not naturally grow in my vicinity is that I should wait until their first spring (when they are a year old) to plant them out or even the second spring (pawpaw or *Asimina triloba* is one such). If you look into the soil and moisture conditions that favour good growth of Fraser magnolia - see the USDA Silvics manual in the sidebar - what you read will be quite sobering. Where we garden, you cannot just plunk certain plants in the ground and know that they will thrive. Rhododendrons may be quite hardy, but require much more acidic soil than we have. With Fraser magnolia, acidity in the soil, good soil moisture, and only dappled sunlight are a must. If you do not have them, or cannot realize them, then best plant a cucumber magnolia or an umbrella magnolia (*M. tripetala*).

Growth in the garden is not slow, but neither is it fast. As gardening is a lifetime addiction, it's fair to assume that those who are bitten by the Fraser magnolia bug are willing to give garden specimens time. I visit ours regularly to see how they fare, and

have been gratified with progress. The largest of the specimens is now about two metres (six feet) but still too young to flower. That it is thriving is enough for me. Live long and prosper, Fraser magnolia!

Websites:

- USDA Silvics manual - a superb website, though quite technical at times: http://www.na.fs.fed.us/spfo/pubs/silvics_manual/volume_2/magnolia/fraseri.htm
- Virginia Tech., Dept. of Forestry: <http://www.fw.vt.edu/dendro/dendrology/syllabus/factsheet.cfm?ID=217>
- GOOGLE (<http://www.google.ca/>) and key in what you want to search

Seed source:

- Magnolia Society International (<http://www.magnoliasociety.org/>). Members are given a list of seed collected from gardens and parks and from wild stands.

Tom Atkinson, his wife, two cats, and visiting raccoons, squirrels, and birds live in the centre of Toronto. The garden is naturalized, a "country in the city" one. He invites any comments on this article – pro, con, or of the "lets's discuss" variety – via e-mail at asimina@sympatico.ca.

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