

What's the Buzz?

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Outstanding Pollinator Habitats

By Linda and Rich Silverman, Penn State Master Gardeners

19th Habitat of Merit Award

Our 19th Habitat of Merit Award goes to Ken and Mee Park of Rydal, Pennsylvania. What started out as a property of full sun has now become an oasis, not only for wildlife but for her children as well. By incorporating children's elements into their garden, they are teaching them about native plants and nature. We also had an uninvited guest as we were touring the property. The young deer was about 10 feet away from us and had walked through an open gate. The entire property is fenced.





Describe your garden

My garden is about ½ an acre. The garden used to be full sun, but it has become more shaded as I've added trees and shrubs to it, with pockets of full sun now. It's a mainly dry site, with moist areas around downspouts and our mini-pond. We have 4 "special" spots/elements:

1) A "mini-meadow" for common milkweed and white snakeroot

2) "Granny's garden" in memory of my Irish mother-in-law who had an amazing garden in Ireland and inspired me to return to gardening. This spot has flowers that were in her garden (non -natives like clematis and a passionflower species), but since she would have loved the native gardening movement, I've been slowly adding natives to it.

3) A hydrangea "room" that I created for my kids who wanted a spot to have picnics and tea parties, but we're adding lots of natives to this spot as well.

4) A hobbit-hole reading area we created for our kids. It's also a work in progress; my younger teen has been selecting shade-friendly natives for the area.



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(Outstanding Pollinator Habitat, continued on page 2)

How old is your garden and how long have you been at this site?

We moved here in 2011, so about 13 years. However, I only started native gardening in earnest from 2018, and then more intensively since 2019.

How many species of plants do you have?

Over 120 native species and still growing!

What kind of pollinators do you attract? What have you done to increase pollinator diversity?

A huge variety of pollinators—I noticed the more species I put in, the more we had an increase in different pollinators. We have many species of wasps, bees, and flies visiting, along with moths (including a humming bird moth and luna moth which was special for our kids to see), butterflies, hummingbirds, and bats.

To increase pollinator diversity, I have transitioned to a mostly native garden, and planted in clusters and drifts (when possible, because I do love seeing many different types of plants in my garden) as well as a large number of different species of plants (to vary color and flower type, and leaf type). My overarching goal was to have as long a continuous bloom as possible, from early spring to early winter. We



have also planted trees densely, but also have attempted to let self-seeded native trees grow freely. We also decided to add a couple of baby oak trees since they are a keystone species.

In addition, I also leave fallen leaves in place, or rake them under the trees, or in a dedicated pile where we keep branches and keep dead plant stems for as long as possible into the spring. I use large branches as garden bed borders, and have left an old cherry willow as a snag. We don't use pesticides or do any lawn treatment. We mow our own lawn with an electric mower, so as to not compact the soil and minimize pollution.



How did you get into gardening? How did you get into natives? I loved plants as a kid, even while growing up in an apartment. Any chance I could get, I would do a project on flowers or science experiments on plants, including on our apartment balcony. I lived in NYC for a long time, but after returning to Philadelphia for my residency and marrying my husband who grew up in Ireland, I knew I needed a lot more green space. We moved out to the suburbs, and I started by putting in colorful annuals in the landscaped beds. After visiting my mother-in-law's garden in Ireland many times, she sparked my old interest in plants. I started expanding my garden and attempted to "design" it the way I wanted it to be.

I got into natives initially through my kids' interest in insects, birds, and frogs. I wanted to attract more interesting creatures to our garden, especially hummingbirds, and started reading about native plants and gardens. The more I read (Beatrix Farrand and Doug Tallamy's research and ideas have been particularly interesting and informative for me), the more it became important to me and my family to transition to a mostly native garden. Looking at our property and the general neighborhood landscape, we noticed it was mainly monoculture green lawn and specimen non-native plants.



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Our property at the time was not attracting pollinators or the creatures our kids were interested in, so I sought to transition to a more sustainable and low-maintenance landscape that would support wildlife better. I started off slowly, adding a bunch of native plants, like columbine, *Monarda*, and *Echinacea* to existing beds, and after seeing how a small change made a big difference in attracting pollinators, I got excited and expanded beds and put in more plants, then shrubs, then trees. Now that the kids are teens, and highly aware of climate issues, they've helped expand and maintain our native garden and on their own, are working to spread the importance of native plants. We're also noticing a nice, positive trend of neighbors planting more natives, which is expanding the wildlife corridors. Our neighbors tell us they watch the hummingbirds traverse from our garden to theirs, to the next one over.



What are your future plans to increase pollinators in your garden?

I'm continuing to edit the garden, by adding more clusters of plants, removing invasive species and replacing them with natives. I'm also working on a "demonstration" garden (in progress) up front near our sidewalk, with a slightly more structured approach to native plant gardening. My garden inside the fence is definitely more wild and free!

What have you observed this year in regard to the number of bees and other pollinators?

There was a slow start to the pollinators appearing in our garden and our hummingbird has finally returned (was late returning as well). We didn't see as many bee/wasp species until recently, and have seen less moths/butterflies so far. I did see a bunch of swallowtail caterpillars on our plants this week, so hopefully we will see a lot more swallowtails soon.

There are many native plants that attract pollinators. Do you have a special one that you would like to suggest?

Can I suggest 2? *Monarda didyma* (scarlet bee balm), because it's a fun flower-my kids used to call them fireworks flowers- and is a big hummingbird magnet in my garden. And coral honeysuckle, because it seems to be able to grow in many different conditions, attracts hummingbirds, birds have nested in them, and have a very long bloom time, even in late fall/winter, we can sometimes see little bursts of red color which is wonderful when everything else around is gray and dark!

Beautiful day and a beautiful habitat! Is it any wonder why Mee and Ken were awarded the 19th Habitat of Merit Award!



OUTSTANDING POLLINATOR PLANTS

Senna Hebecarpa - wild senna By Linda Silverman, Penn State Master Gardener

by Linua Silverman, Perm State Master Gardener

Not familiar with this plant? Never heard of it? In the Northeast U.S., wild senna is listed as threatened or endangered due primarily to habitat loss and is not widely known in the gardening community. But it is an extremely valuable plant for pollinators, especially bumble bees.

The scientific name is *Senna hebecarpa*, also known as wild senna. Other synonyms are *Cassia hebecarpa*, *Cassia hebecarpa var. longipila*. It is a perennial and a member of the Pea Family (Fabaceae). Some of the characteristics that distinguish *Senna* are its alternate leaf arrangement and the legume type fruit of long thin pea-like pods follow the flower.



Senna hebecarpa in a meadow setting

Here are some specifics of growing Senna hebecarpa:

Description

Height: 4-6 ft. (in drier soils about 3 ft). Color: Yellow Bloom Time: July, August Its distribution is Maine, south to Georgia and northwest to Tennessee and Wisconsin.

Growing conditions

Water use: Medium Light requirement: Sun, Part shade Soil moisture: Moist to average. Grows in sand or heavy loam. Can grow on dry sites Soil pH: 6.8-7.2



Bumble bee pollinating Senna

Senna has conspicuous flowers and attracts many butterflies and hummingbirds, but the flowers are primarily attractive to bumblebees and halcid bees. Wild senna has 2 sets of anthers in the center of the flower which have pollen but are sterile and provide food for the insects. The other 2 sets of anthers are on the lower part of the flower. The bottom anthers are fertile and are buzz pollinated by the bumble bees.

An interesting fact is that there is no nectar on the flower parts. Instead, the nectaries are on the stem. This makes it attractive to ants and other insects including ladybird beetles. It is believed that these insects protect the plant from insects that would eat the foliage. *Senna* is also host plant for the cloudless sulphur and the sleeping orange butterfly. For more information check out this fascinating video from Bowman's Hill Wildflower Center by Mary Ann Borge.

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Outstanding Pollinator Plants (Continued from page 4)

Wild Senna is easy to care for and has very few problems. Give it room as it can form large colonial colonies and reseeds easily. It can be used for screening and larger borders.

It is best planted from container stock in the spring or early fall. For direct sowing, scarified seed may be planted in the spring or fall and will germinate the following spring.

It is hard to tell the difference from its relative Maryland Senna (*Senna marilandica*) until the two species have ripe seeds. Wild senna pods open easily and will fall out. Maryland Senna seed pods stay tightly closed. Except for that, it is hard to tell them apart.

Resources

USDA Plant Data Base Wildflowers—A Guide to Growing and Propagating Native Flowers by William Cullina The Plants of Pennsylvania—an Illustrated Manual by Ann Fowler Rhoades and Timothy A. Block Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat and Conservation Landscaping by Chesapeake Bay Watershed USDA NRCS Plant Fact Sheet Ladybird Johnson Wildlife Center, www.Wildflower.org Wikipedia





Areas of the U.S. where Senna hebecarpa is native



MOVING?

If you have a certified Pollinator friendly garden and are moving, please take your sign with you and send a note to PAPollinatorCert@psu.edu to let us know you have moved. The new owner of your property will need to recertify. When the gardens at your new address are ready, send us a new application and mention that you that you have moved. We can certify your new garden and waive the application fee.



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PROTECTING POLLINATORS: Avoiding Invasives

Porcelain Berry or Amur Peppervine– Ampelopsis brevipedunculata By Delores Nolt, Penn State Master Gardener

Porcelain berry is ranked as a severe threat by the DCNR in terms of the threat they pose to native plant communities. A severe threat is a plant species that possesses characteristics of invasive species and spread easily into native plant communities and displace native vegetation.

Porcelain berry is native to Asia and was introduced to the U.S. in the 1870's as an ornamental bedding and screening landscape plant. This vine is widespread in Eastern U.S. and some Midwestern states. It is a hardy species that can adapt to a variety of environmental conditions. It grows well in most soils but is especially successful in moist, slightly shady areas along stream banks, and in thickets. Porcelain berry spreads into natural areas when birds eat the berries and spread the seeds in their droppings. Once established in the wild, this prolific vine spread along the East Coast.



Porecelain berry. JI Swearingen, USDI National Park Service, Bugwood.org

Although relatively slow to establish, it grows quickly and, once established, is tenacious and can be difficult to remove. It is relatively insect and disease resistant, and can out compete native species for water and nutrients. The thick mats of porcelain-berry spatially usurp other plants.

Porcelain-berry is a woody, deciduous, climbing vine of the grape family which can grow, with support, to a height of sixteen to twenty feet. It is related to two North American *Ampelopsis* species, raccoon-grape and pepper-vine. The leaves are alternate and simple, with coarsely-toothed margins. Leaves are bright green, can be either heart-shaped or deeply lobed with three to five divisions, depending on location along the stem. The undersides of the leaves and new wood have small hairs. Young twigs are also hairy to the touch.

The flowers are tiny, greenish-white, and borne on umbrella-shaped cymes which face upward.



The fruit is a distinctive speckled berry, with widely variable coloring ranging from blue, pink, purple, and cream. Berries are on long panicles and each berry holds 2-4 seeds.

The stem pith is white and the bark has lenticels (small spots) and does not peel or shred.

Porcelain berry is still available in the horticulture trade but use of some alternative plants is preferable; Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), American bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) or red honeysuckle (*Lonicera dioica*)(red honeysuckle).



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American bittersweet has pointed leaves while oriental bittersweet has rounded tip leaves. Native vines can also be aggressive so it is imperative these plants be planted with discretion

To remove porcelain berry, pull before the plant is in fruit to avoid scattering seeds. Because the roots of porcelain-berry plants often merge with shrubs or other desirable vegetation, this type of manual removal is difficult in well established patches without damaging the desirable vegetation. If hand pulling is not feasible, porcelain-berry may be removed by the spot application of herbicides. As most herbicides are non-selective they should be used sparingly so as not to contact desirable plants. For more information on control, check out this <u>site</u>.

Once established, porcelain berry vines are difficult to control. Infestation sites will need to be monitored and treated repeatedly until the seedbanks are depleted and eradication can be confirmed. Pull any young vines by hand and be sure to remove the entire root. Do not spread soil that contains any root sections. If the plants are pulled while in fruit, they should be bagged and destroyed. Mature vines can be controlled with either foliar or cut-stem herbicide applications. Make sure to cut and treat vines before they go to seed.

Sources: Invasive.org

Managing your Pollinator Habitat

Chelsea Chop By Lorri Schmick, Penn State Master Gardener

What Is the Chelsea Chop?????

Am I talking about the latest form of Haircut??? No, the Chelsea chop is not the latest haircut, but actually a method of pruning flowers to encourage more blossoms and stronger growth.

The Chelsea Chop is a method of pruning that limits the size, controls the flowering season, and often decreases the flopping of several herbaceous perennials in late spring or early summer. Here in the United States, it is recommended to perform the Chelsea Chop between Mother's Day and Father's Day.

Can you use the Chelsea Chop on Native perennials?

Yes, The CC can be used as a maintenance technique to promote healthier growth and give the appearance of a well-tended perennial garden. Not a weedy looking one that is often thought of native gardens.

Why is it called the Chelsea Chop?

The CC got its name from the famous garden flower show that takes place in London England in late May.

Why do the Chelsea Chop??

The benefits:

- Delayed flowering: By performing the CC, you can delay the boom time, creating a more extended blooming period throughout the growing season. If you only CC the front of the clump, you can enjoy a staggered blooming season from that plant.
- Increased branching: Pruning back the stems of plants encourages lateral growth and branching. The result is a fuller, bushier plant with strong growing forms and stems preventing leggy and top-heavy plants.

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More Chelsea Chop benefits:

- Extended plant life: Rejuvenating and extending the life of perennial plants by stimulating new growth preventing plants becoming overgrown, older, and woody.
- Increased flower production: More lateral branches and shorter stems lead to more numerous flowers on compact plants.
- Easier maintenance: Promoting compact growth, the plants are more manageable in terms of watering, staking, deadheading and general care.
- The flowering of the CC plants will be delayed. You can chop some plants and leave others un-chopped for a staggering flower blooming period. Alternatively, on the same plant, you can chop some stems by a third, but not chop other stems on the same plant for a staggering bloom time. This produces an extended bloom/flowering season.

How To Do the Chelsea Chop:

- Timing: In our area around the third week of May when the plants have reached a height of about 6 to 12 inches and are actively growing. This may also depend on location and climate conditions.
- Prepare tools: Use clean sharp pruning shears or scissors. Make sure tools are sterilized to prevent risk of spreading disease.
- Identify the plants: Selecting the herbaceous plants that would benefit from the CC. Typically, plants that tend to be leggy, floppy or produce a single stem. A few examples are garden phlox, yarrow, aster, coneflower, black-eyed Susan, *Penstemon*, Helen's flower, goldenrod, *Agastache*, bee balm, Joe-Pye, *Heliopsis, Coreopsis*. You can find a complete list of both native perennials as well as nonnative plants online. Check out <u>Taming the Wild</u>
- Determine the cutting height: The general rule is to cut back the stems by about one-third to one-half of their height.
- Make the cuts: Carefully cut or prune the tops of the plants just above a pair of healthy leaves or lateral bud. Make a clean cut at a 45-degree angle to allow water to drain off and reduce risk of disease.
- Maintain plant care: After CC continue to provide proper care, including monitoring for pests and disease. Remove spent or dead flowers.



Some plants that respond to the Chelsea chop



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The Chelsea Chop is not recommended for annuals, woody perennials or for plants with early bloom times. (spring blooming plants).

I experimented last spring using the CC on Culvers Root (*Veronicastrum virginica*) that always grows too tall and flops over. After chopping, the new growth was less leggy, but the benefit of chopping was that multiple stems grew from the chopped stem producing more flowers!!!!



Patch of *Veronicastrum virginicum* (Culver's Root) that has been Chelsea chopped

EVENTS

Don't miss the BEE, BUGS, BLOOMS OPEN HOUSE

When: August 16, 2025, 9a.m. to noon Where: Penn State Southeast Research and Extension Center, 1446 Auction Rd, Manheim, PA 17545

Tour this research trial of native plants and their cultivars, and learn which plants are most attractive to pollinators. Visit displays and talk to Master Gardener experts to learn about our native pollinators. Children's activities available.

Purchase plant plugs of hard to find straight species of some of the best pollinator plants.

Register here

