



What's the Buzz?

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Outstanding Pollinator Habitats

By Linda and Rich Silverman, Penn State Master Gardeners

20th Habitat of Merit Award

*Our 20th Habitat of Merit Award goes to Lisa and Dave Doseff of Lancaster, PA. The property is not only beautiful but incorporates several elements designed for children. Lisa is also the author of the award-winning children's book, *Grandma Lisa's Humming, Buzzing and Chirping Garden*. A Lancaster National Wildlife Federation Habitat Steward, she co-founded the Gardens Gone Native Garden Club of Lancaster, PA. Since Lisa is a published author, we have extended "writer's privilege". Enjoy the article as she wrote it.*

A Garden Where Children and Wildlife Thrive!

My love of gardening bloomed when we bought our first home. At that point, I must admit to planting things based on how 'pretty' they were without any regard to wildlife value. However, I eventually became aware of the importance of restoring habitat with native plant species for wildlife. So our vision when we moved to Lancaster in 2014 was to create a garden where all types of wildlife - grandchildren, and other animals - would thrive. And it had to be fun for the children! It's been a wonderful adventure; one that the children have helped us to realize. And along the way, they've developed an appreciation for the native plants that draw the pollinators, birds and other creatures that visit our yard as a result of their plantings.



While the yard we inherited may have been aesthetically pleasing in a traditional sense, it was mostly lawn and the majority of plants were non-native; many invasive, including English ivy, vinca, pachysandra, privet, and Japanese spirea. So the first order of business was to remove all the invasive species and replace them with a variety of natives to increase biodiversity. Planting with the grandkids was fun. We did decide to keep several of the exotic trees that were not invasive. The Japanese maple in the front yard, for example, makes a great organic hideout and climbing tree for the preschool set. We also provided water features...a small pond and several bird baths, including one which is heated and visited by songbirds and squirrels throughout the freezing winters.



Our lot comprises half an acre in a suburban setting. It slopes slightly from east to west. Within our boundaries, there are many types of micro-environments. At the back of our lot are 100' tall pine trees which are home to a family of great horned owls.



Beneath these stately trees, dry shade gives way to a woodland edge. At the low end of our property, we have a damp area that we've turned into a rain garden with a very small pond. Along the borders, our lot is surrounded by trees that were here when we arrived and we've added shrubs and perennials underneath to create hedgerows. One side of our house is now home to a small meadow. And in the narrow space next to the driveway on the other side, we've planted trees, shrubs and perennials on a dry, sunny slope. We've replaced most of our lawn with islands of native plants, accessible by paths of grass. We've left a small area of lawn for our grandchildren to play 'short croquet' and 'mini baseball'. But in all honesty, they prefer running through the paths and exploring what lies tucked around each bend. Amidst all these plantings are a log fort, teepee, vine house, fairy garden, hopscotch, and many other elements where the children play, surrounded by nature. As such, they've unwittingly become stewards of the natural world that surrounds them.

Along the street, we've set up the "Chickadee Readery" where we invite neighbors to come into the garden and sit in the cool of the maple's shade to read nature books with their children.

It's hard to say how many species of plants have come to live here. They have to number over a hundred. I'll admit that I'm easily seduced by native plants at nurseries and plant swaps so we've incorporated many into the landscape. Because we have so many micro-environments, I can tuck them into the area where they'll be best suited. Other plants have just shown up on their own like Carolina elephant's foot. They attract all kinds of pollinators such as bees, butterflies, moths, hummingbirds, flies, and beetles. Many other bugs find a home here, too. All these, in turn, draw in predators - birds, small mammals, reptiles and amphibians. And at the top of our local food chain, great horned owls, red tailed hawks, and foxes find nourishment for their young.

(Continued on page 3)



There are so many plants that I love! In early spring, the violets, woodland poppies, redbuds, and dogwoods provide nectar and pollen. And their leaves are host plants to many species of caterpillars. They're like beloved old friends, returning after a long absence. These are followed by penstemon, bleeding heart, and magnolias which lead us into summer when bee balm, coreopsis, and coneflower bloom. Come late summer and early fall, the garden takes on a different tone as the goldenrods, asters, and snakeroot steal the show. The oakleaf hydrangeas turn a deep burgundy as the garden bronzes in autumn. And in winter, the evergreen leaves of the hollies, rhododendrons, junipers, and pines provide a beautiful backdrop to the red osier dogwoods and stalks of perennials and grasses whose seeds are

relished by foraging songbirds. But I suppose if I had to pick a favorite, I'll admit that I have a particular fondness for fothergilla with its fluffy white blooms in spring, blue-green leaves in summer, and fall color that ranges from yellowish-orange to scarlet.

In order to continue to provide for more wildlife, each year, we've installed a new bed or expanded an existing one using the 'lasagna' or 'compost in place' method. Cardboard and leaves are always free for the taking on recycling days. But I often have to explain to early morning joggers what I'm doing when they see me fill my van with the neighbors' "trash".

While wildlife is definitely present and active in our yard, we've sadly noticed fewer and fewer pollinators these past few years. Because so many of our neighbors use fertilizers and pesticides, my guess is that storm water runoff and wind carry in the toxins responsible for the decline we've witnessed. Yet I'm ever hopeful! We continue to do our best to counteract this problem by adding more native plant beds and posting signs to educate people passing by. We invite friends and neighbors in to see how lovely and serene a native plant garden can be and encourage them to incorporate more natives into their own gardens. But mostly, we're hoping to help the next generation experience the wonder, awe, and fun of being surrounded by nature in our natural habitat garden which, together, with our grandchildren, we joyfully continue to restore.



It's always a pleasure to enjoy beautiful gardens created for all ages! We can't think of a better garden to be awarded the 20th Habitat of Merit Award.

OUTSTANDING POLLINATOR PLANTS

Goldenrods: Must-have plants for pollinators

Goldenrods?

Goldenrods (*Solidago spp*) are an important late season food source for bees and butterflies. Some bees even specialize on goldenrod pollen! 125 butterfly and moth species use goldenrod as a host plant. So it's no wonder that gardeners looking to provide good wildlife habitat include goldenrod in their plantings.

But don't goldenrods make me sneeze?

NO! Goldenrod pollen is too heavy to be carried by wind. Ragweed, which is wind-pollinated, is the cause of most fall allergies.



Isn't goldenrod just a weed that will take over my yard?

Definitely not. Some species of goldenrod, such as Canada goldenrod, can be aggressive and are more suitable for large properties. But there are over 20 species native to Pennsylvania. One will be just right for your yard. Read on to choose the best goldenrods for your yard.

GOLDENRODS (*SOLIDAGO* spp) FOR SUN

Solidago rugosa—wrinkle leaf goldenrod

This goldenrod grows 3ft to 4ft tall in full to part sun and likes medium to dry soils. 'Fireworks' is a commonly sold cultivar with a beautiful arching form. It spreads slowly by rhizomes and is a beautiful addition to any garden.



Solidago rigida—stiff goldenrod

Plant stiff goldenrod in medium soils with other pollinator attracting natives such as *Monarda fistulosa* (wild bergamot) and *Coreopsis verticillata* (threadleaf tickseed). Growing 3ft to 5 ft. tall, stiff goldenrod was a top winner for attracting sheer numbers and diversity of pollinators.



Solidago odora—anise scented goldenrod

With licorice scented leaves this clump forming goldenrod is a great choice for any garden. Native to open woodlands it grows 2 ft to 4 ft high in average to dry soils. Blooms in August to September.





***Solidago speciosa*—showy goldenrod**

One of the showiest goldenrods, *Solidago speciosa* is unbranched and clumping with a fibrous root system. At 3 ft to 5ft tall, this lovely goldenrod prospers in sunny moist or dry well-drained sites.



***Solidago sempervirens*—seaside goldenrod**

Found mostly on beaches and dunes, this goldenrod is salt and deer tolerant. It grows 2ft to 6 ft tall and does not spread by rhizomes. Place it in full sun to part shade in coarse to medium infertile soils



***Solidago nemoralis*—gray goldenrod**

One of the shortest goldenrods, gray goldenrod tops out at 2 ft and grows in poor, dry, infertile soils in sun to part shade. It self-seeds when happy, but is easy to pull out of areas where it isn't wanted. A great goldenrod for a gravelly bank. Try growing it with *Symphotrichum oblongifolium* (aromatic aster) for a wonderful late season combination.

GOLDENRODS FOR SHADE

***Solidago flexicaulis*—zig zag goldenrod**

This woodland goldenrod prospers in moist to dry soils in part to full shade. At 3 ft tall or less it makes a nice companion for *Symphotrichum cordifolium* (blue wood aster) and *Conoclinium coelestinum* (blue mistflower). It will readily seed into bare spots to provide fall color and food for pollinators.



***Solidago caesia*—Blue-stem goldenrod**

Solidago caesia is a clump forming goldenrod with arching stems of yellow flowers. It grows 1 to 3 ft tall in medium to dry soils in part to full shade. Plant it with blue or white wood aster to brighten up shady spots and provide food for late season bees and butterflies.



PROTECTING POLLINATORS:

Avoiding Invasives

Spiraea Japonica — Japanese meadowsweet, Japanese spiraea

By Connie Schmotzer, Penn State Master Gardener

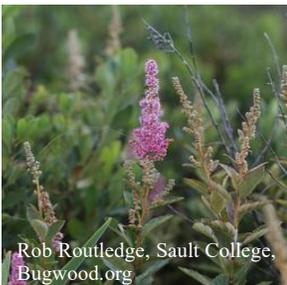
If you walk around your neighborhood in early summer you will no doubt notice this deciduous shrub in the rose family. It is quite popular with gardeners because of its mounded form and pink blossoms. Native to Japan, Korea and China, it was introduced into the ornamental industry around 1870. Unfortunately, not many gardeners realize that it has become an invasive plant in Pennsylvania.

Japanese spiraea's invasive properties were first brought to my attention a couple of years ago when a Dauphin County Master Gardener called me to see the invasion of *Spiraea japonica* on his creek side property. In a relatively short time, a few plants had produced hundreds of seeds that were deposited along the banks of the stream. And the plants were rapidly marching downstream, displacing native plants important to the area's wildlife.



Japanese spiraea spreading on the banks of a Dauphin County stream.

Where it was growing is typical of Japanese spiraea's invasion. You won't notice it seeding around your yard. Instead, it spreads to natural spaces that receive full sun to partial shade such as along streams and rivers, forest edges, roadsides, fields, and utility rights-of-way. And it leaves a huge seed bank that persists for years, making removal difficult.



Rob Routledge, Sault College,
Bugwood.org



F. Irwin

Spiraea tomentosa blossom

Spiraea japonica blossom

When scouting for Japanese spiraea, be careful not to mistake it for our native spiraea—*Spiraea tomentosa* - which also has pink blossoms. But as the picture shows, the native *Spiraea*'s flowers are arranged in a raceme while *Spiraea japonica*'s flowers are arranged in an umbel.

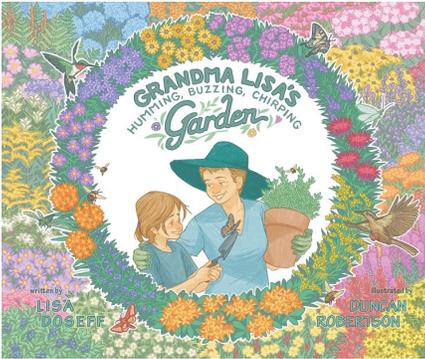
Removing invasive species is always best achieved when the population is small. Young plants can be pulled fairly easily. More mature plants can repeatedly be cut down, but it will take several years to deplete their energy. Another option is to cut the stems and paint with an herbicide.

To learn more about Japanese spiraea and its control check out the Pennsylvania DCNR factsheet at this code:



Some good winter reading for children

The processes of nature can be complicated and not always easy to understand, even for us adults. Well written children’s books get these messages across to children in an enchanting and entertaining way. These are two such books. You may find yourself reading and learning from them as well!



Grandma Lisa's Humming, Buzzing, Chirping Garden by Lisa Doseff

Written by Lisa Doseff, this issue’s “Garden of Merit” winner, this delightfully illustrated book beautifully explains the connections between native plants and all the wonderful creatures in our gardens. A great read for children and anyone interested in preserving our ecosystems.



The Bumblebee Queen—by April Pulley Sayre

Much of the life cycle of bumblebees happens underground and out of sight. April takes us on a bumblebee queen’s journey through the seasons and gives us an inside look at the busy queen’s life. The result is a new appreciation for what this small insect is able to do.

The Bumblebee Queen

April Pulley Sayre  Illustrated by Patricia J. Wynne

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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