



Sowing Seeds of Knowledge Reaps Conservation with Beauty

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The flower beds are consuming my attention these last few days. What wonderful spring weather—a bit too early and at this writing in mid-March the weather forecast is for some cooler weather. It will be a miracle if we don't have at least a frost before April 15/May 1. The trees are leafing out; flowers are blooming; ground is still damp enough to pull weeds; but dry enough to work (do not step any more than necessary into the flower beds—compacts the soil and makes clay into hard pan) My poor body and hands are stiff from bending, pulling, crawling.

The Million Pollinator Garden Challenge is on my priority list this spring. It would be hard to not be aware of this Challenge which is supported by NGC and many other established gardening and environmental organizations. Renie Faulkenberry has written an excellent environmental article for *Garden Gateways* recent issue explaining the importance of preserving the numbers of pollinators so important to maintain the viability of food crops, wildflowers, home gardens, and the joy of butterflies, bird song, and beauty of all nature's gifts. Now it is up to us to make sure the pollenating plants are available to supply the energy and reproductive 'food' for the essential birds and bees. How are we going to accomplish this?

In January for the *Redbud Basic Horticulture Letter* I wrote a rather extensive summary of necessary requirements for a viable Pollinator Garden. It will be added to Scatter Seeds...attachments for you to read. It is relatively long but a good working guide to the necessary steps involved in the pollinator project.

The Xerces Society has published a Guide for “Attracting Native Pollinators” and they also maintain an excellent website, www.xerces.org. I highly recommend it as a resource for your Pollinator Garden.

Like many projects there is more than one way to achieve success! Perfection is of course a wonderful goal...and many things must be done PERFECTLY. The flower garden is generally a play toy—a beautiful play toy. It would be wonderful to recognize every botanical nuance in the garden and to know each and every characteristic of the thousands of birds and bees, but quite frankly most of us are more casual about our gardening. To discern what is truly significant and what is nice to know is best left to academicians. The rest of us will do our best to achieve success, but not necessarily with the perfection of the professional. ***By the same token we do not want to make mistakes that could be harmful to the environment or to the species we are trying to help.***

- Weeds are a nuisance and elimination can be successfully achieved by using a herbicide—but there are environmental consequences to herbicides—best to consider other methods to eliminate weeds—or invasive plants
 - Mulch; paste board boxes soaked in water under the mulch will discourage weeds. (Weeds are tenacious and will grow in the top layer of the mulch—but they are really easy to pull up by hand as you make your morning/evening walk through the garden)
 - Hand pulling the weeds or using hand tools but making sure all the roots are destroyed
 - Using ground covers such as *Thymus praecox* (Mother of Thyme) *Majus reptans*, *Ajuga*, *Bergenia*—anything which will cover up the soil and prevent sun from reaching it. Weeds need sun to propagate!
 - Using ornamental plants which provide the same result as grandcover--*Rudbeckia hirta* (blackeyed susan), *Echinacea purpurea* (coneflower) a marginally invasive perennial ornamental is ideal. With enough ‘pretty’ plants the weeds won’t win and the garden will be pretty.
- Species choice is important. For instance, NATIVE *Asclepius tuberosa* is the specific milkweed for Monarch butterflies—and when I say specific that is exactly what it must be—no alternatives need apply in the opinion of

many experts. But there is a tropical species similar to *Asclepias tuberosa* which is being used and is reported to be harmful to the Monarch butterfly.

- *Asclepius curassavica* is the tropical species, and problems are related to a fungus disease which can be carried in the tropical species.
 - A second concern involves the fact the tropical milkweed provides perpetual flowers and foliage for the Monarch which disrupts the migration season and the breeding season...not good
 - On the other hand it is a readily available food source which IF the grower will simply cut it to the ground three times a year will solve the migration problem. (but then there is that fungus problem...)
 - The solution in my opinion is to plant *Asclepius tuberosa*
 - (We spent 1961-63 in Monterey California. Pacific Grove is one of the communities associated with Monterey. Each October the Monarch butterflies descend on what is now the Monarch Grove Butterfly Sanctuary. The butterflies hang in clusters in the eucalyptus trees from October to February to preserve their body temperature until warmer weather allows them to continue their migration. It is an amazing scene. The sanctuary provides a necessary respite for this amazing creature—molesting a butterfly is illegal and the fine is \$1000.00!)
- The guide mentioned in the beginning of this section and which is attached to Scatter Seeds...has a list of suggested plants appropriate to Georgia, complete with pictures. Check it out, but remember it is a guide—use your own favorite native plants meeting the specifications for a pollinator garden.

(It is no longer mid-March...it is the last day of March!) The garden is beginning to look pretty good and hopefully in the next few days the weeding will be finished and the first of new babies planted. The early annuals with a few perennials included are in the ground. Seeds and summer annuals came a bit later. There are a few new ones and it would be interesting to know your opinions on some of these—



Saxifraga cochlearis is one I'm excited about. It is sometimes called 'rock buster' because it is commonly used in rock gardens. As a ground cover with a dwarf *ajuga* and dwarf *hosta* it could be interesting. Looks really lovely right now with the *ajuga* in bloom and the *hosta* just pushing up. It will have morning sun and is by the hose bib—needs moisture. Hope it is happy here! Another old favorite is *Lithodora diffusa* 'Grace Ward' which I've used in containers for several years, is getting a new setting this year—in a broken Chinese container partially buried in the ground with the original opening being the setting for the *Lithodora*. Will send picture of both these plants in the July Scatter Seeds...If they are successes! This is what makes gardening fun. Sometimes the magic works; sometimes it doesn't!



Bad Bugs This information is from *Georgia Gardening*, April 2016 issue and written by Bob Westerfield, UGA Extension Consumer Horticulturist and Extension Coordinator



Georgia Magazine came last week and included Bob's article about Bad Bugs—Not only does this fit into our Lunch and Learn program it also is very significant to the Pollinator Challenge. Less than 5% of the bugs in the garden are **BAD BUGS!** The 'less than 5%' can make our lives unhappy! So, what in Bob's opinion are **BAD BUGS!**



☀ Slimy snails and slugs are #1 on his list—they are rarely seen until we see the damage they have done. These **BAD BUGS!** are night creatures—flashlights make good hunting equipment! You will know they are in your garden until you see the damage they leave in their 'midnight scavenger hunt'. Numerous elongated holes in your plants are a sure sign of slugs and snails. Slimy trails on the sidewalk is also a sign. Getting rid of them is another problem—Bob Westerfield recommends putting wet cardboard close to the problem area. In the morning it will be the home to

dozens of the slimy creatures stuck to it! The trash can will be their next home. Or how about a little stale beer in a shallow dish—I guess they like a little nip too but their drowning in the beer is our reward! I've had success with empty grapefruit rinds or cantaloupe rinds. Just throw them in the trash can the next morning, slugs and all.



☀️ Aphids are #2 on the list—but there is a catch to getting rid of them because they are a favorite food of beneficial bugs! Dilemma solved by just using a strong stream of water from the hose—washes the Aphids off the plant (iris are especially susceptible) and they are unable to return, and any good bugs can go about their business of being good bugs. *Safer soap* might be more effective, but just hose water has always worked for me. Please don't use a drop or two of dish soap—the content of this soap can be harmful to the plant and the formula changes frequently do just don't use it! (because I said so—as we used to tell our children)

☀️ #3 are spider mites—The first time Bob and Carmen and their children were at the house, Bob's comment was something to the effect my azaleas were a treasure trove for spider mite investigation! Oh dear!



These little guys are so small they can't be seen with the eye but the damage they do will let you know they've been there—a speckled, mottled appearance on the underside of the leaves is a sure sign—they are smart little devils because they 'know' sprays can't get to them on the back side of the leaf! A chemical miticide is probably the only cure IF you get a complete coverage on the back side of the leaf.

Horticulture Oil might work but that requires understanding when to spray so the oil doesn't affect the plant...



☀️ White flies are #4—another tiny insect which looks like a tiny white fly. Gardenia is its favorite plant, but also likes vegetables such as tomatoes and peppers; and roses. They excrete 'honeydew' which attracts a fungus called sooty mold—one of the first signs there is a problem! White flies have become immune to most chemical controls—

overuse raises its ugly head once more. If a little bit does good, a whole lot will do even better! You surely have heard this expression before. Keep it in mind when using chemicals for the garden. Follow directions on the container.



☀ #5—Lace Bug—foe of azaleas. If you find black dots all across the backs of leaves you have lace bug most likely! They feed by sucking the juice from the leaves which causes a speckled appearance. To make matters worse they produce several

generations throughout the growing season! The best time to ‘try’ to control them is after the eggs hatch and the babies are in the crawler stage. Contact and systemic insecticides will help keep the pest under control. Organic oils *may* work if you get the timing right!

☀ Caterpillars in general are #6. What is confusing with this statement? Butterflies come from caterpillars don’t they? I remember the first summer we were here caterpillars were all over my parsley and eating voraciously! Fortunately, it occurred to me they just might be swallowtail butterflies so I let them have the parsley. Unlike my neighbor who when the caterpillars were eating her flat of unplanted parsley, went to the nursery and purchased two more parsley flats so they would have enough to eat! Now, that is devotion. Three bad caterpillars are tent caterpillars, webworms, and tomato hornworm. I generally just pick them off and stomp on them—same as Japanese Beetles which I use my sharp thumb nail to execute. Gives great pleasure to me! UHH A nice jar of soapy water works too but isn’t as satisfying!



Tent caterpillar



Gardens with wings--butterfly as a caterpillar

*Concord Garden Club's Annual Lunch and Learn reinforces the **Bad Bugs** information!*



Concord Garden Club's annual Lunch and Learn is April 21 at the Strickland Building in downtown Concord. The program this year is "Bugs and Creepy Crawlers" with Dr. Wayne Gardner, UGA Griffin Entomologist. The Lunch and Learn is always fun and informative! Dr. Gardner's presentation about bugs will be during the lunch, but the event includes horticulture oriented vendors, a bric a brac sale, and the Harriette Beckham Fund Boutique featuring a silent auction plus a raffle for a large throw quilt in the log cabin pattern. It is your day for 'country living.' You can contact me by email, gail.berthe@gmail.com. for more information and Redbud Reporter has an invitation which gives more details.

The Happy Gardener sincerely hopes you will look at the Pollinator Guide attached separately from **Scatter Seeds of Knowledge—Horticulture**. Enjoy the spring of your garden and all the promise it brings.

*Happy Gardening,
Gail, the Happy Gardener gail.berthe@gmail.com*