

# Green Thumb Prints

Newsletter of the Hancock County  
Master Gardener Volunteers



February 2012

*Gardening is our Passion  
Education is our Purpose*



## WHAT'S INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- **Growing non-natives and not feeling guilty**  
by Bob Campbell
- **Snow molds on turf**
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- **Test seed for germination potential**

## *Dates to Remember!*

**Thursday, February 9:** MGV Monthly Meeting, Extension Office, 7:00.

**Tuesday, February 14:** Happy Valentine's Day!

**Wednesday, February 15:** WFIN Phone Club, Bill Jones and Marilyn Beltz, 9:00—11:00.

**Monday, February 20:** Presidents' Day

**Wednesday, February 22:** Ash Wednesday

**Wednesday, February 22:** Washington's Birthday

### UPCOMING EVENTS

**Thursday, March 1:** Perennial School, Clark Co. MGVs and Extension. (See page 3)

**Saturday, March 17:** Allen County annual seminar. (See Page 2)

## *Coordinator's Corner* *By Marilyn Beltz*

For those of you that enjoy snow-congratulations. I personally am ready to move on to warmer weather.

Included in the newsletter are several seminars on gardening so apparently I'm not alone in thinking spring. Pouring over the seed catalogs is letting us think warm. There are some extra copies of the catalogs in the work-station that you can use. Please feel free to look.

If you have not turned in your hours, please do so ASAP. We need to send them to the state.

Hope to see you at the Feb. meeting, so till then stay warm!

- Marilyn



## PHONE CLUB VOLUNTEERS

Anyone interested in doing the phone club should contact **Barb Phillips** as soon as possible. This begins February 15, at WFIN Radio Station from 9:00—11:00 AM.  
**PLEASE VOLUNTEER!**



## Reminder and Thank You

Thanks to Kathy Grossman and Barb Sherman for providing refreshments for the February MGV meeting.

## Allen County Master Gardeners Present the 13th Annual

"Art of Gardening"

on Saturday, March 17, 2012

at the Life Science Bldg. on the OSU Lima campus.

Time: 8:45—3:30.

Registration and breakfast at 8:00 am.

Registration fee is \$45.00.

Topics will include *Companion Planting*, *Planting Blues for Striking Effects*, *Hortus Mustus - Plants You Have Got to Get*, and the *10 Most Unwanted: Landscape Weed Control*.

Contact: <http://allen.osu.edu> or Gretchen Staley at 419-302-4234.



*Happy Valentine's Day*

## Brown Bag Presentations

Mar 8 Cheryl Miller, "Continuous Blooms Gardening." Presentation will cover planning and planting a garden to provide something in bloom for the duration of our growing season.

June 14 Dick Deerhake, "Composting." He will cover the "hows" and "whys" of successful composting.

Sept 13 Jeanette Miller, "Ornamental Grasses." Information will be provided on growing and using ornamental grasses in the garden.

Nov 8 Betty Hammett-Schroeder, topic to be determined.

Thursdays, before MGV Monthly Meetings

Sessions begin at 6:00 and continue for 50-55 minutes.

Thanks to the above MGVs for volunteering to share their expertise and making the Brown Bag program a success. We are all excited about these presentations. Also, thanks to Sharon Hammer Baker for organizing these presentations.

# Training available from Clark County Master Gardeners

Contact: Carolyn Allen, 937-521-3860 or <http://clark.osu.edu/topics/horticulture>

## March 1: 13th Annual Central Ohio Perennial School

Featured Speaker: Irwin Etienne, Indianapolis Museum of Art,  
Topics: Tough Perennials and Using Perennials in Containers  
Registration 8:30  
Program 9:00 a.m. until 4:15 p.m  
Courtyard by Marriott 100 S. Fountain Ave., Springfield, OH

## April 7: 2012 Garden Fling

A day of learning and fun!  
Sponsored by Master Gardeners of Clark County  
\$7.00 fee  
Kenton Ridge High School 4444 Middle Urbana Rd., Springfield, OH

## May 5: Perennial Plant & Barn Sale

Master Gardeners of Clark County present the 3rd Annual Sale.  
Plant Sale: ground covers, shrubs, small trees, assorted perennials and more!  
Barn Sale: garden supplies, tools, garden art & books...all things "gardeny", new or gently used!  
Gateway Learning Gardens, OSU Extension, 4400 Gateway Blvd., Springfield, OH

**June 21 and Thurs July 12:** Garden walk, FREE

**August 4:** Gateway garden Jubilee

## When should I cut back my ornamental grasses?

Remember to cut down ornamental grasses in early March. Cut to within a few inches of the ground using hedge shears, loppers, or even a string trimmer. Fertilization is required to compensate for nutrient loss; apply a 10-10-10 fertilizer at the rate of 1 to 2 pounds per 100 square feet. Calcium and magnesium are lost when removing foliage, therefore a soil test for deficiencies of these elements should be carried out periodically and recommendations followed.  
Source: Plantfacts, osu.edu



# Growing Non-Natives and Not Feeling Guilty (Part I)

By Bob Campbell

The conversation in horticulture, as it has come to my ears since taking a serious interest in gardening, has been dominated by the virtues of growing native species. "Military metaphors of waging war against invasive species," writes Mark Davis, in an article in Nature quoted by Michael Price, "convey the message that introduced species are the enemies of man and nature." It came as something of a surprise, then, in 2011, to find that this is not a universally accepted message, that it is indeed being challenged by thinking men and women, including scientists and horticulturists.

The first article that caught my eye was published in the New York Times in April of 2011. Written by Hugh Raffles, it was entitled, "Mother Nature's Melting Pot." Raffles is an anthropologist at the New School, and the author of "Insectopedia." He is an immigrant and became a U.S. citizen in 2011. Raffles sees similarities in his experience to that of animal and plant non-native species. "... Nativism runs deep in the United States. Just ask our non-native animals and plants: they too are commonly labeled as aliens, even though they also provide significant benefits to their new home. While the vanguard of the anti-immigrant crusade is found /in political movements/ the native species movement is led by environmentalists, conservationists and gardeners. Despite cultural and political differences, both are motivated - in Margaret Thatcher's infamous phrase - by the fear of being swamped by aliens."

Being a gardener, and hopefully sometimes an environmentalist and conservationist, I heard in his words a challenge to think through the assumption that native species are to be preferred over non-natives.

## I. THE REASON FOR PREFERRING NATIVES OR NON-NATIVES

There are two reasons why environmentalists, conservationists and gardeners have promoted native over non-native species. The first is harm done by non-native species; the second is the significant

contribution native species bring to our environment and our landscapes.

Non-natives can wreak havoc in their new lands. They can run over native species. They can bring disease that native plants are not equipped to fend off. They can crowd out native plants and take over the landscape. Some are aggressive, invasive. So the answer becomes, keep them out. Or once in, kill them off.

January's Green Thumb Prints highlights the damage done by a Japanese invasive perennial vine, Kudzu. "It is common for this weed to completely overgrow all trees and other vegetation once it is established in an area. It is estimated that a single acre of kudzu would expand to 5,250 acres if left uncontrolled for 100 years."

*The University of Florida Extension notes that "one of the most common tree species in Tampa, Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*), is both non-native and invasive. It readily spreads into disturbed areas such as fields, ditches, along canals, and in flatwood forests, growing in thickets that are costly to eradicate. The dominance of this species is not confined to Tampa; in fact, it is estimated to be established on over 1 million acres throughout the state."*

At a more personal level, some, perhaps most, of us have experienced the damage of non-natives in our beds and borders. In Fremont, before I had learned anything about underground rhizomes, I tried bugleweed (*Ajuga reptans*), a native to Europe, as an edging plant. It was not long before I had more edging than I needed, and bugleweed popping up in places where I had not put it! When we moved to Findlay in 2003, I put some spearmint (*Mentha spicata*), a native of Europe, Asia, and Africa, into a corner raised bed in the backyard. I enjoyed mint in my tea, but I did not enjoy the spread of the plant; in a couple of years it had almost taken over the bed.

Sometimes the non-native we grow in our garden, while

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# Growing Non-Natives and Not Feeling Guilty (Part I)

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beautiful to our eyes, promotes its invasion into the environment, where it crowds out other valuable plants. One that I grew in three communities before I knew what I was doing, is Purple Loosestrife, *Lythrum salicaria*. A plant with awesomely beautiful purple to magenta flowers, it is one of 10 designated invasive to the environment by the State of Ohio. It spreads aggressively by rhizomes, and produces as many as a million seeds per plant. Sometimes nurseries try to sell a "sterile" variety, *L. virgatum*. But its seeds will outcross with *L. salicaria* and more seeds will be produced and spread. While not a problem for the homeowner, it becomes a problem to the environment when the seeds land in wetland habitats (marshes, river banks, ditches, wet meadows, and edges of water bodies). I have seen literally acres of the plant in such areas in northern Ohio. It is an awesome sight, even somewhat beautiful, until you think of all the native vegetation it has replaced.

Non-natives have done their harm, to our gardens and to the environment. On the other hand, the proven virtues of native species stand out. Prairie Moon Nursery, Winona, Minnesota, came into being three decades ago, to implement the visions of the prairie restoration and collective land stewardship experiments of the 1960s and 70s. Native plants, say its owner, yield "more pollinators, wildlife, beauty and diverse ecosystems.../they/ assure vigorous, diverse and beautiful growth for decades to come."

The state of Virginia summarizes the virtues of natives:

Native species are those that occur in the region in which they evolved. Plants evolve over geologic time in response to physical and biotic processes characteristic of a region: the climate, soils, timing of rainfall, drought, and frost; and interactions with the other species inhabiting the local community. Thus native plants possess certain traits that make them uniquely adapted to local conditions. ... The benefit of growing plants within the region they evolved is they are more likely to

thrive under the local conditions while being less likely to invade new habitats. Native plants are well adapted to local environmental conditions, maintain or improve soil fertility, reduce erosion, and often require less fertilizer and pesticides than many alien plants.

PA Trees.org, The Pennsylvania Tree Resource Guide, lists the virtues this way:

Using native species in landscape and wildlife plantings provide many ecological benefits which introduced plants may not. Native plants provide diverse communities that support wildlife populations throughout the year, while many exotic plants have little or no wildlife value and displace the native species. Native plants, used for landscaping purposes, are often more adaptable to natural environments, and can have greater resistance to droughts, insects and diseases once they are established on the site. Native plants are often more functional in the landscape, providing stream bank stabilization, erosion control, climate control, and wildlife habitat.

PA Trees.org, in almost paranoiac language, goes on to warn us against introducing non-native plants into our landscape:

***Exotic invasive plants /are/ impacting Pennsylvania's landscapes:*** Drive down any road in the region and you will probably find non-native plant species beginning to invade our forests, stream corridors, meadows, and yes, even the ornamental landscapes at your home. When was the last time you walked your property and wondered why there seems to be plants that are taking over? Your property may already have been invaded by an "exotic invasive" plant or you might have even accidentally planted some in your landscape that will soon escape and invade a nearby forest or stream. As good stewards we need to become more aware of the impact these non-native invasive species have on our local environment and learn to identify and properly control these species before they

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completely take over an area.

## II. BUT NOT ALL NATIVES ARE PERFECT - SOME HAVE THEIR VICIES

The Us Department of Agriculture defines Invasive Plants as "an alien species whose introduction does or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health" (Executive Order 13112, 2/3/99). The executive order itself is a biased statement, presuming that native plants have no vices, cannot be native or harmful. But not all Natives are perfect. Some of them are also invasive. Even PA Trees.org qualifies its paranoiac language:

"Before you start tearing out all your landscape plants, you must know that NOT all non-native plants are invasive and there are some native plants that have a tendency to become invasive (especially on disturbed sites)." PA Trees does not identify these invasive native plants. Nor will you find much on Google, or from nurseries or educational websites. The conversation up to now has been a one-sided attack on non-natives. But we will find the beginnings of a list of invasive natives in the experience of gardeners (including our own), one government website, and in at least one mail order nursery that is scrupulously honest with its customers.

\*\*Irwin Post, a forest engineer living in Chester, Vermont begins an article, "Got Fern? Controlling Native Invasive Plants," with these words:

**Exotic invasive plants get the headlines, as they crowd out native species, deprive wildlife of food, and generally devalue the Northern Forest. But in certain cases, native plants can cause the same problems. In fact, on many of the woodlots I see, the native invasive plants are a much bigger problem than the exotic ones. On my own woodlot, the native plants that have earned the invasive label are ferns (especially hay-scented), striped maple, and American beech. These plants are all**

**indigenous, and they all have a habit of rapidly taking over large areas to the exclusion of other species.**

\*\*I can add to the list from personal experience, as I'm sure some of you can also do. After I had taken out my non-native invasive spearmint, I added some new plants to my corner raised bed. In the southeast corner, I put in a red variety of bee balm (*Monarda didyma*), a North American native. I had heard of rhizomes by this time, so just to be safe I cut out the end of a bucket, buried the bucket, and planted the bee balm in it. In a couple of years, its rhizomes had escaped, and apparently some seed too, and like the spearmint, it had taken over. Earlier, at Fremont, I had decided to try to brighten up a wetland corner of my backyard with three obedient plants (*Physotegia virginiana*), another native of North America. The obedient plant was far from obedient. By its second or third year, it had taken over more than a hundred square feet.

\*\*Wisconsin's Division of Forestry has published an Herbicide Sensitivity Table for Native Invasive Plants in their state. Five perennial monocots are listed, along with 12 biennial and perennial broadleaf weeds, including violets and goldenrod, sometimes grown in gardens. It also includes 4 native invasive trees: box elder, aspen, willow, and cottonwood; 6 perennial shrubs: prickly ash, wild raspberry, gooseberry, sumac, red osier dogwood, and grey dogwood; and 5 vines: ground nut, dodder, Virginia creeper, poison ivy and grape vine.

\*\*Prairie Moon Nursery, whose mission is to encourage more native plants in our garden, is also scrupulously honest in warning that some of the plants it sells would be bad for our gardens and landscape. Of each plant it sells, it tells you when it is "aggressive (may not be suited for small landscape plantings), and when it is rhizomatous (has a fast-spreading root system). Of these so labeled, it gives one asterisk to ones that are yet highly recommended for home landscaping, and two asterisks to those that are recommended but with a warning to be careful because of their aggressive,

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rhizomatous nature. The really invasive ones, with no place in home landscaping, it labels aggressive, rhizomatous, or both, and leaves them without an asterisk.

Fifteen or more genera of this last category of native plants are listed, sometimes with several species within a genus. Many would not be of interest for most of our gardens, but some might to a few. Included in the list is common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*), willow aster (*Aster praeltus*), wild strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*), three species of sunflower (*Helianthus giganteus*, *H. grosseserratus*, and *H. maximilianii*), early sunflower - or false sunflower- (*Heliopsis helianthoides*), wild mint (*Mentha arvensis*), wild golden glow (*Rudbeckia laciniata*), four species of goldenrod (*Solidago flexicaulis*, *S. gigantea*, *S. graminifolia*, and *S. patula*), and cream violet (*Viola striata*). Two shrubs make this list: *Spirea*, both meadowsweet (*S. alba*) and steeplebush (*S. tomentosa*); and black haw (*Viburnum prunifolium*).

## SOURCES: PART I (AND NEXT MONTH'S PART II) OF THIS ARTICLE:

Michael G. Andreu, Melissa H. Friedman, and Robert J. Northrop, "Important Species in Tampa's Urban Forest - A Brief Overview of Tampa's Urban Ecological Assessment", Publication #FOR 205, University of Florida IFAS Extension, <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fr267>

"Kudzu Presents Problems", Green Thumb Prints, January 2012

Analia Manriquez, "THE VALUE OF NON-NATIVE PLANT SPECIES TO HONEY PRODUCTION IN ALASKA'S INTERIOR", 9/21/10, <http://www.apinews.com/en/technical-articles/others/item/11893-usa-the-value-of-non-native-plants-species-to-honey-production-in-alskas-interior>

Native Plants for Conservation, Restoration, and Landscaping, [http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural\\_heritage/nativeplants.shtml](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural_heritage/nativeplants.shtml)

PA Trees.org, The Pennsylvania Tree Resource Guide, <http://www.patrees.org/native-trees-vs-invasive-plants>

Irwin Post, "Got Fern? Controlling Native Invasive Plants," 8/26/10; <http://northernwoodlands.org/articles/article/got-fern-controlling-native-invasive-plants>

NEW JERSEY NON-NATIVE PLANTS, Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*), New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Science, Research and Technology, October, 2008; [http://www.nj.gov/dep/njisc/Factsheets/j\\_barberry.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/dep/njisc/Factsheets/j_barberry.pdf)

Ohio's Invasive Non-Native Plants, <http://ohiodnr.com/tabid/2007/Default.aspx>

2012 Catalog & Cultural Guide, Prairie Moon Nursery -Native Seeds and Plants for Prairie, Wetland, Savanna and Woodland; [www.prairiemoon.com](http://www.prairiemoon.com)

The Plant Book - the world of plants in a single volume, Random House Australia Pty Ltd, 2001; first published as Botanica, 1997

Michael Price, "Are Nonnative Species Victims of Prejudice?", Science Insider - Breaking news and analysis from the world of science policy", July 6, 2011

<http://news.sciencemag.org/scienceinsider/2011/07/are-nonnative-species-victims-of.html>

Hugh Raffles, "Mother Nature's Melting Pot," [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/03Raffles.html?\\_r=1&page=print](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/03Raffles.html?_r=1&page=print)

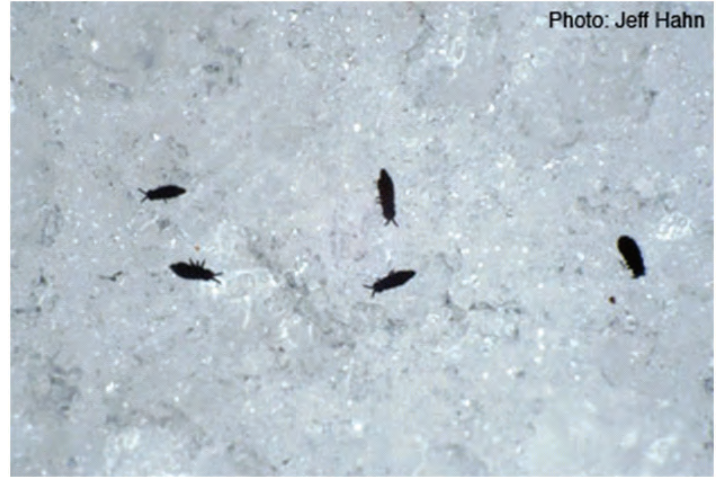
Carl Zimmer, "Alien Species Reconsidered: Finding a Value in Non-Natives" [http://e360.yale.edu/feature/alien\\_species\\_reconsidered\\_finding\\_a\\_value\\_in\\_non-natives/2373/](http://e360.yale.edu/feature/alien_species_reconsidered_finding_a_value_in_non-natives/2373/)

## Next month: "Growing Non-Natives & Not Feeling Guilty" (Part II)

- The Positive Role of Non-native Species,
- The Contribution of Non-natives to the Landscape,
- Towards a More Balanced Approach in Growing Non-natives)

## ***Snow Fleas - Tiny Winter Jumpers***

Next time you are outside on a sunny winter day take a close look at the snow, especially where it has melted a bit around the base of trees or house foundations, for a small insect called the snow flea. Snow fleas will look like someone spilled pepper on the top of the snow but if you look closely you will see them moving.



The snow flea is one of the very few insects that remain active in the winter; they are believed to be feeding on fungal spores and algae on the surface of the snow. They have a unique compound in their body that basically serves as anti-freeze, allowing them to be active when most other insects, and humans, are seeking shelter.

Despite its name the snow flea is not a flea, it is part of a group of insects called springtails. Springtails are harmless insects found in damp areas where they feed on fungi and decaying organic matter. Springtails get their name from their ability to use a tail-like apparatus to jump. There are many different species of springtails, but most are not active in the winter. Springtails can also easily be found in the summer in the soil, under leaf litter, in decaying logs, and other areas that are moist with organic matter. Springtails are actually very abundant but tend to get overlooked because of their small size – less than a millimeter to several millimeters in length.

### **Sources:**

**Iowa State University, University Extension, Laura Jesse, Plant and Insect Diagnostic Clinic**

**Image:** courtesy of Jeff Hahn, University of Minnesota

## **How can you test seed for germination potential?**

A good activity for February is to test leftover seed for germination potential, especially if seed is more than a couple of years old, and if it was not stored properly. Wet a paper towel and lay 10 seeds on it, an inch from one edge; fold this edge over the seeds. Now roll the paper towel up from the other side. Tie at the top to make a "rag doll." Place the paper towel where it will stay warm (such as the top of the refrigerator), and keep moist. In a few days, unroll the towel to check germination percentage. This will give you an idea of whether to discard the seed and purchase fresh, whether to sow seed more heavily, or whether there is no reduction in germination and seed can be sown at a normal rate.

Source: Plantfacts, OSU, edu

# Snow Molds on Turf

Extended snow cover on ground that is not completely frozen is conducive to turf diseases called snow molds. Two snow mold diseases, gray snow mold and pink snow mold, typically appear at this time of year. Gray snow mold is caused by two species of the fungus *Typhula*, while pink snow mold is caused by the fungus *Microdochium nivale*.

Symptoms of snow molds first appear when snow melts in late winter or early spring. Circular, straw-colored patches appear in the lawn as the snow recedes. Patches caused by gray snow mold may be a few inches to a few feet in diameter, while those caused by pink snow mold tend to be smaller, less than six inches across. These patches may continue to enlarge if the grass remains cool and wet. Grass in the patch may be matted and wet, with pink or gray colored fungal growth over the patch or on the edge. Gray snow mold causes small, pinhead-sized round structures (sclerotia) to develop on the leaves and crowns of the grass plants.

Damage caused by snow mold usually is not serious, and affected areas typically green up eventually, though more slowly than the rest of the lawn. Raking the affected areas gently can help to dry them out and prevent further fungal growth. In some cases, affected areas will need to be overseeded if they fail to recover.



Problems with snow mold can be minimized in the future by:

- Avoiding excessive nitrogen fertilization in the fall
- Mowing the lawn at the recommended height throughout the fall
- Keeping the thatch layer to 1/2 inch or less
- Raking up fallen leaves in the fall
- Preventing excessive snow accumulation on problem areas, by using snow fencing and spreading out large snow piles to promote melting
- Applying fungicide late in the fall on golf courses and other high-value turfs

Source:

**Christine Engelbrecht, Plant Pathology,**  
Iowa State University, University  
Extension. Photo by Mark Carlton.



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