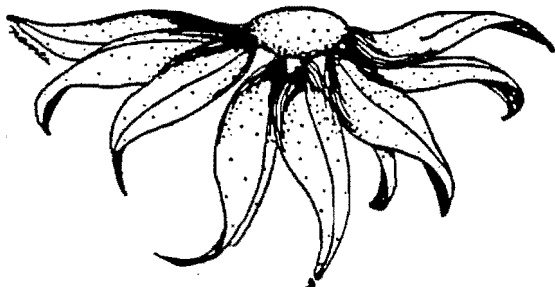


the wild ones



# The Outside Story

newsletter for natural landscapers

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Bayside, Wisconsin

## HERBICIDE DRIFT INTO MY PRAIRIE RESTORATION

Some of us are beginning to see lawn care services as a form of industry vandalism. This summer the east end of my now famous yard (U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT, 8/27/90) was accidentally sprayed with 2,4D. Not wanting to cause my neighbor undue stress, I went directly to the owner of the company whose employee had spot-sprayed the lawn bordering my garden. He appeared to be very surprised that this had happened. He said that this is the first time such an incident had ever occurred; that one of his most experienced men was responsible; that it must have been an unusual gust of wind, and if the flowers were cut half way down they would recover next year.

This was not acceptable to me. Almost a thousand people would be viewing the yard and I wanted to use the mishap as an educational lesson. I gave him two choices: 1 - Leave it as it is so that people who wished to cultivate a flower garden adjacent to a dandelion-free lawn could see what might happen and also observe how 2,4D distorts as it destroys vegetation, or 2 - Remove the twisted, bleached, drooped flowering plants and replace them with potted, nursery grown wildflowers to match the remainder of the unsprayed sand garden. He chose the latter. I submitted the bills one month later on August 17. Yesterday I received a fifty dollar check in the mail. He was surprised by the prices of the plants and will try to pay by installments.

*Lorrie Otto*



## GRASSES & SEDGES

Grasses once formed the foundation of the North American Prairie. Although there are many more species of prairie wildflowers, the plant community as a whole was dominated by a few very robust and adaptive native grasses. Five in particular stand out because of their longevity and ability to grow under a wide variety of soil and moisture conditions: Big Bluestem, Little Bluestem, Indiangrass, Switchgrass, and Prairie Dropseed. These grasses covered the greater part of the once vast Midwestern grasslands. In conjunction with over a hundred different wildflowers, they blanketed the center of the continent with an ocean of green that built some of the finest soils in the world. Their legacy today is the Corn Belt.

Despite the wholesale conversion of the prairie into cropland, these grasses have not disappeared. They are being planted today at an increasing rate for their attractive appearance and ease of care. Together with the wildflowers, native prairie grasses are excellent for conservation and wildlife habitat. But perhaps the most important of all, they are a living reminder of our inextricable link to Nature, the true source of all abundance and wealth.

### BIG BLUESTEM

*Andropogon gerardi*

The monarch of the prairie grasses. It is the most prevalent and widely distributed of all prairie grasses, and was largely responsible for the formation of the famous prairie sod. Growing three to eight feet tall, it thrives on a tremendous range of soils, from wet, poorly drained clay to dry open sand. In late August it produces its distinctive three-parted seed heads, which resemble a turkey foot. The lush green of the leaves and stems changes with the first frosts to an attractive reddish-copper color. Plants appear as individual clumps, but their roots mesh together to form a dense sod.

### LITTLE BLUESTEM

*Andropogon scoparius*

This is a very ornamental grass, widely used in landscaping. Much shorter than Big Bluestem, it grows two to three feet high. Little Bluestem is often used in plantings because it will not overshadow the prairie wildflowers, as can happen with dense plantings of the taller grasses. Coloration of the leaves ranges through a variety of blue and green hues, which complement one another nicely. These turn a striking bright red in the fall and are topped by fluffy silvery-white seedstalks. A patch of Little Bluestem waving in the wind is a truly wonderful sight. Grows best on medium and dry soils.

### INDIANGRASS

*Sorghastrum nutans*

The silky golden brown seedheads of this grass are a prominent aspect of the prairie in late summer. The second most important tallgrass next to Big Bluestem, Indiangrass grows rapidly and often matures in the second year after seeding. Does very well on any well-drained soil.

### SWITCHGRASS

*Panicum virgatum*

Turning light yellow in fall, this grass produces widely spreading conical seedheads. Its large, tough rhizomes are at home in a wide variety of soils. Switchgrass forms individual clumps on poor sites and a tight sod on fertile ground. Since this species can become aggressive, it should be seeded or planted locally, with plenty of competition. A thick stand of Switchgrass makes excellent winter and early spring wildlife cover, as it resists being knocked down by ice and snow. Grows three to five feet high.

### PRAIRIE DROPS EED

*Sporobolus heterolepis*

Prairie Dropseed produces a magnificent fountain of emerald green leaves. Adds a touch of elegance to almost any planting. Often considered to be the most handsome of the prairie grasses, it has a variety of landscaping uses. Makes a well defined and very distinctive border when planted eighteen to twenty-four inches apart. One year old plants grow slowly and will usually reach maturity in the second year after transplanting. The seedhead has a faint but unmistakable fragrance that can be detected by some people, but not by others. Plains Indians ground the seed to make a tasty and highly nutritious flour. Large landscaping size plants are available, and will mature the first year.

GRASS IS THE FORGIVENESS OF NATURE--  
Her constant benediction.

Fields trampled with battle, saturated with blood,  
torn with the ruts of cannon, grow green again  
with grass, and carnage is forgotten.

Streets abandoned by traffic become grass-grown  
like rural lanes, and are obliterated.

Forests decay, harvests perish, flowers vanish,  
but grass is immortal. Its tenacious fibers hold  
the earth in place, and prevent its soluble  
components from washing into the sea. It invades  
the solitude of deserts, climbs the inaccessible  
slopes and forbidding pinnacles of mountains,  
modifies climates, and determines the history,  
character and destiny of nations. Unobtrusive and  
patient, it has immortal vigor and aggression.  
Banished from the thoroughfare and the field, it  
bides its time to return and when vigilance is  
relaxed, or the dynasty has perished, it silently  
resumes the throne from which it has been  
expelled, but which it never abdicates. It bears  
no blazonry of bloom to charm the sense with  
fragrance or splendor, but its homely hue is more  
enchanting than the lily or the rose; it yields  
no fruit in earth or air, and yet would its  
harvest fail for a single year, famine would  
depopulate the earth.....

JOHN JAMES INGALLS-1872  
U.S. Senator, Kansas

# The Inside Story

Compiled by Janice Stiefel

## NEW ENGLAND ASTER

(*Aster novae-angliae*)  
Composite or Daisy Family



OTHER NAMES: Christmas Daisies, Eye of Christ, Starworts

HABITAT: Meadows, thickets, wet spots.. FLOWERING: August to October

DESCRIPTION: A large, leafy plant with bright lavender to purplish flower heads clustered at the ends of its branches. The 1 to 2 in. flower heads have 35-45 rays and yellow disk flowers. Beneath the flower heads are narrow, sticky, hairy bracts. The stout flower stalk has sticky hairs. Toothless, lanceolate, 1½ to 5 in. long leaves clasp the stem. Height is 3 to 7 ft.

COMMENTS: Because they bloom so late in the year, Asters are sometimes called Christmas Daisies. Asters were often burned to keep evil spirits away. A concoction of mashed Asters was thought to cure the bite of a mad dog. One herbalist wrote that "boiling Aster leaves in wine and placing them close to a hive of bees would improve the honey."

Asters are associated with elegance and daintiness. If they are picked in bloom and hung to dry, they will burst into fluffy seed heads and retain their color. If they are picked in the field, they will be coarser-looking and darker brown.

MEDICINAL USE: The Shakers used the plant to clear their complexions and ancient Greeks used it as an antidote for snake bites and to drive away snakes.

NAME ORIGIN: The Genus Name, Aster, comes from the Latin and Greek words for "star." The Species Name, novae-angliae (no-vee-ang'li-ee), means "from New England." In Germany, this plant is called "starworts" and in France it is called "Eye of Christ."

AUTHOR'S NOTE: It would be helpful to have a whole book devoted to Aster identification. Since there are more than 75 Aster species in the U.S., it is hard to identify some of them down to the species level. We have several on our property that I haven't been able to name.

Including the New England Aster, we have the White Heath Aster (*Aster ericoides*), Large-Leaved Aster (*Aster macrophyllus*), Prairie Aster (*Aster turbinellus*), Purple-Stemmed Aster (*Aster puniceus*), Small White Aster (*Aster vimineus*), and White Wood Aster (*Aster divaricatus*). We did not introduce any of these plants, they just appeared naturally because we didn't mow and the woodland ceased to be grazed.

As far as I know, most of the Asters growing in our area are natives, which means they were not introduced from Europe, Asia, or elsewhere. Restoring our land to natural plant communities is something in which we can all become involved. Using native trees, shrubs and plants in our home, school and business landscapes, result in a cumulative effect, adding millions of native plants to our environment.

The stability of our ecosystem is dependent on our native flora because it supports animal life, enriches the soil, and absorbs harmful chemicals in the air we breathe and the water we drink. In the words of David K. Northington, Ph.D, Executive Director of the National Wildflower Research Center, "Let's start repairing our environment one person and one plant at a time. It is our environment that we have all innocently had a part in damaging, and it is up to all of us to be a part of the solution."

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## NATURAL LANDSCAPER WINS CITY AWARD FOR NEIGHBORHOOD EDUCATION

The north Milwaukee suburb of Glendale, recently honored citizen environmental achievements in its first annual Glendale Beautification Awards ceremony. Mark Feider, Milwaukee Audubon Director, worked closely with Alderman Ray Gripentrog to develop award categories which would recognize not only aesthetics, but education and conservation as well.

Wild One member, Rochelle Whiteman, 6919 North Ironwood, was honored for sharing her environmental philosophy (and her plants) with her neighbors. Not a believer in straight edges, she has convinced her neighbors that the "flow of plants is better than the mow of plants." Many neighbors are following her lead in transforming the suburban plots into inviting naturalized areas. The Whiteman's paths have been enjoyed by many visitors on Lorrie's annual yard tour, as well as many Nicolet High School students.

The Resource Conservation Award was won by Lori and Mark Crawford, 865 West Montclair Avenue, whose north-facing yard of rolling woodchipped berms has been planted with every conifer native to the state of Wisconsin. On the south side they have planted every deciduous tree native to the state.

Awards were also given for Woodland/Wetland Plantings, Ornamental Herbs and Shrubs, Recycling Efforts, Commercial Landscaping, and Commercial Property Improvement. Winners received yard plaques.

A number of Wild Ones members participated in the project. Lorrie Otto reviewed judging criteria; Beverly Shapson participated as a judge; and Lucy Schumann hand-lettered certificates. Anyone interested in starting a similar program in their community contact: Glendale City Hall, 5909 North Milwaukee River Parkway, Glendale, WI 53209.



Nicolet High School teacher, Chris Kolb, and her third period biology class plant native grasses and wildflowers on the north end of school property. Neighbor Rochelle Whiteman initiated the project when she noticed an uncared for strip of land. (HERALD photo by Jack Plale.)

11/90

# Presidents' Notes ...



Greetings...Mark your calendar for the second Saturday in February, the date of the annual LANDSCAPE SEMINAR. This seminar promises to be informative for a range of gardeners, from the novice to the professional.

We will need people to staff the registration table, assist with audio visual work, help with our booth, or publicize the event. And yes...you can help without missing a single lecture. Give me a call, or let me know at the next meeting that you are willing to participate by sharing one of your talents.

Please complete the SURVEY included in this issue. The questions asked were designed to gather information not collected before. When you mail the survey to us, we will know you better and we will be better able to judge topics for articles for "Outside Story", choose speakers for meetings and seminars, and determine directions to take regarding community action. We will share information we receive on the cross section of our membership. We have designed the survey for ease of reply, but any additional comments are encouraged and welcomed. Even though the newsletter goes to 500 people, YOUR response to the survey is very important, and we look forward to hearing from you.

## About our Editor ....



Carol Chew has been actively involved in the Wild Ones since she, her husband, Dan, and daughter, Carrie, moved to Bayside from Oregon three years ago. She has been the Editor of The Outside Story since the second issue. In 1971, the Chews began using native landscaping around their new home near Sonoma, California. Water shortages did not affect their native plantings. Next, they moved to Hayden Island in the Columbia River (Portland, Oregon). Carol's new native woodland plant collection came from her Aunt Helen in Salem.

In Oregon, Carol learned that a few people can make a difference. Pivotal in her thinking and concern for the environment was her experience in Portland helping to lead a three year campaign to save a corridor of beautiful ravine leading into Tryon Creek State Park, Oregon's only urban state park.

Dan's work in public television brought the family to UWM and Milwaukee. One of the first week-ends after arriving in Milwaukee, Carol attended an Audubon Center workshop in order to learn about native Wisconsin plants. The Chews are currently working on naturalizing their Bayside yard.

Carol taught English, and was the journalism advisor at Napa High School in Napa, California. She is an active member of her new community, and has been very involved in the Fox Point/Bayside School District. Her interest in historic preservation has led her to work on Milwaukee's Turner Hall restoration and serve on the Frank Lloyd Wright Tourism Initiative sponsored by the State of Wisconsin and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Carol and Dan recently completed a video archives for the Village of Fox Point.

# From the Secretary ...

SEPTEMBER found us on a bus headed for Riveredge Nature Center in Newburg, Wisconsin. Center Director, Andy Larsen, spent the morning leading us on a tour of the Nature Center.

Andy started by telling us that although we would be seeing several areas that had been seeded with native prairie plants, he does not consider these areas in Riveredge to be "Prairie Restorations". He explained, while prairie seed can be planted to grow into prairie forbes and grasses seed cannot be planted to grow buffalo, caterpillars, butterflies, insects, birds, spiders, animals, soil microbes, or the infinite multitude of other life and the conditions that constituted a native prairie. He considers what has been done at Riveredge in terms of landscaping to suit the site using native prairie plants. Hopefully an environment will be created which will encourage the other components of a prairie. We learned that one prairie plant species supports about five species of animals and/or insects. To give the insects and animals time to escape from a man made prairie burn, we should burn into the wind.

Andy reminded us that every year in the life of a prairie is different - that's what's exciting! Some of the land was seeded over fifteen years ago, and there is still something new to see springing up from the original seedings.

What happens to a site planting also reflects the past use of the site - what was done to the land previously. The importance of reducing soil disturbance and minimizing land management was stressed. He explained that while the parking lot in front of Riveredge's new building was a "necessary evil" covered in asphalt for practicality, responsibility was felt for the surface water runoff. Therefore a "surface, water retention basin" known as "the puddle or pond" was created in front of the parking lot. The sloping land around the pond was seeded in prairie forbes and grasses with a heavy emphasis on the pioneer plants, Black-eyed Susans and Primrose. These two plants will blossom and provide color while the other plants are still getting established. An annual cover crop of blue flax and annual rye was also used effectively here.

OCTOBER: Once again our annual see gathering and aster dig was held. The seed gatherer people were divided between two sites, and the asters were dug not far from the Audubon Center. This was a tough decision for some of us - to gather or to dig?

The Milwaukee Public Museum is in search of people who will help contribute specimen plants for the annual Wildflower Show for display. Potted native specimen plants set in the ground in the fall and brought to the museum for display will be return to you. Should you wish to participate we encourage you to contact Neil Luebke, coordinator of this project. 414/278-2711.

