

a voice
for the natural
landscaping
movement



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Celebrating natives
plant and natural
landscapes
since 1979.

From Lawns to Sock Gardens: My, How Seeds Do Travel

Next Generation

By Barbara Bray – Oakland (MI) Chapter

My mind is usually tuned out when I sit atop our mower, chopping down the weeds and grass that make up our backyard lawn. One early summer day, however, I almost crashed into a bush as I suddenly veered out of the way of a small plant growing in a spot where some grass had died. I managed to cut a circle around it and returned later to identify the mystery plant. The plant was only about five inches tall with coarsely toothed leaves, similar to those of stinging nettles. The stem felt somewhat square to the touch. A quick look in my Newcomb's guide led me to confirm my discovery. Nothing fancy, nothing rare – but it was a native plant – white vervain (*Verbena urticifolia*) with its own uniqueness and its own story.



I ran excitedly inside and dragged my two children outside to see the vervain. They gazed quizzically at me trying to understand why this plant was so special. We walked to the back of our yard and I showed them a few other vervain plants growing in the wooded strip along the stream. I asked them how they thought the new plant had ended up so far from the parent plants. We soon had a guessing game about how seeds travel, and we came up with two likely possibilities. A deer or other animal could have transported it on its fur or in mud crusted on its feet, or maybe the seed stuck on my shoe one of the times I walked through the yard. That simple, not very exciting plant turned into a lesson on how seeds travel by animals, wind, water, and birds. That plant also earned a place in one of my gardens for being such a tenacious little survivor.

In the spirit of learning about how seeds travel, take your child on a special walk in his or her socks! Using an old pair of socks, wet them on the bottoms and then help him or her put them on. Walk through the grass or through your garden (with your guidance, of course!) until the bottoms of the socks are covered with dirt and seeds. Then take them off carefully and place in the bottom of an aluminum loaf pan or other container. Cover the socks, dirt sides up, with about an inch of soil. Place outside or inside in a sunny location. Let your child water her own new "sock garden" and watch as she learns about the wonders of nature!

For more information on how seeds travel, check out the following books:

Newcomb's Wildflower Guide. Lawrence Newcomb. Little, Brown & Co.: ISBN 0-316-60442-9.

How Seeds Travel. Cynthia Overbeck. Lerner Publications – Company: Minneapolis. 1982.

Seeds Pop, Stick, Glide. Patricia Lauber. Crown Publishers: New York. 1981.