

a voice
for the natural
landscaping
movement



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Celebrating natives
plant and natural
landscapes
since 1979.

The Grapevine

By Maryann Whitman

Confrontation with Dow's Confront

While compost is usually seen as a natural alternative to chemical fertilizers, many communities were surprised to find that their local compost supplies were contaminated with the herbicide clopyralid, making compost toxic to many plants, including asters and goldenrods. Clopyralid, the active ingredient in Dow Chemical's herbicide Confront, is mobile in soil and water, allowing it to persist in the environment.

To address this issue, the Washington State Department of Agriculture banned the use of the herbicide on lawns and turf.

Holiday gift ideas

From Horticulture magazine... DecoColor Permanent Paint Markers – with extra fine points – are recommended as the only garden marking pens that are resistant to water and ultra-violet rays.

I can vouch for severe fading of printing by a Sharpie Permanent Marker, after about a year. Something I have found that works very well is wax pencil on plastic markers and 2B (soft) pencil on matte metal. I get my metal markers from Paw Paw Everlast Label, P.O. Box 93-T, Paw Paw, MI 49079; sales@everlastlabel.com.

Recycling

Recycle vinyl mini-blinds for marker sticks. Cut to desired length and with a point at one end, they last indefinitely except if fire is used as a management tool. The ink in Sharpie pens does not last on mini-blinds either, but perhaps DecoColor does. Five years after planting and marking with the miniblind, when a prairie plant at last made its presence known, I knew it was my planting by the stick next to it, even though the script had long faded.

Think twice about wild grape

There is no question that a strong, thick grapevine can kill a tree by shading the leaves of the tree. But consider this: the death of mature trees is part of a natural process, allowing sunlight to reach the ground level through a dense canopy, and making room for young trees.

Consider also the birds that feed on the fruit; the shelter the vines provide, and the birds that use the shreds of grapevine bark to build their nests.

It takes a number of years of growth before a grapevine starts producing fruit. Consider leaving a few that are not climbing your favorite trees.

Read in fall, 2003 issue of The Nature Conservancy

In his recently published book, *Win-Win Ecology: How the Earth's Species Can Survive in the Midst of Human Enterprise*, author Michael Rosenzweig makes the case that traditional reserves, parks refuges and other designated natural areas,

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will, at best, secure roughly 5 percent of the world's species. In a review of the book, renowned Stanford conservation biologist Gretchen Daily writes, "A world in which conservation effort is sequestered in a minor fraction of the earth's surface will be a biologically inhospitable world. Save biodiversity in a hostile sea of development? You bet. However absurd or offensive this idea might seem, it is the only option."

I wonder if she knows about Wild Ones' philosophy and efforts.

Fire has cleansing properties

University of Florida researchers say that fire may be a key to dogwood anthracnose resistance. They've found that trees in the wild survive the disease better in areas that have been previously subject to forest fires. Results of further research may lead to controlled burns to help protect the trees, which have been threatened by the anthracnose epidemic. It's estimated that the disease has killed 90% of the native East Coast *Cornus florida* populations since the late 1970s. For more info go to <http://extlab1.entnem.ufl.edu/PestAlert/dogwood.htm>.

Something else we need to think about

We Wild Ones members have long been aware of how appropriate and useful fire can be in the management of some ecosystems, like prairies, savannahs, woodlands and even forests. (There are notable exceptions to the usefulness of fire in some parts of the country.) Among other beneficial effects, it helps control the incursion of invasive aliens, and it reduces the density of non-fire tolerant species (both native and non-native), thereby promoting the rehabilitation of shade intolerant species. By understanding the benefits of fire we are able to perceive the resulting blackened earth and dead and dying trees as part of a natural and necessary progression of events that benefits the ecosystem and promotes biodiversity.

I recall the shock that rippled through the nation in 1988 when the land management people of Yellowstone National Park opted toward the end of the summer of that year to let the fires "burn themselves out." That may have been the first time this generation had heard of such a thing. We had grown up with Smokey the Bear and the notion that fire was the enemy and here was a National

Park letting the enemy win. The action bordered on un-American activity. However, those of us who listened to the rationale behind this decision and subsequently followed the recovery in Yellowstone learned how useful the "enemy" could be when handled with care. Foresters have been educated about the benefits of fire since the late 1960s.

It seems now that the education needs to reach the ears of the public who only see the immediate aftereffects of a burn or fire. Just as we Wild Ones members have been instrumental in spreading the word about the deleterious effects of invasive aliens, about the benefits of using native plants in our landscapes, and about the benefits of reducing the amount of mowed lawn in our landscapes, we need also to spread the word about the benefits of fire to ecosystems and to biodiversity.

Recently the Wisconsin DNR was ordered to remove dead trees left behind by a permitted, controlled burn. The public did not understand the natural progression that was being incited, and saw only the "ugly" carcasses that spoke of death and invoked thoughts of disease.

It is possible that we who burn and promote the use of fire as a tool need to take into account the sensibilities of a public that does not "see with our eyes," a public whose perceptions are based on another set of lessons. Just as we have been working to educate ourselves and our neighbors on the writing and interpretation of weed ordinances, and the visual acceptability of naturally landscaped yards we now need to do the same regarding the benefits of fire in some ecological circumstances.

Mandy Ploch, Milwaukee-North (WI) Chapter, was fortunate to be able to horseback ride in the Bob Marshall Wilderness (MT) two years after the big fires. The beauty was surreal with the sun shining silver and grey off the standing burned tree trunks and the floor carpeted entirely in magenta fireweed. "It was a lovely two-color composition I will always remember. I look forward to returning there in 2004 to see the changes time has wrought."

I'd be pleased to hear from other Journal readers about this subject. Feel free to e-mail me at editor@for-wild.org.

Maryann Whitman is a member of the Oakland (MI) Chapter and the Journal's editor-in-chief.