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Yellow Coneflower (Ratibida pinnata) B. Bradburn

August 2024

SEEDLINGS

Wild Ones|Kalamazoo Area Chapter

"There can be no purpose more enspiriting than to begin the age of restoration, reweaving the wondrous diversity of life that still surrounds us." —E.O. Wilson



Spotted Joe-Pye Weed (E. maculatum) B. Bradburn

Dear *|FNAME|*,

We have two inspiring stories of garden creation for you this month, one conveyed in images (find a link to the video below) and a second narrated in this newsletter. And if you want more stories of native gardens, join us for two more member garden tours, one on [August 5](#) and the other [tentatively scheduled for August 28](#). You can also review the garden stories from previous tours by visiting [our event schedule page](#) and clicking on the member garden tours links. And you'll appreciate the story of Ilse Gebhard's experiments with container milkweed along an extra tough (in this editor's opinion) native flora ID quiz this month.

Beth Bradburn
Editor

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From the Editor

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Editor

If you've missed any of our previous presentations, not to worry.

Visit the KAWO YouTube channel, where you can view our programs at your convenience.

[*Click Here to visit our YouTube channel*](#)

You can also click on the small red YouTube icon above,
underneath the Table of Contents.

Past issues of Seedlings can be found [here](#), and by clicking the link between the
Facebook and YouTube links above.

A Transformation Beautifully Documented

KAWO member Bart Litjens created a beautiful four-minute video showing how he and his family transformed their suburban yard into a wildlife garden with native plants. When a nearby bog dried up after the construction of a school, Bart wanted to restore habitat for the frogs and other animals that used the bog. Drawing on the design principles of Joel Ashton, Bart constructed a pond in March 2023. “Within a year,” he says, “our garden came alive with many more birds, insects and frogs.” Check out his inspiring video [here](#). You are also invited to contact Bart through his YouTube channel to learn more.

Container Gardening—Milkweeds

Ilse Gebhard

When I was giving talks on Monarchs or attending events with my Monarch exhibit, I was sometimes asked if milkweeds could be grown in pots. Often the inquirers were living in apartments or condos with balconies or patios where they had flowering plants in pots or hanging baskets. After years of saying “I don’t know” I decided to find out.



A. incarnata in pots R. Schipper

Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*) seemed to be the logical species to start with. Unlike Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) with its deep taproot, Swamp Milkweed has relatively shallow roots and it does not spread by rhizomes like Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*). Therefore, in spring 2018 I planted four second-year swamp milkweed plants into 8" diameter clay pots and set them on our deck right next to a native plant flowerbed. The plants had been overwintered in our garage as plugs and each put up two stems, the tallest of which was just over two feet by the end of summer.



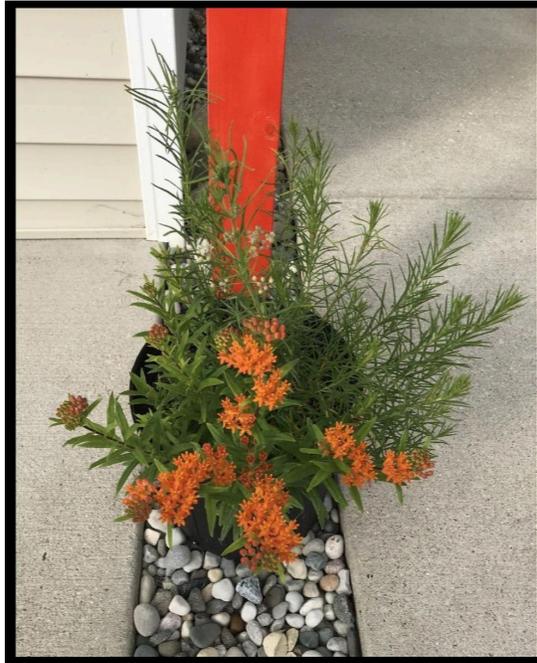
Monarch eggs laid on Swamp Milkweed leaves I. Gebhard

I called them my “Magic Swamps” as Monarchs (*Danaus plexippus*) found them very inviting and laid many eggs on them. None bloomed. After a second winter in our garage, all four plants put up sprouts, two of which grew into respectable plants that bloomed and two that stayed shorter and did not bloom. Again, Monarchs laid eggs on all four plants.

By fall the plants were found to be root-bound and, with plans to move in a year or two, I decided to end the experiment by planting them in the ground. I suspect that if they had been transplanted into bigger pots before overwintering a third time, they might have survived and thrived in pots the following year.

After moving in 2021, I was ready in 2023 to try growing other milkweeds in pots. Where we now live, most residents have fancy flowerpots with annuals on either side of their garage door. Mike and Carol Klug gave me a 5-gallon plastic pot to place beside our garage door. While not fancy like our neighbors’ pots, it held one Butterfly Weed and two Whorled Milkweeds (*Asclepias verticillata*). The plants were first-year plugs, germinated from seed the past winter and raised in spring in their hoop house. Both species did extremely well, with Butterfly Weed blooming before Whorled Milkweed. Some of the potting mix was recovered from germination trays and I was forewarned of possible “extra” plants. Sure enough, a seedling of Common Milkweed came up in the pot as well and was eaten to the

ground by a very hungry monarch caterpillar before I discovered it. Not wanting the caterpillar to spoil my experiment by consuming the Butterfly and Whorled Milkweeds, I relocated it to some Common Milkweed in another location.



Left: Butterfly Weed in pot. Note Butterfly Weed blooming before Whorled Milkweed.

Right: Whorled Milkweed in pot. Note Whorled Milkweed blooming after Butterfly Weed set seed.

Photos R. Schipper

If you look closely at the photo of the Whorled Milkweed in bloom, you will notice that the flowers attracted a number of small insects. Dr. Ann Fraser, Professor of Biology at Kalamazoo College, identified them as a species of Sweat Bees (*Lasioglossum* sp).

I overwintered the 5-gallon pot with the Butterfly and Whorled Milkweeds in our garage, and in late April placed it outside again. By late May the Whorled Milkweed had emerged and was growing nicely but the Butterfly Weed had not emerged. I did not expect the seedling Common Milkweed that had been eaten to the ground to survive and indeed it did not emerge in spring. At our former home I found Monarch caterpillars on Whorled Milkweed growing in our yard, so as with the Swamp Milkweed in pots, I would expect Whorled Milkweed in pots to attract Monarchs. At the very least its flowers were found to be a good nectar source for sweat bees. Chances of attracting Monarchs would be enhanced if some other good native nectar plants in pots were also present. For some keystone nectar species suitable for growing in pots in our area see [this guide](#) from [Homegrown National Park](#).

Creating a Native Garden

Molly Williams

In 2014, several Kalamazoo faith communities began a discussion of how they could respond positively to increasingly bad news about climate change and other environmental concerns. The organization, [Hope for Creation](#), developed many initiatives promoting ideas to save energy and resources and promote climate justice. Among these was development of community gardens—not only to grow healthful local food, but for other purposes like managing storm water and providing habitat for pollinators and other insects that had experienced severe population declines due to climate change and habitat loss.

Our church, First United Methodist, on Park Street across from Bronson Park, seemed like a good site to demonstrate what a garden of native plants would look like. The plan was to replace about 600 square feet of lawn with plants that would have been part of the oak savanna habitat that was in this region prior to European settlement—an area of mostly open grassland with forbs and occasional oak trees. Our first hurdle was to persuade the church trustees that bees wouldn't pose a threat to children in the nearby play area of a daycare center. And we had to secure some funding both from private donations and from the Nancy Small Memorial Fund. A consultant, Steve Allen, offered advice on garden design.

The project began in summer 2017 with solarizing to kill the turf grass. A layer of cardboard and landscape cloth was laid and secured with landscape staples, where it remained until the following spring. When the layer was removed in May 2018, the turfgrass was dead, although there were some dandelion roots that appeared ready to revive and had to be dug out.

Planting was in early June 2018, with plugs purchased from Hidden Savanna. During this first season, we kept the plants watered, and we removed uninvited invasive plants—encroaching turfgrass, thistles, wild lettuce, dandelions, and others whose seeds had blown in or been brought by birds. A few late season plants bloomed as they became established that first season.



Above is a picture of what it looked like in early July 2019, just a year after planting. But then we got very bad news. The adjacent building, First Church of Christ Scientist, was to be demolished. For safety reasons, the fence that would surround the demolition operation would also enclose our garden. The garden would be inaccessible for the rest of the 2019 season. It was inevitable that bricks and broken concrete would fall onto the plants, and heavy construction equipment would drive over the garden. We quickly relocated a few plants to what we hoped would be the safer end of the garden plot. We found new homes for some, but many others were left to their fate inside the demolition fence. For the rest of the summer and fall, we could peer through the fence and look at the plants, but they were beyond our reach. By the time we could return to assess the damage and care for the plants, it was November of 2019. There wasn't much foliage left above ground, and all we could do was wait for spring.

We all know what happened in spring of 2020. Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdown prevented us from leaving our homes. Again, there was an extended period of gardening neglect that continued till late 2021, when we could finally return to do some tending.

Amazingly, we found that the plants were doing just fine on their own. The three native grasses had spread—almost too much in some areas. The purple spiked Hoary Vervain was sufficiently robust to have spread out of the garden bed into the surrounding lawn. Bees were frequent visitors. A wasp was found exploring the Rattlesnake Master flower heads.

So, while there were more than two years of abuse and neglect, the plants spent their time alone sinking their roots and becoming established. These are deeply rooted perennials with roots that can reach many feet deep into the ground.



There are now enough established milkweed plants (both Common Milkweed and Butterfly Milkweed) to qualify as both a [Monarch Waystation](#) and a Native Plant Butterfly Garden, part of the [Million Pollinator Garden Movement](#). We're working to restore a path that in the original layout allowed visitors to reach the middle of the garden, where a magnificent Compass Plant reaches for the sky above other colorful lower-growing natives. Perhaps we'll add a bench in one corner for visitors who would like to sit for a while. Overall, we are pleased with the result of this experiment in gardening with native Michigan plants. Visitors to Kalamazoo's Bronson Park can see this garden across Park Street behind the Bronson Park band shell.

Photos M. Williams

[A Public Survey about the Kalamazoo River](#)

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission has begun the second phase of its Kalamazoo River Urban Wild Life Corridor Project, in which it will "develop a regional plan that focuses on identifying and prioritizing areas for restoration and enhancement." The commission is seeking public input through a survey that will remain open through September 15. To answer the survey, click [here](#) or scan the QR code in the image below.

Kalamazoo River Urban Wildlife Corridor Survey

Help enhance the Kalamazoo River Corridor in Kalamazoo County by providing your input on:

- Increasing recreational opportunities
- Improving water quality
- Creating educational opportunities
- Restoring and protecting habitat
- Identifying cultural + historical landmarks
- Cleaning up contaminated sites
- And More!

SCAN ME



Share your thoughts in the survey by scanning the QR code or using the link below:
www.surveymonkey.com/r/KzooWildlifeCorridor

Survey closes
September 15,
2024

Who Am I?

A native flora ID quiz from Ilse Gebhard





Photos R. Schipper

Click [here](#) for the answer!

Community Events of Interest

Thursday, August 1 - 7:00pm: Pints and Native Plants, an informal meet-up at [Brewery Outré](#) in Kalamazoo. [Learn more.](#)

Saturday, August 3 - 2:00pm-4:00pm: "Hope for Our Planet," a Kalamazoo Lyceum conversation, Kalamazoo Public Library. [Learn more and RSVP.](#)

Monday, August 5 - 6:00pm-8:00pm: KAWO member garden tours, Texas Township. [Learn more.](#)

Saturday, August 10 - 9:00am-12:00pm: Wild Rice Workshop, Pierce Cedar Creek Institute. [Learn more and register.](#)

Sunday, August 11 - 10:00am-12:00pm: Volunteer Day, Kleinstuck Preserve. Meet at the Maple Street YMCA tennis courts.

Sunday, August 11 - 12:00pm: [Reforest Vine](#) garden/tree tour, Vine Neighborhood. Meet in the 500 block of Village Street (near Martini's). Walking shoes suggested. Participants will receive free milkweed.

Friday, August 16 - 10:00am-12:00pm: KAWO Community Projects work day, Axtell Creek. [Learn more.](#)

Monday, August 19 - 6:30pm-8:30pm: Flat Iron Lake Nature Preserve Tour, Wild Ones River City event. [Learn more.](#)

Wednesday, August 21 - 10:00am-12:00pm: KAWO Community Projects work day, Northglade School. [Learn more.](#)

Wednesday, August 28: KAWO member garden tours, Winchell Neighborhood. **This date is tentative.** Please check our [website](#) or [Facebook page](#) for updates.

Saturday, August 31 - 10:00am-12:00pm: Michigan Botanical Society field trip to Sugarwood Forest, Berrien County. [Learn more.](#)

Editor's note: If you know of any local events pertaining to native plants that you feel may interest our readers, please send them along to us at the address below. Thanks!

What's Happening at the National Office

Check out our [National Office web site](#)

To read the most recent reports from the board of directors,

[Log In to the Member Only Area.](#)

Thank you for your interest and support of Wild Ones!

Not a member? [Click Here](#) for information on how you can support Wild Ones.

SEEDLINGS is edited by Beth Bradburn. It appears mostly monthly.
The next regular issue will arrive in August. **Deadline for the August issue is July 20.**

[Contact the editor](#)

Contributing Editor:

Ilse Gebhard

To share comments and suggestions, simply reply to this email.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Find more information and news at www.KalamazooWildOnes.org

and www.Facebook.com/KalamazooAreaWildOnes



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