

SEEDLINGS - Kalamazoo Area Wild Ones Newsletter - August 2026

"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



Nodding wild onion (*Allium cernuum*)

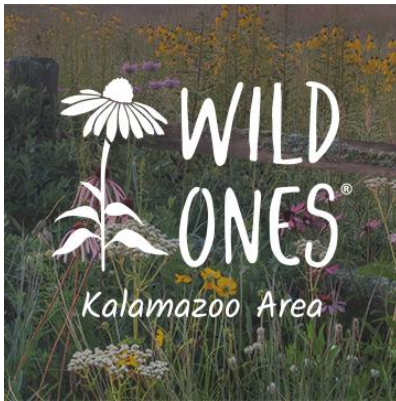
Dear friend,

Continuing the larval news from last month: I was wandering around in the garden a few weeks ago when my eye was drawn to the pearly everlasting. Sure enough, there was an American lady (*Vanessa virginiensis*) caterpillar hanging out among the pearls! A welcome sight after the extremes of this season. Enjoy the August newsletter.

Beth Bradburn, editor



New Facebook Group for KAWO Members



We've formed a private Facebook group so that Kalamazoo Area Wild Ones can keep in touch and help each other between in-person events. This is the (virtual) place to go if you want to exchange plants or other items, ask Kalamazoo-region-specific questions about gardening, or share your successes and challenges with other Wild Ones. Click on the link below to join. You'll need to answer a few required questions so we can connect you to your Wild Ones membership.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1373046128300013>

August Garden Tour

About twenty-five of you made the journey out to Hickory Corners for our July garden tour! Our second garden tour of the summer will be on **Wednesday, August 26, from 6 to 8 pm** in the East Arcadia neighborhood of Kalamazoo. (This is the neighborhood just west of WMU's campus, bounded by West Michigan Avenue, Howard Street, Arboretum Parkway, and Dobbin Drive.)

This will be an easy walking tour of five residential gardens within a few blocks of each other. Save the date! We'll post a map along with the gardeners' stories on our website, and we'll send it to you mid-month.



Wildflower Identification Guides

by Ilse Gebhard

When I retired in 1995, I was going to do some serious wildflower identification. Until then I had used *A Field Guide to Wildflowers of Northeastern/Northcentral North America*, by Roger Tory Peterson and Margaret McKenny. This guide is subdivided by (1) flower color, (2) general shape or structure, and (3) distinctions between similar species. As a beginner, I found the

“general shape or structure” subdivision of the guide confusing, and so I would just page through the appropriate color section and look at the drawings until I found a match.

While this was very time consuming, I did find one feature of the guide very helpful. It was the use of arrows pointing at important features to look for when trying to identify a species. This feature is used in other guides in the Peterson series, being wildflower, bird, or whatever the subject of the guide.

Wanting to make my endeavor of identifying wildflowers more efficient, I looked for a different book—a book of the same, easy-to-carry size, but with a key (system of identification) that would lead me more directly to the answer. On the recommendation of Emma Pitcher, author of *Ramblings* and *Of Woods and Other Things*, I purchased *Newcomb's Wildflower Guide*, written by Lawrence Newcomb and illustrated by Gordon Morrison. It covers not only wildflowers but also shrubs and vines of northeastern and north-central North America.



Wild geranium having 5 regular parts (S. Hodapp)

Newcomb's key is based on three classifications: flower type, plant type, leaf type. The first step in the key is still the flower, but its shape rather than its color. Is the shape defined as irregular, like that of an orchid? Or does it have regular parts of same-shaped petals, like wild geranium? Or are the parts so small that they are indistinguishable, as in boneset?

In the second step the book asks if the plant is a wildflower, shrub, or vine. If it is a wildflower, how are the leaves, if present, attached to the stem? Are they attached opposite to each other as in common milkweed, or alternately, as in butterfly weed? Or are they in a whorl, as in whorled milkweed?



Common milkweed with leaves attached to the stem opposite each other (R. Schipper)



The third step asks for leaf shape, from smooth edges, as in wild blue phlox, to having teeth, like hoary vervain, or lobes, like broad-leaved waterleaf, to being divided, as in wild lupine.

Divided leaves of wild lupine (R. Schipper)

At each of the three steps there is an assigned one-digit section number, generating a three-digit group number, which is then used in the locator key to find the page, or closely following pages, where the plant is shown. The above sounds complicated at first, especially without the book in front of you, but once you have learned the system it is very efficient.



Of note is that plants in the same species can have slight variations, often noted in guide books. For example, in *Newcomb's* the color of swamp milkweed flowers is noted as pink to rose-purple, wild senna's leaves have between five and nine pairs of leaflets, and the lower leaves of tall coreopsis are divided into three, four, or five leaflets.

Wild senna with six pairs of leaflets (range 5–9)

Book Review: *The Story of the First Pawpsicle*

by Mel Luna

The Story of the First Pawpsicle by Ariel Ojibway, illustrated by Stephanie Babij (Fifth Avenue Press, 2025).

Follow a young boy named Wabooz (Rabbit) into the woods and bogs of the Great Lakes region after a freak snowstorm in September. Adventure along with him as inspiration gives way to innovation!

Written in the conversational style of oral traditions, the story is peppered with a handful of Anishinaabemowin words that allow the reader to imagine the meaning from the context. A glossary of terms, an introduction to the Anishinaabe people, information about Pawpaws, and a recipe for Pawpsicles (Paw Paw popsicles) follow after the story.



Beautifully illustrated and masterfully written, this is a first-rate addition to any native plant enthusiast's library. It's also a joy to read again and again, making it perfect for entertaining the

young ones in your life. I hope this delightful and instructive book makes its way into many hands and hearts.

American Columbo—Confusing to a Beginner Botanist

by Ilse Gebhard



American columbo plant (S. Hodapp)

All species but one were puny in size compared to the plant before me. All details of my plant matched the one in *Newcomb's*, except instead of four leaves in a whorl, mine had five. It had to be American columbo (*Frasera caroliensis*), but why the extra leaf? I kept counting them over and over again.

American columbo flower (K. Martin)



The basal rosette of large leaves of “my plant” looked just like several that I had noticed in previous years, and that had never bloomed. (Note the basal rosettes with no flower stalks behind the flowering specimen in the photo above.) We did have a three-volume set of Edward G. Voss’s *Michigan Flora* at home and it confirmed that American columbo spends several years as a basal

rosette before putting up a flowering stalk. It also said that the plant would die after flowering this once. But no mention of extra leaves.



Note the five leaves in the whorl (S. Hodapp)

Hoping to get an answer for why my American columbo plant had an extra leaf, I contacted Dr. Richard Pippen, who taught botany at Western Michigan University. His answer was “plants do strange things.” And I would have to agree. For example, after looking at thousands of common milkweed plants with leaves attached to stems in pairs opposite each other, one year I came across a plant that had three leaves in a whorl.

Who Am I? A Native Fauna ID Quiz from Ilse Gebhard



Visit [iNaturalist](https://www.inaturalist.org) for the answer!

(photo by Ilse Gebhard)

Community Events of Interest

Saturday, August 8, 10am–12pm. Michigan Botanical Society Field Trip to Oak Barrens, Fort Custer State Recreation Area. [Visit event web page.](#)

Saturday, August 8, 2–3pm. Prairie Power Guided Hike, Kalamazoo Nature Center. [Visit event web page.](#)

Sunday, August 9, 10am–12pm. Volunteer Workday, Kleinstuck Preserve. [Visit event web page.](#)

Wednesday, August 12, 6:30–8pm. PDL Monarch Waystation Tour, Portage District Library. Registration required. [Visit event web page.](#)

Saturday, August 15, 10am–12pm. Butterfly Walk, Chipman Preserve. [Visit event web page.](#)

Monday, August 17, 6:30–8pm. Wild Ones River City Program: “The Importance of Riparian Buffer Zones,” Rogue River Park, Belmont, MI. [Visit event web page.](#)

Thursday, August 20, 7pm. Pints and Native Plants, Brewery Outré. [Visit event web page.](#)

Tuesday, August 25, 5:30–7pm. Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy Pollinator Hike, Chipman Preserve. Register by August 24. [Visit event web page.](#)

Wednesday, August 26, 6:00–8:00pm. KAWO member garden tour, East Arcadia neighborhood.

Saturday, August 29, 10–11am. Summer Fungus Walk, Kalamazoo Nature Center. [Visit event web page.](#)

SEEDLINGS appears mostly monthly and is edited by Beth Bradburn. Ilse Gebhard is Contributing Editor. The next regular issue will arrive in September. Submission deadline is August 20.

[Contact the editor](#)

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