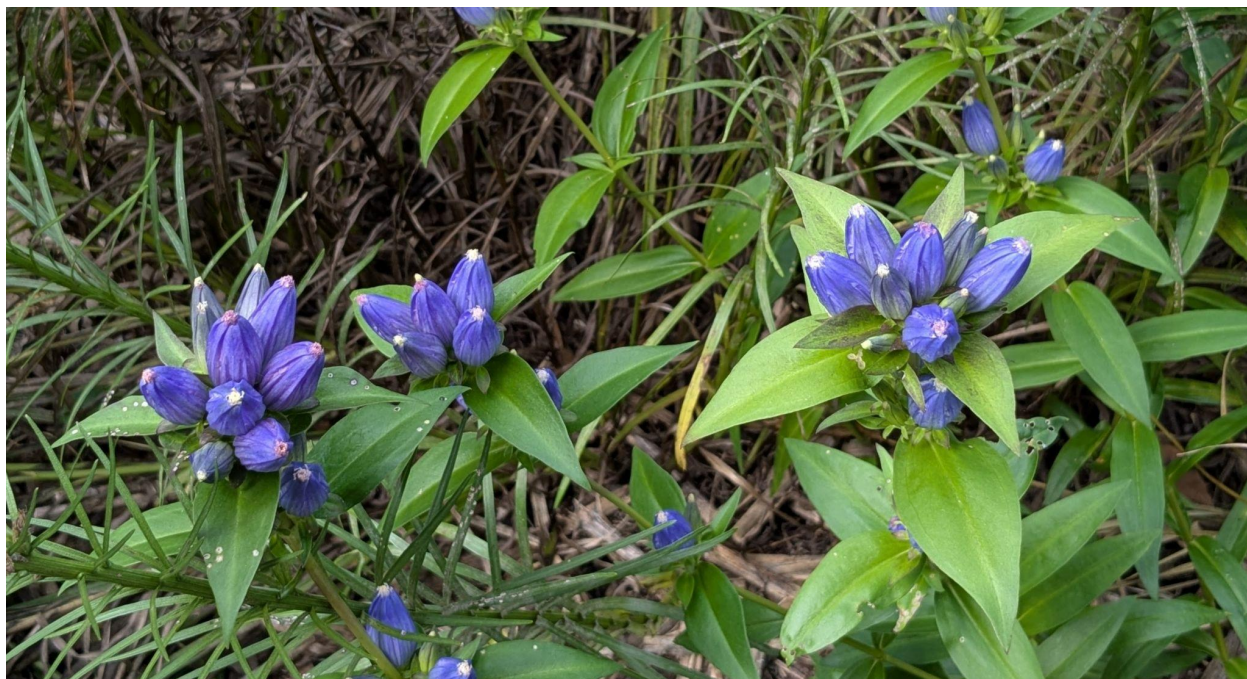


SEEDLINGS - Kalamazoo Area Wild Ones Newsletter - September 2026

"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



Bottle gentian (*Gentiana Andrewsii*)

Dear friend,

We were so glad to see fifty or so of you at the August garden tour! It was really gratifying and inspiring to show and talk about our native plants with so many interested people. My only regret is that I didn't get to tour the other four gardens in our neighborhood. The other hosts reported that they enjoyed having people visit their gardens as much as we did.

These bottle gentians attracted a lot of attention. There are numerous bumblebees around—so far none have pried their way into the closed flowers, but I'm hoping to be there when one does.

Beth Bradburn, editor

September KAWO Events



We have some wonderful events lined up for September! Our annual [Fall Plant Exchange](#) will be held at Crane Park on **Sunday, September 6, from 1:00 to 4:00pm**. You don't have to bring plants to take some home, and we'll have folks there to help you choose the right plants for your site. If you do have extra native plants, please donate them to the exchange. You can drop them off starting at 9:00 on Sunday morning. Whether you're looking to get plants, give plants, or both, please visit our website to read a few instructions about the exchange.

Later that week, Native Landscapes founder Randy Counterman will guide us through native plant restoration at Milham Park. The field trip is **Thursday, September 10, at 6:00pm**.

And finally, our in-person monthly programs are back! On **Wednesday, September 23**, we will welcome Sharon Gill and Jacklyn Brickman to present "Coalesce: Science and Art Collaborations to Foster Environmental Engagement." The program starts at **6:30pm at Portage District Library**. Doors open at 6:00 for social time.

Check [our website](#) for updates and details about these September events.

New Online Native Plant Finder

by Ilse Gebhard

A new online native plant finder, *Plants for Monarchs*, was recently announced by the Xerxes Society for Invertebrate Conservation that will increase awareness of native plants that support monarchs. Currently, this resource provides plant information for locations in the lower forty-eight US states, but they hope to eventually provide the same information for locations in Canada and Mexico.

An international nonprofit organization, the Xerxes Society protects the natural world through the conservation of invertebrates and



their habitats. The name comes from the now-extinct Xerces blue butterfly (*Glaucopsyche xerces*), the first butterfly known to go extinct in North America as a result of human activities. The Xerces blue's habitat was destroyed by development in the sand dunes of San Francisco, and the species was declared extinct by the 1940s. The Xerces Society was founded in 1971 by Robert Michael Pyle, a lepidopterist and conservationist dedicated to invertebrate conservation.

You start the plant finder by entering your location on plantsformonarchs.org to generate a list of native plants near you known to be important for monarchs as nectar or host plants. There is a profile for each plant that includes a photo and a map of where the species occurs, along with species attributes such as height, color, bloom time, soil moisture needs, and more. You can filter the list by the plant attributes to help you choose what to plant.



The milkweeds, as caterpillar host plants, are limited to monarchs and only a few other butterfly and moth species. But they are excellent nectar plants for pollinators in themselves, as are the plants listed as nectar plants.

Sweat bees (*Lasioglossum* sp) on swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*) - R. Schipper

The plant profiles also include a list of native plant suppliers nearby. When purchasing plants, it is highly recommended that you use a nursery that grows its plants from locally sourced seeds, or at least from the same eco-region where you are going to plant them. If the nursery does not disclose their seed source on their website, ask them. The same goes for seeds, especially if you order them online.

There are two basic criteria for the suppliers listed on the *Plants for Monarchs* website: (1) their general inventory is accessible online at a URL, and (2) they have a profile in the [Xerces Native Plant, Seed, and Services Directory](#).

There is an option to submit feedback and questions about the *Plants for Monarchs* website; please click on the “Send Feedback” button at the top right of the page. The tool will be updated periodically, with additional supplier information as well as new monarch nectar plant data.

Not All Yellow Bears Are Yellow

by Ilse Gebhard

Fall seems to be the time for me to find the greatest variety of caterpillars. With many butterflies and moths having only one brood in the north, it makes sense that caterpillars are wandering out and about looking for a safe place to pupate and spend the winter. Not that they all spend the winter in the pupal stage. For example, the spongy moth (*Lymantria dispar*) overwinters as eggs, the woolly bear (*Pyrrharctia isabella*) as a caterpillar, and the mourning cloak (*Nymphalis antiopa*) as the adult butterfly.

One early September, we were showing friends our “out-back” when we came across a caterpillar with black hair and white spiracles. (Spiracles are the openings along the sides of the thorax and the abdomen of an insect through which it breathes.) It was one-and-a-quarter inches long and was found on stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*), which made feeding it a bit painful at times.



Yellow bear - R. Schipper

After a week, and some growing, it spun a cocoon incorporating its hair and some nettle leaves. Inside the cocoon was the pupa, I assumed. It could not be seen through the dense, dark cocoon. In my experience pupae, when visible, are shorter than the caterpillar.



The cocoon was overwintered on our screened-in porch, and during the night of May 10 to May 11 a beautiful moth with white wings and body emerged. With a span of two inches, the wings had small black markings. There were three rows of black dots on the abdomen, one down the middle and one down each side, along with yellow stripes on the sides.

Virginian tiger moth - I. Gebhard

The legs were white with black markings, visible in the photo. With all those distinguishing features it was easily identified as the Virginian tiger moth (*Spilosoma virginica*), known to be common in our area. The caterpillar of this species is called yellow bear and its color can range from yellow to orange to reddish brown or black.

I was to find caterpillars of this species many times, in its various color forms and on various plant species. Likely because I was checking common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) plants regularly for monarch eggs and larvae for the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project, I found yellow bears most often on this species. Others have found yellow bears on common milkweed as well. While not being obligate milkweed feeders like the monarch (*Danaus plexippus*), they do feed on and tolerate the toxins in common milkweed. Early instars are gregarious but later instars are solitary.



Yellow bear on common milkweed - K. Oberhauser



Not only did I find yellow bear caterpillars on common milkweed, I also found their eggs on it. The eggs were laid in a group, and I raised one of the batches, not knowing what the eggs were.

Virginian tiger moth eggs - this and the following six photos, I. Gebhard



Yellow bears, one day old



Three days old



Third instar, ten days old



Fourth instar, twelve days old



Fifth instar, yellow



Fifth instar, brown

As they went through the successive instars, they revealed their identity. Only two of the forty-four larvae were the light color of the fifth-instar yellow bear. The brown fifth-instar yellow bear is almost identical in appearance to the first yellow bear caterpillar that I found.

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



Visit [Michigan Flora](#) for the answer!

(photo by Russ Schipper)

Community Events of Interest

Sunday, September 6, 1–4pm. KAWO Fall Plant Exchange, Crane Park. [Visit event web page.](#)

Thursday, September 10, 6–7:30pm. KAWO field trip to Milham Park, with Randy Counterman. [Visit event web page.](#)

Saturday, September 12, 11am–1pm. Michigan Botanical Society Field Trip to Tefft Savanna Nature Preserve, Pulaski County, Indiana. [Visit event web page.](#)

Sunday, September 13, 10am–12pm. Volunteer Workday, Kleinstuck Preserve. [Visit event web page.](#)

Thursday, September 17, 7pm. Pints and Native Plants, Brewery Outré. [Visit event web page.](#)

Friday, September 18, 8:30–10:30pm, Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy Mingle with the Moths event, Chipman Preserve. Registration required. [Visit event web page.](#)

Monday, September 21, 6–7pm. “Brain-Body-Forest: Experience the Connection,” with Jodi Heaney, Parchment Public Library. Registration requested. [Visit event web page.](#)

Monday, September 21, 6:00–7:30pm. Wild Ones River City Program: “The Final Flourish: Michigan’s Asters and Goldenrods,” Pierce Cedar Creek Institute. [Visit event web page.](#)

Tuesday, September 22, 10:30am–12pm. Seed Collecting Volunteer Day, Pierce Cedar Creek Institute. [Visit the PCCI event calendar.](#)

Tuesday, September 22, 6:30–7:30pm. Honorable Harvest Lecture Series: “People, Place & Plants: The Roots We Carry,” with Kaya DeerInWater. Marilyn J Schlack Culinary and Allied Health Building, 418 E Walnut Street. [Visit event web page.](#)

Wednesday, September 23, 6:30–8pm. KAWO monthly program: “Coalesce: Science and Art Collaborations to Foster Environmental Engagement,” with Sharon Gill and Jacklyn Brickman, Portage District Library. [Visit event web page.](#)

Thursday, October 1, 11am–1pm. Silver Maples: Native Lawns and Gardens Lecture, Kalamazoo Nature Center. [Visit event web page.](#)

Saturday, October 3, 9am–12pm. Foraging and Medical Plant ID Class, Tillers International. Registration required. [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 October. Submission deadline is September 20.

[Contact the editor](#)

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