

Cross Pollination



Designing gardens with Native Plants

By E. Richards and V. Love

There is a growing awareness among gardening communities that the installation of native plants are needed for ecosystem restoration. The gardening advantages of using native plants are many, including minimal irrigation (once established), less maintenance, and increase in wildlife value. In South Western Ontario in the Fall, for example, many bees and ladybugs can be seen crawling on native asters. In the Winter, the seeds of these same asters feed many birds, including juncos, goldfinches, chickadees, sparrows and cardinals.

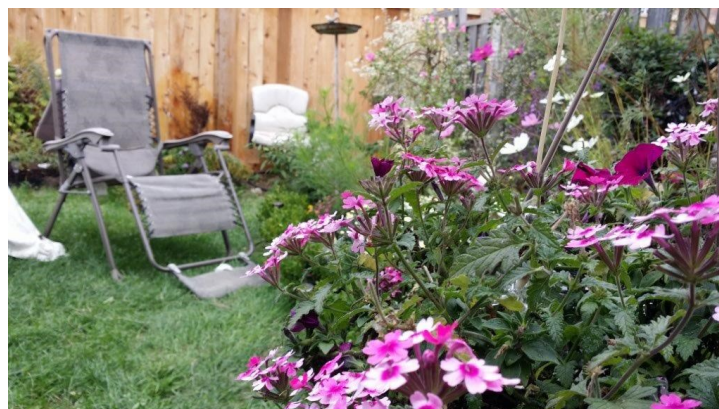
While there is plethora of articles which describe the design of native “meadow” gardens, discussions on the incorporation of native plants in more cultivated settings are relatively few. To address this void, this article will attempt to broaden existing knowledge of native garden design by examining its use in two specific settings: a semi-formal and a woodland site. Drawing on examples from their own gardens in Southwestern Ontario (zone 5), the authors will demonstrate how native plants can be used effectively in any garden design. This article will concentrate on native plants known to be hardy in zone 5.

Garden One: Elisabeth’s Garden

Elisabeth’s garden is more formal in garden design, although there are many informal elements. To make her small gardening space more harmonious, she uses small clipped boxwood hedges as well as the same variety of evergreen shrub (i.e., Hinoki cypress) in a grid pattern. To unify the garden further, she has added a number of hanging pots with the same combination of flowers in each one. The palette of Elisabeth’s garden is restricted to pinks, purples and whites. The plants tend to be small in keeping with the proportion of the small space.

One of the most common complaints about native plants is that they are too “messy” looking in more structured gardens. Elisabeth uses trellises and reusable Velcro plant ties to “train” native plants, such as asters, into more desirable shapes. She has placed three trellises along a wooden fence. Rather than allowing her white paniced asters (*symphyotrichum lanceolatum*) to grow unfettered, she stakes them through the slats of the trellis during their growing period to help create an upright columnar appearance. When it comes to their blooming period from late August to the middle of October, she has a profusion of tiny white flowers throughout the backdrop for the garden, complementing the dark hued magenta petunias and pink verbena

at the front. Interspersed in the middle of her garden is a slightly shorter native aster, the New England aster, which is mauve in colour.



Elisabeth’s garden

These too are tied to other structures (e.g., a miniature wishing well) to maintain a tidier shape. She then leaves these asters up all winter as food for the birds.

Garden Two: Valerie’s Garden

Valerie’s garden is more woodland in character and less formal in appearance. There are no stone statues in Valerie’s garden, for example, nor are there any clipped hedges. Unlike Elisabeth who uses a small number of native plants, Valerie uses a wide variety to cover the vast expanse of her backyard. In her bog area, for example she uses a number of plants that would be attractive to butterflies (e.g., -- *asclepias incarnata* and *eupatorium purpureum*) and the outhouse plant (*rudbeckia laciniata*) as a deciduous screen. In her semi-shade section, she uses Christmas fern (*polystichum acrosti*) and heart-leaf aster (*symphyotrichum cordifolium*). In the denser shade under the cedars, she has planted a ground cover, golden

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Newsletter of the Halton
Master Gardeners

Website:

<http://haltonmastergardeners.wordpress.com>

January TO DO List

- Inspect house plants for insects – hot dry conditions favor mites and mealy bug.
- Order seed and plant catalogues.
- Plan the garden.
- Try growing Amaryllis (not fragrant) and Paper white narcissus (very fragrant).
- Start very slow growing seeds like geranium and begonia.
- Begin a garden journal for the year.

Gardening Events across Ontario

<http://gardenmaking.com/events/ontario/>

‘Seedy Saturday’: Milton and District Horticultural Society and Landscape Ontario

Saturday, February 27th from 10 am to 4 pm at Landscape Ontario, 7856 Fifth Line, South Milton

Designing gardens with Native Plants Cont’d

star (*chrysogonum virginianum*), to light up that area with its long-blooming yellow flowers and combines them with Canadian wild ginger (*asarum canadense*).

Even in more naturalistic settings, however, there is still a desire for some structure. To address these concerns, Valerie tends to cluster and use multiple plantings to make her garden more cohesive. Foam-flower (*tiarella cordifolia*), for example, are repeatedly planted in ring groupings under trees. These inner rings are then rimmed by other leafy plants like native ginger, to form a series, sometimes overlapping, of circles. The use of repetition of the same two plant choices serves to accentuate the design lines in rhythmical ways. Further structure is provided by native Eastern White Cedars (*thuja occidentalis*), which act as screening and allow the garden to maintain its shape throughout the year.

There are many benefits of incorporating native plants into a cultivated garden. Native plants add fragrance, color, texture, as well as

Master Gardeners of Halton

Email Help Line: haltonmastergardeners@gmail.com



Halton Master Gardeners Speakers List

Join us for our monthly speakers held at the Royal Botanical Gardens at 7:15 p.m., first Wednesday of the month.

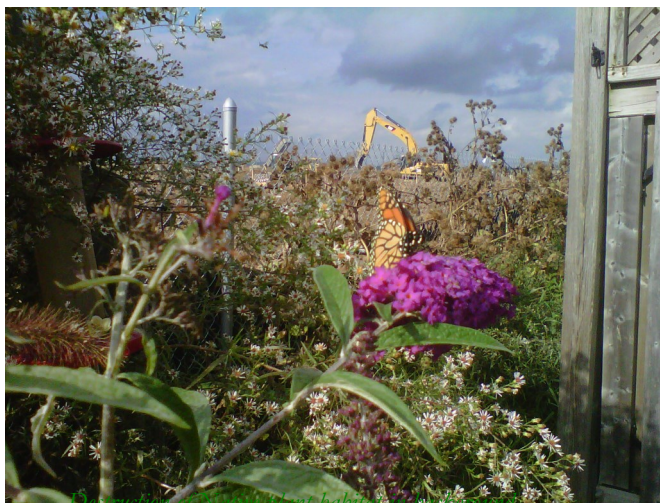
February’s speaker is Roisin Fagan, a fabric artist from Hamilton, who dyes fabric using many plants she grows herself.

Contact: Patty King at [a_p@cogeco.ca](mailto:ap@cogeco.ca) Please note a \$5.00 fee covers speakers and refreshments.

Advice Clinic

Find us at the Grimsby Garden Club on March 28 at 8:00— “What’s in a Name?” A talk about famous people behind the names of plants, by Claudette Sims

And at the Town of Halton Hills Civic Centre for a Lunch & Learn on Feb 3 — “Butterfly Gardens “ by Elisabeth Richards. Call Jennifer Spence, Halton Hills Office, 905-873-2600 X 2290 for reservations



Description of a native plant habitat in background

the sights and sounds of birds and insects. They are not only better choices in creating healthier, more sustainable eco-systems, they actually act as beautiful focal points/striking accents in contemporary garden designs.

As we begin to consider more sustainable forms of gardening perhaps we need more than a thorough knowledge of native plants. We need to appreciate more expansive ways of understanding beauty. Selectively incorporating more native plants into cultivated garden designs,

either as focal points or as embellishment to non-native plants, is one way of expanding that vision. It is the authors’ hope that gardeners across North America will open themselves up to the possibilities provided by native plants.

*By native, the authors mean native to North America.