

# Newsletter of the Louisiana Native Plant Society

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Spring 1983

This is our second offering in the way of a newsletter. I thank those of you who have responded with your ideas and comments, and renew that request to those of you who have yet to contribute. This is **your** paper — all of you have resources to offer in one form or another.

Remember our May field trip to DeSoto Parish *this Saturday!* We will meet in Keatchie at 8 a.m. See the map on the last page of this newsletter for further directions.

Our president, Richard Johnson, has called a meeting in Alexandria for Saturday, August 20, at 8 a.m. for the purpose of organizing chapters of our Society throughout the state. Dr. Martin has planned a field trip which will end at 11 a.m. The actual meeting will begin at 1 p.m. and end at approximately 4 p.m.

Address all correspondence to your editor:

Teresa Thrash  
166 Rustic Way  
Shreveport, LA 71106

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## Wildflowers from Seeds and Cuttings

Those who do not grow wildflowers from seeds are missing the thrilling experience of watching those seeds germinate and grow to potting-size plants.

Do mark the desired flowering plant, as it may be obscure when not blooming. Gather mature seeds, for most should be planted at this time. A good potting mixture consists of leaf mold and sandy soil. Tiny dust-like seeds should be pressed into the top of the soil; larger seeds can first be soaked to hasten germination. You will learn that cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) seeds must be sprinkled on top of the soil and have indirect light.

Conversely, seeds of *Hibiscus* species need darkness to germinate. They should begin life in a newspaper-covered tray and covered lightly with soil until germination occurs. As soon as true leaves have shown, the new plants may be removed from the tray and potted individually.

Propagation by cuttings is the most desirable way to increase a rare or endangered plant. Rooting cuttings is so rewarding that after some success you will want to "put down" any and everything — even Gaillardias!

A good rooting medium is coarse white creek sand. Make several four-to-six-inch cuttings, slanting just below a joint or node and leaving a single leaf at the top. Dip the bottom end into a good rooting powder and press into sand. Water well and cover completely with a clear plastic bag secured with a tie or rubber band. Kept from the sun they will need no attention for weeks. As the cutting roots, puncture the top of the bag to allow fresh air to enter. Over the next few weeks, enlarge the opening until the bag can be removed without undue shock to the plant.

Patience! You will experience both successes and failures but will undoubtedly obtain many special plant cuttings. Beginning wildflowers from seeds and cuttings are two inexpensive and fulfilling methods of propagation, assuring an abundance to share with friends. In sharing there is much less likelihood of their becoming lost to you or extinct.

Karlene DeFatta

## A Day in Spring

The moist night fades into the pink dawn, and I am awakened by dozens of birds' songs, all seemingly trying to outdo themselves — just for me.

My feeding stations are alive with cardinals. I hear barred owls hooting to their "friends" throughout the woods and I step out into a world that most people never have the opportunity to know. Early mornings deep in the country: no sights or sounds but the wild ones.

I stroll leisurely about my yard which I have devoted to wildflowers. I have observed the heydays of the trilliums, bloodroot, hepatica and violets and notice them receding into the background — giving way to phlox penstemon, verbena, and various trees and shrubs. I lift a large stone under a leaky water faucet to see if "old Mr. Toad" is still there. I see where a "rascal" mole has tunneled under some primroses, nearly pushing them out of the ground. I caress a furry fiddlehead of a cinnamon fern, feeling its dewy softness. I see that my arrowwood viburnum is loaded with buds. How lovely it looks in full bloom with a blanket of ferns beneath!

I stroll over to my newly-constructed bog garden, hoping the plantings there will thrive. The cardinal flowers certainly look happy as do the bog ferns. I stop to snitch a sourwood leaf to chew. The tart taste makes my mouth feel alive. I notice bluebirds around my blueberries. I wonder if they will allow me some ripe ones.

I sit quietly in my swing for a moment and watch as two cardinals and a white-throated sparrow dive into a nearby feeder. Hummingbirds buzz in, fighting and bickering, so tiny to be so testy. Bluebirds hop about catching worms for their broods.

The day has dawned once more and in a thirty-minute stroll about my wildflower garden I have soaked up enough peace and love to share with everyone I see, and enough energy to face anything the day has to offer.

Dee Bishop



# Butterfly Gardens

*"I meant to do my work today but a brown bird sang in the apple tree and a butterfly flitted across the field and all the leaves were calling."*

Richard Le Gallienne  
*"Transgressions"*

Have you ever considered inviting those elusive, ethereal butterflies to your garden? They can, in fact, be attracted by knowing their life cycles, favorite wildflowers and foods.

Weeds and wildflowers are the habitats of many butterflies, and you can simulate their natural environment by establishing and maintaining a piece of land as a butterfly garden.

The butterfly life cycle depends upon food for both adults and larvae forms. Favorite adult foods include nectar from milkweed, thistle, daisies, dandelion, asters and clover. Many butterflies lay eggs among the weeds on which the larvae feed. Some, however, depend on woodlands during part of their life cycle. Trees and shrubs are often needed by larvae.

A butterfly garden is a venture which should not be entered into lightly, for it requires devotion. However, if I have managed to capture your imagination ...:

- **Know the local butterflies.**

These local species are the ones you will attract. Learn their names, their life cycles, behavior and favorite foods. Discover the places where they hibernate, seek cover and pupate.

- **Identify suitable plants for egg laying larvae food and adult feeding.** Generally the plants used for egg laying are also eaten by the larvae. Butterfly populations are strongly governed by availability of larvae food.

The females of many species mate and lay eggs immediately after emerging from the pupa. So it would appear that blossoms are more critical to our enjoyment of these butterflies than it is to the perpetuation of their life cycles.

References such as *Peterson's Field Guides on Butterflies and Wildflowers* can be helpful.

- **Set aside the land.**

If your selected area is already somewhat natural, you will need to make few changes.

Decide which useful plants are present then decide, from observation, which are still needed to encourage the life cycles of those desired butterflies. Locating the butterfly garden near a wooded area may attract species which require trees for larvae food.

- **Plant, evaluate, replant, re-evaluate.**

Your goal should be an established butterfly garden which will have eggs, larvae, pupae, and adults. To make this possible you must meet their needs for blooming wildflowers, cover and larvae food.

Realize that introducing plants unsuitable to your soil and climatic conditions is a total waste of your time/energy/efforts. Careful analysis may lead to replanting and further assessment. Just because a certain butterfly was not attracted to your "spot of heaven" this year does not mean that you have failed. Maybe next year that type will appear. Remember: The success of your garden requires constant evaluation.

- **Learn their special needs.**

It really is not as simple as selecting flowers rich in nectar that can be easily extracted, for not all adults live exclusively on nectar. Compost piles, sap from woody wounds and carrion supply some of the adult needs for several species. Puddles and their surrounding soil are popular with some butterflies. Both the gregarious types and the more solitary ones will gather at these "watering holes."

- **Mow a part of the area.**

An open, undisturbed area will become bushy and gradually change into a woodland. Mowing may be required to keep it meadowlike. But mow only part of this special garden in any one year. By alternating you will allow the established life cycles to continue in the unmowed part.

Adult butterflies are pollinators and rarely garden pests. Yet their larvae, like all other insect larvae, have voracious appetites. This is a consideration which can be met and conquered with forethought.

If your space is limited you can still create a haven for butterflies. The larvae of some of the most beautiful ones feed from trees probably already in your yard (willow, oak, and elm, for example). Nectar-rich vines can expand the garden upwards.

These guidelines are not intended as a formula. The longer your butterfly garden, the more accurately you can assess their needs. This is a new field and much information will come from butterfly lovers/gardeners themselves.

Your editor has lists of spring-, summer- and fall-flowering wildflowers attractive to these insects and information on the Xerxes Society, which is devoted to this rewarding study and hobby. For the loveliest of all visitors, consider a butterfly garden.

Teresa Thrash



## Sources

Suggested reading (check your library for these and other references):

*The Concise Encyclopedia of Favorite Wild Flowers*, by Marjorie Dietz; Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1965.

*Wild Flowers and How to Grow Them*, by Edwin F. Steffik; Crown Publishers Inc., 1954.

*Wild Flowers for Your Garden*, by Helen S. Hull; Gramercy Publishing Co., 1952.

*Wild Flowers of America*, by Walcott, Platt and Rickett; Crown Publishers Inc, 1953.

*Wild Flowers to Know and Grow*, by Jean Hersey; Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1964.

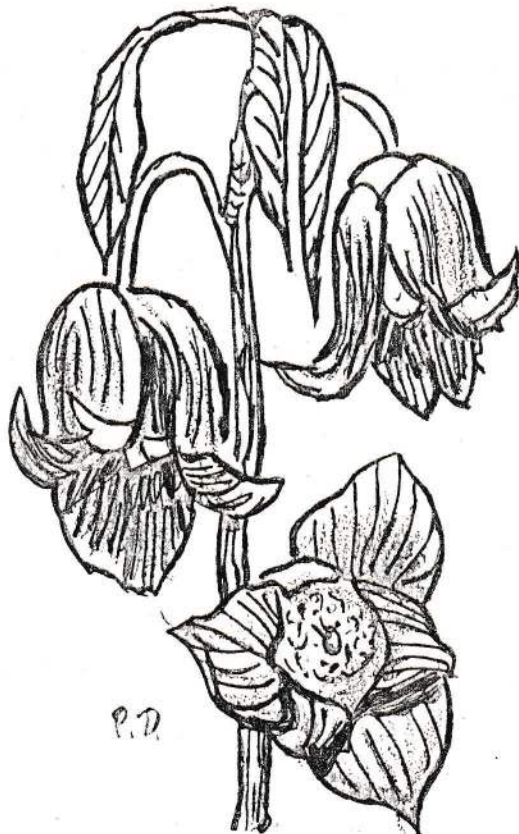
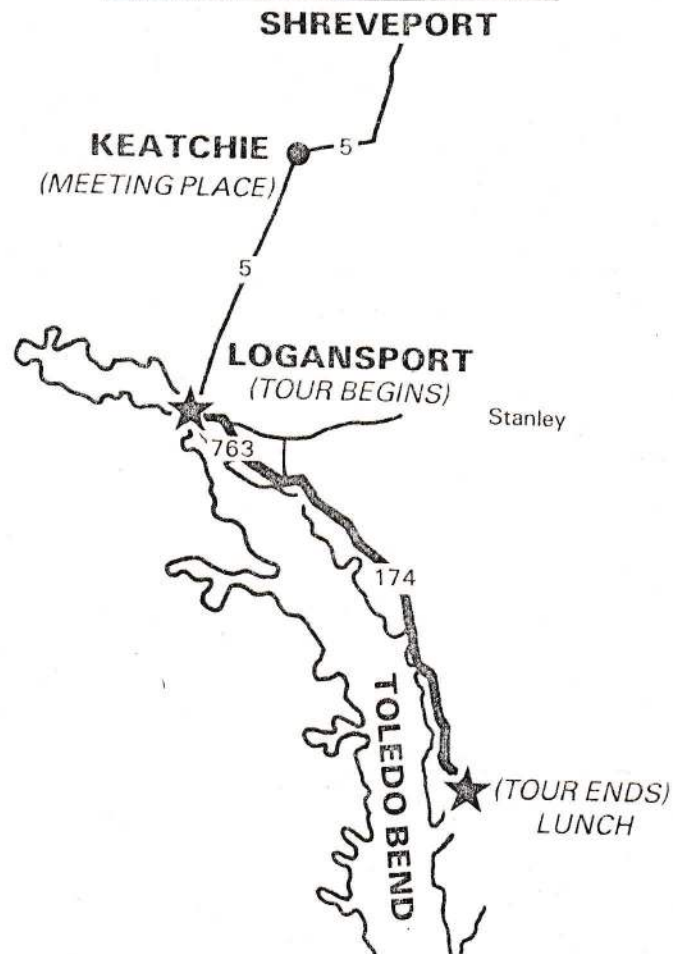
*Louisiana Conservationist*, (Nov./Dec. 1982), "Louisiana's Floral Treasures" by Julia Murchison McSherry.

*Southern Living* magazine, (April 1983), "There's Lots to Love About Wildflowers" by Nan Booth Simpson.

A 28-page booklet listing nurseries and wildflower sources around the country is available from:

Ann Reilly  
210 Cartwright Blvd.  
Massapequa, NY 11762

It's free, so long as you include a legal-size, self-addressed, stamped envelope.



## Fruit of papaw is delicacy

In early March in low creek and bayou areas a slender tree will be in full bloom. Its brown bark is slick with very noticeable leaf scars on the branches. Each leaf scar will have a bud, which will develop into a new branch, a flower is located in each of these areas. The flowers first appear as green masses up and down the branches. From the green tissue a brownish-red bell shaped flower will develop. It is about one inch in size with six petals and a yellow-green center. Flowers in different stages of development will be found on the same limb, each blossom will last several days. As the flowers disappear the bright slick leaves unfold at the tips of the branches.

After the blossom sheds the small green fruit will remain. It will grow into an oblong soft mass three to four inches in length throughout the summer. The fruit contains a number of large brown seeds. It slowly turns from green to dark brown in the fall. When it has turned brown and fallen on the ground it is ready to eat. In some localities the fruit is sold in produce departments of stores as either Papaw or Custard Apples, and is considered a delicacy.

Papaw trees like cool damp areas of bayous and creek bottoms, and sparse thickets where they are protected from the wind. The oblong leaves are six to fourteen inches in length and are easily stripped from the tree when exposed to high winds. The root system is shallow and sparse. Papaws are not large trees in size, a trunk of twelve inches and a height of 30 feet is considered an exceptionally large tree. They require a large amount of water, rich soil, moderate amount of water, rich soil, a moderate amount of sun and good protection from the wind. If these conditions are available in your wildflower garden Papaw would be a welcome addition to your garden as they bloom at an early age.

Jack Price