



Bluffviews

a quarterly newsletter by Clifftop

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Time to Garden

By Joann Fricke

Is it warm weather or the swelled buds of trees and shrubs that make us want to get out and plant? After suffering through a dreary winter season, who doesn't look forward to the first appearances of crocuses and daffodils? Color is the order of the day when all we've seen for months is brown. Garden centers abound in glorious shades of red, yellow, blue and green—annuals, perennials, you name it, they've got it!

But did you know that some of the old reliable foundation plants can be invasive? Until I became involved with Clifftop a little over 5 years ago, I did not know that burning bush could invade our beloved hardwood forests. This winter, while removing bush honeysuckle from my woods, I stumbled across a rather robust burning bush specimen deep in the forest. It was far taller than I, so had been growing there for some time. As much as I love their gorgeous red leaves in the fall, I will never again plant another burning bush!

In the following article, we will discuss some native plants as alternatives to the cookie-cutter landscape plantings found in most neighborhoods.

Grow Native

By Pen & Carl DauBach

Want to put some pizzazz in your garden this spring? Add some blooms, some butterflies and birds for a landscape of delights that can give years of renewal and beauty.

Gardeners and home landscapers are nearly unanimous in wanting plants that look great and need little attention. Those who turn to native plants – trees, shrubs, groundcovers, vines, herbaceous shade- and sun-loving bloomers – find rewards in ease of care, long-lived beauty, and bonuses of butterflies wafting and birds aplenty in gardens that are naturally home-like.

Native plantings are growing in popularity, but all too often suburban and rural-urban homescapes have been constructed with non-native choices brought in by the truckload that have resulted in a monotony of sameness. Bradford pears, burning bushes, wintercreeper, pampas grass, Chinese and Japanese honeysuckle, privet hedge, and Japanese barberry, are just a few of the boring landscape plantings suburban developers and mass marketing have left behind. While the boredom of these "everybody-has-the-same-look" landscape is among their great drawbacks, these plantings also turn homesteads into wildlife deserts that might, at best, provide homes for starlings, house sparrows and the occasional robin. And after a few years the homeowner often finds that the showiness of Bradford pear trees is ruined when a quarter or a half of the tree sheers off during an ice storm or in high winds. Many of the exotics also are invasive: spreading and colonizing far from their suburban and yard plantings into area woodlands, farm edges, and field borders.

What's a gardener to do? **GROW NATIVE!**

Select native plants simply win the beauty contest **and** beat the exotics – hands down – when it comes to ease of care and making your yard attractive to wildlife. Here are a few favorites along with our reasons for choosing them rather than the exotics:

Trees and shrubs:

Serviceberry (*Amelanchier arborea*) is among the earliest flowering trees in our area, with showy, slightly fragrant white flowers in clusters (see photo at right). Fall color is often excellent. The small red berries are edible and are very attractive to many bird species including cedar waxwings, robins, mockingbirds and thrashers. This sturdy drought-tolerant native can grow in a variety of soils, including clay, and will take full sun to part shade. They often are pruned to grow as a multi-stemmed tree and generally reach 15-25 feet. Much sturdier than Bradford pears, Serviceberry trees offer years of springtime flowers, food for birds, and rich autumn colors. Nurseries offer several cultivars of Serviceberry.



Photo courtesy Tom Rollins, ThomasRollinsPhotography.com

Yellowwood tree (*Cladrastus kentuckia*) can grow to 30-50 feet and has a broad round crown when mature. This member of the pea family has compound leaves that are bright green in summer and yellow in the fall. A yellowwood may keep you waiting for up to eight years before it first flowers, but the show each year after that is spectacular: highly fragrant, wisteria-like white flowers in long drooping clusters of up to 15-inches in length can cover the tree in late spring. Breeders have developed cultivars that feature pink flowers, and another form that grows 35-40 feet tall, making this an excellent choice for smaller yards. This low-maintenance tree needs full sun and tolerates a wide variety of soil conditions. Yellowwood trees have deep roots and, so, are perfectly happy to have other plantings growing underneath them. Yellowwoods are strong and a better choice for years of beauty than Bradford pears or maples.

Black haw (*Viburnum prunifolium*) generally is grown as a shrub, but can be pruned into a small, single-trunked tree. The flat-topped white flowers appear in May to June and are followed by edible blue-black fruits that may persist into winter or until birds and small mammals come to feast. The dark green leaves turn red and purple in the fall. As a shrub, black haw will grow 6-12 feet wide and 12-15 feet tall and can be used as a hedge or specimen; black haw makes a great alternative to non-native viburnums or to privet hedge. Like most natives, this is a low-maintenance plant, tolerant of drought and able to grow in a variety of soils in full sun to part shade.

Virginia Sweetspire (*Itea virginica*) is an excellent choice for a low or damp spot in your yard or garden, as it likes a bit more water. This shrub can grow to five feet tall in full sun to shade, even dense shade, and produces long racemes of showy white flowers in June to July. In autumn, the dark green leaves turn dark red and the leaves often stay on the bush into December. Nurseries offer several cultivars, including a dwarf form; Virginia sweetspire will root sucker in favorable conditions and so can help control soil erosion. It is an excellent alternative to burning bush or to bush honeysuckle.

Ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*) is an upright, spreading shrub that offers year-round interest: showy pink or white spirea-like flowers in the spring, dark green leaves in summer and exfoliating red-brown bark in the winter. Ninebark shrubs generally grow four to eight feet in width and height, and can be pruned after flowering to maintain a desired shape and spread. This shrub tolerates a wide range of soils, including clay or rocky soil, and grows in full sun to part shade. A wide variety of cultivars, some of which have purple to wine-red leaves, or leaves with a coppery cast, are offered by nurseries. Ninebark plantings far outshine burning bush for ease of growth and colorful flowers and foliage.

Groundcovers:

Wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*) not only is a lovely groundcover for shady areas, it's a groundcover that even tolerates deer browsing. The stemless paired leaves are heart-shaped and cover the very early spring purple-brown flowers. Wild ginger is native to rich woods and slopes and prefers shade and even moisture. It spreads by rhizomes to form large colonies and is an easy, no-maintenance ground cover for shade gardens. It is an attractive alternative to the highly invasive exotic wintercreeper.

Common blue violet and smooth yellow violet (*Viola sororia* / *Viola pubescens*) are two of Illinois' 25 species of native plants in this genus that is the sole food source for the caterpillars of fritillary butterflies. Without access to native violet foliage, the caterpillars starve. Common blue violet grows here, there and everywhere, and can form a dense groundcover that will self-seed itself outside the flowerbed. The lightly fragrant blue flowers in early spring attract butterflies. Yellow violet does not spread so aggressively but will self-seed in good growing conditions. Both violets tolerate deer browsing and, in hot dry summers the foliage may mug off. Cooler autumn weather brings fresh growth and occasionally a fresh flush of flowering. The caterpillars of fritillary butterflies feed at night; the gardener's best reward is a summer-long joy of watching these large spectacular butterflies waft from flower to flower.

Verbena (*Glandularia canadensis*) is a perennial groundcover with a multitude of uses and minimum – if any – problems. Also known as rose or clump verbenas, this spreading plant hosts pink to rose-purple flowers from May through August and can take dry, shallow, even rocky soil and drought. Verbena flowers best in full sun and will self-seed and spread by stem rooting. This very hardy plant can even be grown as an annual and makes an attractive addition to hanging baskets. Butterflies and the occasional hummingbird enjoy verbenas' nectar. It is a far better choice for a sunny no-maintenance groundcover for full sun areas than vinca or wintercreeper.



Great-spangled fritillary butterflies nectaring on purple coneflower.

Photo courtesy Pen DauBach, Clifftop

Milkweeds (*Asclepias* sp.) are easily grown, and offer great benefits to butterflies and to gardeners. With 18 species of this genus found in Illinois, gardeners are able to select plants for any sort of soil, light, or moisture conditions found in their flowerbeds. Most milkweeds have showy flowers, often with fragrance, and color choices range from pale white through pink, to deep orange and dark red. The flowers are attractive to many different butterflies, and some even attract hummingbirds. The foliage is the sole-source food for the caterpillars of Monarch butterflies, as seen at right, but also serves as a larval host for several species of moths.



Photo courtesy Paul Feldker, Clifftop

Indian physic (*Porteranthus stipulatus*) flowers in May to June and can itself resemble a flock of small butterflies lighting up a shady area in the flower border. The one-inch star-like white to light pink flowers are held above the foliage on wiry stems from May to June. The deeply cut, tri-part leaves turn a deep bronze-red in fall. This very low-maintenance plant takes average soil, part to fairly deep shade, and will self-seed in favorable conditions.

These are just a small sample of the many native plants available to gardeners and home landscapers. Please see our website – the section on “Conservation (from home)” – at <http://www.cifftopalliance.org/conservation-from-home/>, click on **Growing with Natives** at the end of paragraph 4 for additional information and for a downloadable list of native plants and suggested uses.



Bluff Adventures

By Merrill Prange



Photo courtesy Merrill Prange

I've always felt fortunate to have lived near the bluffs for my pre-teen and teen years. The forests, creeks, cliffs and caves provided days of fun with a hint of danger to make them exciting to a youngster.

Saltpeter cave was a pleasant diversion. (The trail to the cave can be seen in the photo at left.) After a steep climb from Bluff Road (also visible in the photo), you could sit in the opening and see for miles. Two shafts lead back; one about 100 yards or so to a dead end. The other had a “well” or vertical drop. The well was caved shut at the bottom, but still deep enough to attract would be explorers.

From the cave's mouth, a narrow ledge led to the top of the bluff and was always a fun hike. A large, flat

outcropping was perfect for a picnic site. Here we occasionally enjoyed a gourmet feast consisting of a soda and a bag of chips. (Editor's note: A photo of the picnic site with 1950's era Village of Fults in the background can be seen on the following page.)

We also conducted scientific competitions. This involved gathering stones of various shapes and sizes, throwing them off the cliffs to see which fell and rolled the farthest. If your stone made it to the road, you won. Extra points were earned if a car had to avoid the stone. If the driver stopped and exited the vehicle, we conducted another scientific competition: to see who could disappear the fastest.

A number of small caves and cliff overhangs contained fossil brachiopods, branching corals, etc., enough to satisfy the rock hounds among us.

The creeks yielded large colonial corals we called “bee hive” corals. Many of our moms' flower beds sported a fossil coral or two.

Another great (and my favorite) pastime was grapevine swinging. The tall oaks and steep slopes allowed for swings which were twenty-five feet or more above the ground at the outer arc.

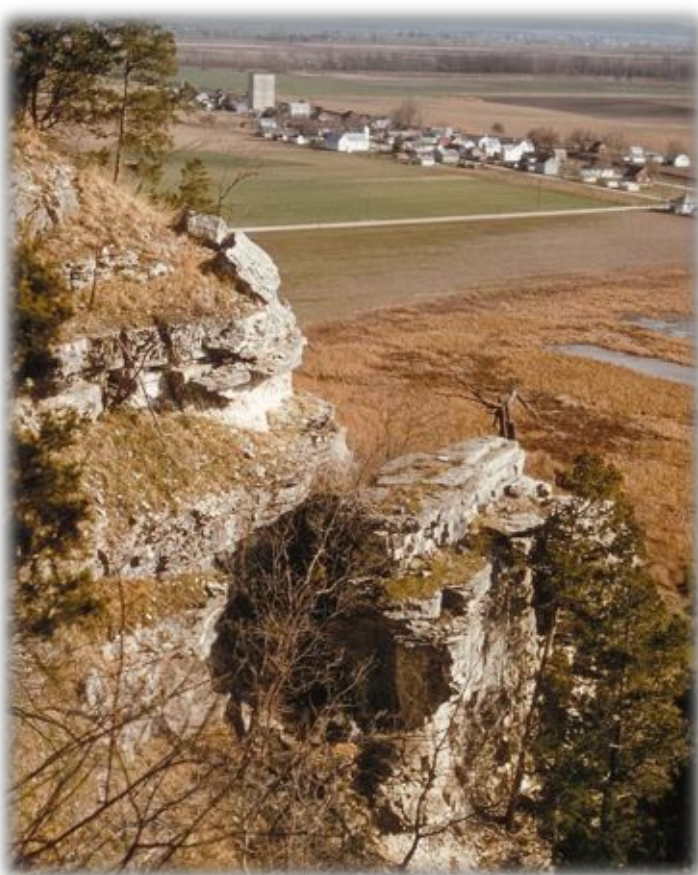
At one wondrous location we were able to swing into the top of a tall, thin sapling, grab it and release the vine. Our momentum would cause the sapling to bend downhill and gently deposit us on the ground.

We took turns utilizing this great toy for a couple of hours. Each successive swing tore more wood fiber in the sapling. As in Russian roulette, each successful ride increased the chance of failure for the next. Finally the sapling snapped and the rider's gentle deposit became a fifteen foot vertical drop. After the hearty laughter ended, we grew tired of his whining and helped him to his feet. He limped and complained the half mile walk back to Fults, but after medical treatment consisting of an R.C. Cola and a Butterfinger bar, he was as good as new.

I still love walking in the woods, hunting mushrooms and finding fossils or an occasional arrowhead. However, my grapevine fun ended a few weeks before my 52nd birthday. My wife, Sheryl, daughter Beth, son Audie and I were bluff climbing. The kids, actually young adults, found a vine and were making good, but not great, swings. After failed explanations, I attempted to show them how to get a great ride.

My swing took me out over Bluff Road. Of course the vine snapped, dropping me, tailbone first, onto the pavement. As luck would have it, a senior couple was enjoying a leisurely drive. Fortunately, they were in the far lane, so I landed beside them. As my wife and kids laughed hysterically, the elderly driver hit the gas and drove quickly away. I suspect they regaled their next family gathering with stories of being attacked by a Sasquatch. I limped home for medical attention, but soon realized that an R.C. Cola and a Butterfinger bar no longer provided miracle cures, even when fortified with an ounce of bourbon.

The back windows of my home look out onto the bluffs. As I gaze at the red and orange fall foliage or the wet winter snows hanging on the cedars, I'm always touched by the beauty of the bluffs and enjoy the memories of the long gone days of my youth.



Bluff picnic area photo courtesy Merrill Prange



Clifftop Volunteer of the Year 2012

Prior to a prescribed burn at his residence, Mike Fricke, second from right, was awarded a personalized hard hat and goggles as Clifftop's Volunteer of the Year for 2012. Pictured making the presentation to Mike is Carl DauBach (third from left), Clifftop's Executive Director. Others on hand to help at Fricke's controlled burn are Mike Fries, Tish Turner and Stan Darter. Not pictured is Mike's wife, Joann, who took the photo.

An End to One of the World's Great Migrations?

The twice-annual migration of Monarch butterflies to and from wintering grounds in Mexico and across their North American breeding grounds is a phenomenon that scientists began to understand only within the last few decades. Monarch migration is on par with the great hemispheric migrations of birds or of the herds of herbivores across the African continent. But monarchs are in deep trouble and their generationally-borne annual migrations could become only a memory.

The 2012-2013 census of wintering colonies in Mexico showed a 59% decrease in the area used by wintering colonies, the lowest level observed in two decades. The annual survey, conducted by the World Wildlife Fund and Telcel Alliance and Mexico's National Commission of Protected Areas, is done to estimate and monitor the number of butterflies that arrive in the nine hibernation colonies in the Mexican highlands.



Photo courtesy Pen DauBach

This year's great decrease in Monarch numbers is attributed to the tremendous loss of milkweed plants in the U.S., particularly in the Midwest, as agricultural use of herbicide-ready crops has eliminated most weeds, including milkweeds, from field edges and borders. Monarch caterpillars simply starve to death in the absence of their sole-source food plants, milkweeds.

Last year's extreme climate variations, with drought and very hot, arid conditions, also caused reproductive troubles for Monarchs that did manage to find milkweed plants for egg-laying. The heat and drought simply caused many of the eggs to dry out and created a very reduced hatch rate.

Continued decreases in monarch-friendly habitat in the U.S. and continued climate extremes may bring an end to one of earth's great migrations. Continuing reductions in the numbers of monarchs that reach their wintering grounds will signal that the overall populations of monarchs may simply not be sustainable in the future.



Upcoming events...



April 18 – Birding 101

April 29 – Walk About the Park

May 4 – Illinois Spring Bird Count

May 18
Bio Blitz at
Mill Creek
Natural Area

For details, please see our website:

<http://www.clifftopalliance.org/upcoming-events/>

June 8
Herps Hunt Field
Trip

Recent events...all photos courtesy Joann and Mike Fricke, Clifftop



Approximately 60 people attended the Owl Prowl on March 22 at White Rock. The highlight of the evening was the Barred Owl conversation!



The Ticked Off! Seminar on April 6 was very well attended.

Dr. Mike Kirk, left, presented the medical aspect of tick-borne illness and Dr. Brian Allan, right, presented information on ticks, their habits and habitat. Look for the May CLIFFnotes in the Monroe County Independent for a discussion of the relationship between ticks and honeysuckle and for Dr. Allan's instructions on building your very own tick trap. May is invasive species month in Illinois and our May CLIFFnotes will focus on our bluff lands' number one invasive—bush honeysuckle.



Nearly 100 people enjoyed the beautiful weather on April 13 at the Spring Wildflower Walk at Salt Lick Point Land and Water Reserve. Debbie Newman spoke of the 50th anniversary of the INPC and Rich Dependahl thanked everyone for coming. The false rue anemone (at left) were particularly showy that day!



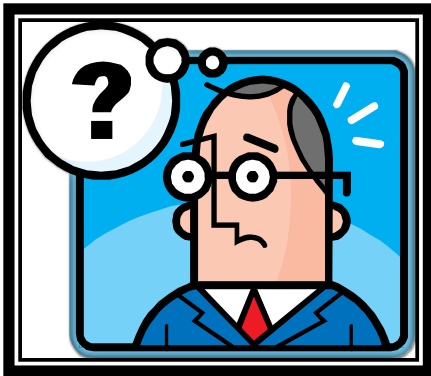
White Rock Stewardship Update

Thanks to USDA-NRCS conservation program monies, contractors have begun working at the White Rock complex to clear brush (largely sumac and dogwood) from all hill prairies and glades, tackle unwanted non-native invasive plant species (NNIS) (largely bush honeysuckle) and cull sugar maple and tree-of-heaven trees to promote oak-hickory regeneration. Mike Fries has completed a first treatment for NNIS on half of the 160-acre Land and Water Reserve, and, thanks to a grant from the National Wild Turkey Federation, will begin working on additional acreage at the Reserve. A small grant from the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission allowed Bear Engbring to clear brush from most of the glades on the Reserve. Kevin Slaven is clearing hill prairies on the 306-acre Nature Preserve and will initially treat NNIS on 115-acres of the Preserve. Bear Engbring will soon begin conducting a Timber Stand Improvement on half of the Reserve. We are continuing to seek grant and conservation program dollars to allow conservation contractors to do most of the "heavy lifting" for our initial restoration efforts at the complex.

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Photo Courtesy Tom Rollins, ThomasRollinsPhotography.Com



## Photo Contest Results...

Due to a scheduling conflict, the final selection of photos for display at the Southern Illinois Medical Development Corporation facility on Hamacher in Waterloo has not yet taken place. Eleven semi-finalist photos have been submitted to the staff at SIMDC. We await their decision. Watch for results in the July edition of Bluffviews!

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Got any ideas?

We've met the neighbors—snakes, owls, bobcats, ticks, etc. We've offered workshops on prescribed burning, prairie and grasslands management and woodlands management. We've taken field trips to caves, listened for owls, frolicked with frogs and hunted for herps. Now we'd like to know what you'd like to do or learn about. Please submit your ideas for future seminars, workshops and field trips to clifftop@htc.net.

