



January 2021 Chapter Newsletter

Wild Ones Mission Statement: promotes environmentally sound landscaping practices to preserve biodiversity through the preservation, restoration and establishment of native plant communities.

Wilderness Wildlife Week: *Wilderness Wildlife Week 2021 is going virtual!*

Join Pigeon Forge and the Wilderness Wildlife Staff February 2-4 as they celebrate the natural features, creatures and cultures of the Great Smoky Mountains—all online. They've invited some of the leading wildlife experts to lead informative discussions with you, our virtual outdoor enthusiasts. This is a great opportunity for students to learn and ask questions about nature. They'll also share all-new content that takes you into the great outdoors from the comfort of your home, guided by our wilderness explorers. Visit the link below for additional information. <https://www.mypigeonforge.com/event/wilderness-wildlife-week>

Member Login: If you are a member, you are entitled to the resources on the national website. To create your website login, go to www.wildones.org and click on the "Member Login" button near the top right corner of the home page. Then click on "Already a member but not registered? Register password for member here". Complete the short form for the Wild Password Registration. **Note:** use the same email you used when completing your registration form to join Wild Ones.

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Healing the Earth one yard at a time!

Membership: Our Wild Ones chapter is dedicated to educating and advocating for biodiversity in the Great Smoky Mountains. We offer a variety of programs and events throughout the year that teach and encourage sustainable landscaping and gardening practices using plants that are native to our smoky mountain region. Membership is vital to the ongoing success of our chapter. We invite you to attend our programs and to become a member! To obtain a membership packet, please contact Marti Agler at martiava@att.net

Winter: Winter has only just begun, and many native plants play an important role in the survival of many different kinds of wildlife..

Here is a brief peek at some of the natives that are important for our local wildlife, especially birds in the Smoky Mountains:



Southern Wax Myrtle – *Morella cerifera*

One of our valuable native shrubs is the southern wax myrtle, also called southern bayberry. The multitude of wax-coated berries are an important high-energy source of fat (50.3%) and fiber for more than 40 species of birds. It grows in average, medium to wet soil in full sun to part shade. It is also a nitrogen fixer which helps it to survive in poor soils. Male and female flowers are borne on separate plants. Often forms colonies. It is a fast growing and evergreen to semi-evergreen shrub with a height of 4 to 8 feet and a spread of 3 to 6 feet. The flowers are fragrant but not showy.



Southern Arrowroot – *Viburnum dentatum*

Another valuable native shrub for bird lovers is the arrowwood viburnum which is easily grown in average, moist, well-drained soils in full sun to part shade but tolerates a wide range of soil types. It typically reaches 6 to 10 feet with an equal spread of 6 to 10 feet. It has very attractive flowers but they are not fragrant. Its fall foliage is showy ranging from yellow to orange and red. The blue/black berries are enjoyed by birds and other wildlife and provide 41.3% fat and fiber. It also attracts butterflies. It is reported that Native Americans used the straight stems of this plant for their arrow shafts.



Gray Dogwood – *Cornus racemosa*

This interesting native shrub is easily grown in average, moist, well-drained soils in full sun to part shade but tolerates a wide range of soil types. It typically grows along streams, ponds and wet meadows and rocky bluffs. It averages approximately 10 to 15 feet in height and 10 to 15 width in width. It features attractive white flowers and the shrub in full bloom is beautiful. The foliage turns a pretty dusky red color in the fall. The stems are red in the winter and provide nice contrast. The Gray/white berries provide 39.9% fat and fiber to a variety of birds and other wildlife.



Spicebush – *Lindera benzoin*

This lovely native shrub likes rich, moist soil in light shade to part sun. It grows about 6 to 10 feet in both height and width. A variety of wildlife eat the high-fat (33.2%) red berries that ripen in time for the peak of fall migration. The spicebush swallowtail butterfly lays her eggs on the leaves which are a larval food for the babies. The flowers are a nectar source for early spring butterflies and bees. All parts of this shrub are aromatic, and the stems can be boiled in water to make a pleasant tasting tea.

Don't Plant This: Purple Loosestrife



Where there is water, there is likely to be purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*), if not today, then soon. This beautiful invader presents flower spikes loaded with tiny but vivid magenta flowers rising above smooth-edged lance-shaped leaves. Purple loose strife is a gift to North America from Europe and Asia, first noted in Lake Ontario in 1869, but not spread throughout most of North America wherever wetland prevail—in lakes, rivers, streams, creeks, even continuously wet ditches—where it displaces our native plants, such as goldenrods, boneset, joe-pye weed, ironweed, and marsh marigolds.

Here are some key features of purple loosestrife:

- Grows 2 – 4 feet tall in no more than two feet of water, hence mostly along shorelines, and prefers full sun.
- Blooms from July to October.
- Has woody stems with 4-6 sides rather than rounded.
- Propagates by seed (up to 2.4 million seeds per pod) and by root division to form dense mats of roots that choke out other plants and block water access.
- Has become one of the most highly invasive plants in North America.

So, despite its relative beauty, purple loosestrife is a great challenge for those trying to maintain lakes and ponds or even agricultural irrigation sites with ditches and channels. Control requires manual or mechanical digging; large stands require chemical controls that then risk polluting the water. Consequently, early intervention is essential.

Plant This Instead: Giant Blue Lobelia



A native plant that can easily rival purple loosestrife in beauty and height is giant blue lobelia (*Lobelia siphilitica*), also known as blue cardinal flower. Like its rival, this perennial lobelia presents its tiny blue flowers drooping in mass on a flower spike above deep green foliage. It is especially effective for providing blue color in rain gardens; use as an attractive food plant in pollinator gardens, where it attracts both butterflies and hummingbirds; and as a border plant along shorelines, where its tamer nature will not present the crowding problems caused by purple loosestrife.

Other notable features are:

- Grows well in climate zones 4 - 9 in both full sun and partial shade.
- Can grow in both sandy and clay soils provided the pH is neutral to acidic and moist.
- Rises to about 36 inches in height with a spread of approximately 23 inches.
- Blooms profusely from mid-summer to late fall.
- Propagates easily by division of its root clumps in early spring.

And it provides that all too rare condition in nature—it's **blue!**

To suggest ideas for future issues, please contact Joanne: jko.wildones@gmail.com

DIY Garden Projects

During the winter season, many gardeners have more time on their hands than they do during the active growing season. Its a great time to do some of the interesting garden related projects you thought you'd like to do but couldn't seem to find the time..

Two interesting projects that are easy and yet valuable to wildlife are:

Make a Blue Bird House: All species of bluebird in the United States are cavity nesters. But due to development, natural cavities are increasing hard to find. Competition for these limited sites is becoming a huge problem. A well-built and properly placed bluebird nest box in your backyard or a nearby park or vacant lot can help boost local populations.

Here are some links to help you learn how to build a proper nest box for bluebirds:

National Audubon Society: www.audubon.org

Birds and Blooms: www.birdsandblooms.com

The Spruce: www.thespruce.com

Make a Mason Bee House: A second simple project that you can do to help native bees is to create homes for native bees!

Many of the wild bees you may encounter in your backyard garden make their burrow homes in the soil. Some bees create hives in snags (a dead or dying standing tree, often with its branches broken off), or in holes in trees. You can also encourage bee-residents by providing man-made nesting blocks or "Bee Condos."

Here are some links to help you learn how to build a proper home for native mason bees:

Instructibles: <https://www.instructables.com/Mason-Bee-House/>

Tall Clover Farm: <https://tallcloverfarm.com/13423/how-to-make-an-orchard-mason-bee-house>

Friends of the Earth: <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/bees/make-a-bee-house>

Also, native mason bees hatch out earlier in the spring than other bees with the possible exception of bumblebees. Try to plant very early blooming native plants such as: native maples, service berry, wild cherry, ninebark, elderberry, pussy willow and white willow. Planting spring ephemerals is also helpful.