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2011

## In the Garden

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# In the Garden

Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, Inc.

# Nature Writers Take Us Deeper in

*"In my part of the country, there comes each year one long and occasionally fruitful season when gardening takes place strictly on paper and in the imagination." Michael Pollan, *Second Nature**

January is a quiet month. Christmas things are packed away, the hustle of gatherings has slowed down and the pace of the new year has not yet begun. It's time to read. Michael Pollan describes writing and gardening as "two ways of rendering the world in rows." Both have a wonderful way of resolving things, of putting things right. Naturalist Ann Zwinger says she writes with the hope that her words will be "witnesses to grace and coherence." And witnesses they are.

Reading about a region while travelling through is like having a personal guide alongside, pointing out things that might otherwise be overlooked. On a trip through Wisconsin, Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac* will draw you deep into the forests, farmlands and marshes of the Great Lakes.

For a trip through the Sandhills, there are few better guides than Merrill Gilfillan. Here's how he describes the Sandhills in *Magpie Rising: Sketches from the Great Plains*: "Of all the geographical pockets on the continent, the Sandhills and their sheer rippling extent hang in the mind like clouds seen from a plane above. Their 20,000 square miles comprise the largest sand dune area in the western hemisphere. They remain the 'greatest unbroken grassland in North America.' They are among the great cattle producing regions in the world. As pure wilderness—in the sense of untrammelled and self-willed space—the Sandhills hold their own against any mountain terrain.... once you top the first real hill and drop into this utterly different topography with its more complicated spatial, something closes behind you and the earth feels possible and receptive again. From high points you see them ripple away, the hills, mile upon mile, muscular yet gentle, supple but Spartan. Wind-rumpled, pocked and dimpled. Dream mountains."

The list below is far from complete and, for brevity's sake, only one book is listed for each author. University of Nebraska Press has some wonderful books on the Great Plains, including Steve Edwards' *Breaking into the Backcountry* and Steve Kahn's *The Hard Way Home*. Anthologies like Stephen Trimble's *Words from the Land: Encounters with Natural History Writing* offer excerpts from a variety of writers.

There's nothing better than first-hand experience. Still, with their knowledge of the land, its history and the natural world, the best nature writers can take us farther and deeper into the country than we could ever manage on our own.

**Abbey, Edward.** *Desert Solitaire*

**Berry, Wendell.** *The Gift of Good Land*

**Bryson, Bill.** *A Walk in the Woods* (humor)

**Carson, Rachel.** *Silent Spring*

**Dillard, Annie.** *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

**Ehrlich, Gretel.** *The Solace of Open Spaces*

**Eiseley, Loren.** *The Immense Journey*

**Gilfillan, Merrill.** *Magpie Rising: Sketches from the Great Plains*

**Hasselstrom, Linda.** *No Place Like Home*

**Hogan, Linda.** *The Sweet Breathing of Plants: Women Writing on the Green World*

**Leopold, Aldo.** *A Sand County Almanac*

**Louv, Richard.** *Last Child in the Woods*

**McPhee, John.** *Rising from the Plains*

**Muir, John.** *The Wilderness World of John Muir*

**Pollan, Michael.** *Second Nature*

**Pyle, Robert Michael.** *The Thunder Tree: Lessons from an Urban Wildland*

**Tallamy, Doug.** *Bringing Nature Home*

**Trimble, Stephen.** *The Geography of Childhood: Why Children Need Wild Places* (with Gary Nabhan)

**Williams, Terry Tempest.** *Finding Beauty in a Broken World*

**Zwinger, Ann.** *Run, River, Run: A Naturalist's Journey Down One of the Great Rivers of the West*

*Karma Larsen, January 2011 "In the Garden" from Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, Inc.*

# Ornamental Grasses Shine Mid-winter

*"In the beginning the meadow was a disappointment.... So it was a lucky day for me when I discovered that I could put the lawn mower blade on the highest setting and cut a path through the tall grass that, at a stroke, transformed that sorry patch of grass and weeds into something altogether different—into a meadow... I don't know exactly what it is, but that sharp, clean edge changes everything; it makes a place where there wasn't one before." Michael Pollan, **Second Nature***



If you see a good-sized patch of grasses as a weedy mess, Pollan's suggestion of cutting a pathway through them may permanently change your mind about grasses in the landscape. Pollan goes on to explain the transformation, to turn the mown pathway into a reassuring metaphor: "In a path is the beginning of narrative, that sure and welcoming sign of human presence."

Whether you love them or not, ornamental grasses stand on their own this time of year. Even the heaviest snow can't permanently bend them to the ground and the low angle of winter light enhances their beauty and appeal. In the minimalist landscape of Nebraska winters, grasses shine.

Few other plants offer such a huge variety of textures, forms, sizes and cultural adaptations as grasses.

Most ornamental grasses grow to mature size in just one season, and there's a grass to fit any landscape, even the narrowest strip of soil between walkways and buildings.

For sustainability, it's hard to beat them. They're drought-tolerant once established; largely unaffected by pests or diseases; work

well in containers; provide habitat and food for birds and other wildlife; their deep root systems stabilize banks and discourage gophers and other "tunnellers"; they can grow in almost any type of soil; and they actually improve rather than decimate soil quality and fertility. They require little maintenance other than an early spring cutback—at a time of year when most gardeners are eager to get outside.

Here are some wonderful grasses for the home landscape, with shorter grasses listed first (\* denotes native):

**Blue grama\***, *Bouteloua gracilis*

**Chinese pennisetum**, *Pennisetum*

*alopecuroides* ('Hamlin', 'Karley Rose')

**Little bluestem\***, *Schizachrium scoparium*

('The Blues', 'Blue Heaven', 'Blaze')

**Prairie dropseed\***, *Sporobolus heterolepis*

**Sedge**, *Carex*, grass-like plants that can thrive in shade and wet soils (*Carex grayi*, *C. muskingumensis*)

**Sideoats grama\***, *Bouteloua curtipendula* (photo)

**Tufted hairgrass**, *Deschampsia caespitosa*

Taller grasses, larger than 3' in height:

**Big bluestem\***, *Andropogon gerardii* ('Pawnee', 'Silver Sunrise')

**Giant sacaton**, *Sporobolus wrightii*

**Graybeard grass**, *Spodiopogon sibirica*

**Indiangrass\***, *Sorghastrum nutans*

**Maidenhair**, *Miscanthus*

**Ravennae Grass**, *Saccharum ravennae*

**Reed grass, feather and Korean reed grass**, *Calamagrostis brachytricha* and *x acutiflora*

**Sand lovegrass**, *Eragrostis trichodes*

**Switchgrass\***, *Panicum virgatum* ('Dallas Blues', 'Northwind', 'Shenandoah')

February "In the Garden" from Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, Inc.



# Jump-start Spring



After another long, cold winter, it's time for some reminders that spring is just around the corner. The winter landscape can be beautiful, but it can also drag on longer than we'd like. The perfect remedy to chase away the dreary winter blues and bring some spring color into your home is to force some branches from your favorite spring-blooming shrubs.

Almost any shrub that blooms in early spring can be forced into bloom inside. Many ornamental trees and shrubs set their flower buds during the summer for bloom the following spring, go dormant in winter and come out to bloom when exposed to warm temperatures and moisture. Late winter, the best time to prune deciduous trees and shrubs, is also the best time to cut branches for forcing. The flower buds are generally fatter and more rounded than leaf buds.

The farther into spring you collect branches, the earlier they will open. Some woody branches will take up to three weeks to bloom, while others will flower in a week or less. No matter how long it takes, this is a great way to have a few blooms indoors while you wait for the arrival of spring.

It's best to cut branches for forcing when the outside temperature is above freezing – they will be more pliable and make a better transition from cold outdoor temperatures to warmer indoor temperatures. When you get inside, recut the stems by a few inches under running water to prevent air from being sucked into the vessels. Make sure you cut the stem at an angle to give the branch a larger surface to drink in the water.

After the branches are cut, hammer or split the cut ends, then submerge the branches in very warm water in the bathtub for about four hours to allow the buds to absorb water directly. If you want, you can stand the cuttings in a deep bucket of warm water with a plastic bag over the tops to increase the humidity overnight. The next day, you can stand the branches in fresh warm water with a floral preservative dissolved in it and put the container in a bright location. You should start forcing at 50 degrees Fahrenheit; higher temperatures at the start will blast the buds. After a couple of weeks, you can speed up flowering by moving the buds to a warm room. Check the branches frequently; they will need regular misting to prevent buds from drying out. You should also change the water every three days.

Select branches that are at least 1 foot long with many enlarged buds and prune branches from all sides of the shrub to maintain symmetry. Whichever shrub you choose, make sure you cut each branch all the way to the main stem. You can always shorten the branches later if they are too long for the vase.

Pussy willow, flowering quince, and forsythia are among the most common and easiest woody plants cut for forcing. Nanking cherry, cornelian cherry dogwood, vernal witchhazel and clove currant are not as common but are very easy to force and they make excellent landscape plants as well. The spicy clove scent and rich yellow color of the clove currant will brighten any day.

Suitable branches can also be cut from other willows, wild plum, serviceberry, cherries, lilacs, flowering quinces and red maple. It's best to wait until March or perhaps April to take cuttings from harder-to-force ornamentals such as crabapple, magnolia and redbud. Late winter is also a great time to collect the bare branches of hazelnuts, alders, birches and hornbeams to force and elongate their slim, pendulous catkin flowers.

If you haven't forced spring blossoming shrubs before, make this the year and you'll be rewarded with colorful, fragrant flowers in your home.



## Vines

Why vines? Maybe it's simply that we prefer green.

There are plenty of structures in our lives... houses, garages, fences, clotheslines, mailboxes, compost bins. Vines meld and soften all the hard edges, blurring the boundaries between garden and fence and gutter and house, extending green far into places where no garden exists.

They can provide quick privacy, screen buildings or parking lots, give shade—some of them within just a month or two, define and separate distinct areas in a garden. Areas that are awkwardly shaped can be softened with vines. Many vines have beautiful

blossoms and good fall color; a few are evergreen in Nebraska.

Though vines tend to be used as climbers, they also work well as groundcovers, twisting around rocks and through low-growing perennials and shrubs, adding dramatic bursts of color when blooming. Like any groundcover plant, they function much like a mulch, shading the roots of perennials and competing with weeds.

Vines extend themselves in a variety of ways and the differences are important in deciding which plant to put in a particular spot or to climb an existing structure.





Twining vines like honeysuckle and morning glory wrap around their support so they require fairly thin surfaces like wire, string, netting, small poles and slats. Clinging vines like clematis, grape and porcelain berry also require thin wire or netting for support but in their case the entire stem doesn't spiral but has tendrils, specialized stems, that wrap around the structure. Clinging vines, on the other hand, cannot attach themselves to netting or string. Their aerial roots or "holdfasts" adhere to almost any flat surface but they prefer slightly rough surfaces like unpolished stone or brick or rough bark (e.g. Boston and English ivy).

It's also important to know the eventual size or weight of the vine. The trunks of some clinging vines, like climbing hydrangea, can require strong support in just a few growing seasons.

Some of the vines listed below are very aggressive (sweet autumn clematis, porcelain berry, perennial pea, etc.) so do some research before planting!

*Actinidia arguta*, hardy kiwi. White flowers in May; male and female plants required for fruit set.

*Akebia quinata*, chocolate vine. Purple flowers in spring.

*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*, porcelain berry. Bright berries through summer.

*Aristolochia macrophylla*, dutchman's pipe. Small, inconspicuous greenish flowers.

*Celastrus scandens*, American bittersweet. Crimson berries in fall; male and female plants required for fruit set.

*Clematis alpina*, Alpine clematis. Early, profuse blossoms in a variety of colors.

*Clematis macropetala*, downy clematis. Blue flowers early summer; silvery seedheads.

*Clematis maximowicziana*, sweet autumn clematis. Small, white flowers late summer and early fall.

*Clematis Montana*, clematis Montana. Light-colored flowers in early summer.

*Clematis tangutica*, golden clematis. Yellow flowers late summer/fall. Fluffy seed heads.

*Clematis terniflora*, sweet autumn clematis. Varied color flowers in early fall.

*Clematis texensis*, scarlet clematis. Red flowers midsummer to early fall; more tolerant of dry soils than most clematis.

*Clematis viticella*, Italian clematis. Purple flowers midsummer to early fall.

*Clematis x jackmanii*, Jackman clematis. Varied color flowers June to September.

*Fallopia 'Lemon Lace'*, lemon lace vine. Golden leaves with red stems in early spring, foamy white flowers in fall.

*Hedera helix*, English ivy. Evergreen; foliage turns purplish with cold temperatures.

*Hydrangea anomala petiolaris*, climbing hydrangea. White flowers through summer; good fall color.

*Lathyrus latifolius*, perennial pea. Multi-colored flowers with small green pods.

*Lonicera sempervirens*, trumpet honeysuckle. Scarlet-orange flowers and red berries summer into fall.

*Lonicera x heckrottii*, goldflame honeysuckle. Fragrant, reddish flowers through summer.

*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*, Virginia creeper. Scarlet fall color.

*Parthenocissus tricuspidata*, Boston ivy. Leaves are brilliant red in fall, dark berries.

*Polygonum aubertii*, silver lace vine. Fragrant varied colors in early summer.

*Vitis* species, grape. Edible fruits.

*Wisteria floribunda*, Japanese wisteria. Varied color flowers April to May.

*Wisteria frutescens*, American wisteria. Flowers June to August; needs strong support.

April "In the Garden" from Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, Inc.



## Graveside Plantings

*"About thirty years ago or more, when I first commenced traveling around the country in the interest of the nursery trade, I began to find out that the best places and the places where I could get the most information about trees and plants, was by visiting cemeteries, for there I could learn what trees and what plants were doing the best in those communities." What Trees and Plants Mean to a Cemetery, published in 1919 by Fletcher Bohlander*

Cemetery plantings are difficult. They're difficult to talk about, difficult to think about. Planting is often a last-minute decision, sometimes left to the discretion of the cemetery or a local nursery. Usually plantings are maintained by grounds crews with limited time and resources. The constraints of cemetery planting are daunting... plants need to stay within the confines of the individual plot, withstand foot traffic, require a minimum of water and care, not cover the gravestone, not interfere with mowing or other maintenance and may need to survive winter with a foot or more of leaves covering them.

Understandably, most cemeteries have strict guidelines about what can and cannot be planted in order to avoid maintenance problems, obstructions, invasive plant issues. Does the cemetery owner or association even allow planting? Is there a limited list of plants

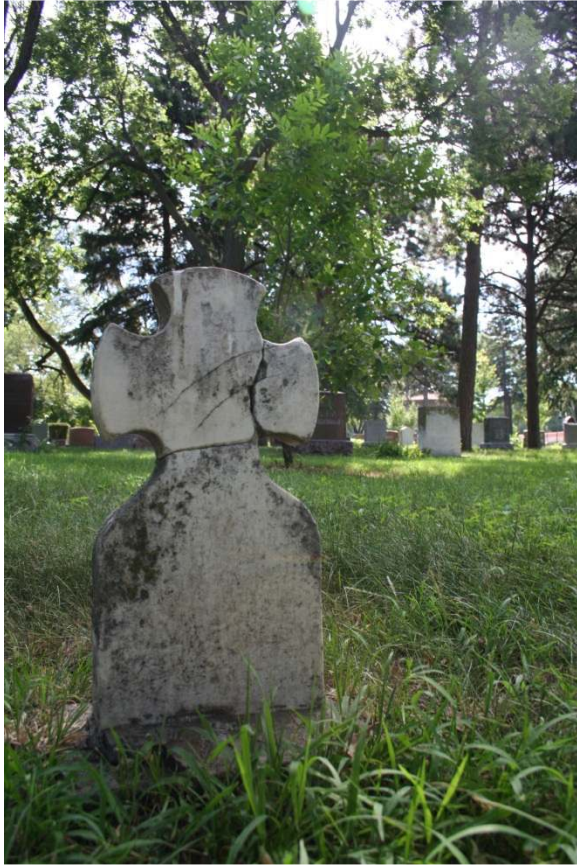
allowed? What are their requirements? Remember, too, that guidelines may change under the direction of future caretakers. Given all those constraints, cemeteries may be the ultimate test for sustainable landscapes.

One of the best ways to decide what can be done with an individual plot is to see what plants are currently thriving at the cemetery under similar site conditions—sunlight, available moisture, protection, etc. A visit to a nearby arboretum or public garden will also offer some great examples of sustainable plants for the area.

There are other, more personal, considerations as well. Many of us will be visiting cemeteries in the coming month but how many of the gravesides we visit will bear any memories of the person we remember? Was there a plant they especially loved, a plant that carries special meaning about a



specific time or event? Will that small plot of ground bear any resemblance to the gardens they cared for themselves? Is there a plant that can be transplanted from their home garden to the grave?\* Another question might be the time of year friends and family will most likely be visiting the grave... Memorial Day, an anniversary or birthday?



Below are some recommendations for varying goals and conditions but make sure you check with the cemetery administrator or association before undertaking any planning or planting. Also make sure plantings are well-defined from nearby turf. If you won't be there to water them regularly, you may want to amend the soil with compost to help it

retain moisture better; then mulch it well to protect and further define it.

For early spring bloom, consider bulbs like snowdrops or daffodils, which are hardy, long-lived and will spread gradually but not aggressively. For Memorial Day, peonies, iris and lilies are likely choices, along with pasque flower and bleeding heart.

Low-growing groundcovers that can withstand mowing include: ajuga, creeping phlox, germander (fragrant when bruised and semi-evergreen for interest far into winter), poppy mallow, plumbago and creeping sedum.

Native plants are adapted to local conditions and usually require the least maintenance. The ones listed below are fairly tall, and should be planted behind the gravestone to keep it visible. Long-blooming summer and early fall perennials for sunny areas include: *Agastache*, aster, bee balm, catmint, coneflower, coreopsis, garden phlox, black-eyed Susan, gaillardia, toad lily (fall) and yarrow.

For shady areas: bleeding heart, coral bells, *Corydalis*, daylilies, hosta, sedum.

For foliage that persists year-round: coral bells, germander, hens and chicks, perennial geranium.

Though ornamental grasses are low-maintenance and tough, in early stages it can be difficult to differentiate them from turfgrass or weeds, so it may be best to avoid planting grasses unless specifically approved.

*\* One of the plants I transplanted to my father's grave from his pasture was purple poppy mallow. It's been mowed back several times but remains—a reminder both of my father and the pasture he took pleasure in.*  
*Karma Larsen*

*May 2011 "In the Garden" from Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, Inc.*



## Gardens for Pollinators

The word pollinator conjures up images of bees and butterflies, but are there other pollinators? And what exactly do they do? Pollinators include bees, butterflies, moths, beetles, flies, birds, bats and even reptiles. They are insects and animals that move pollen from one plant to another; more specifically, from the anthers of a male flower to the female flower's reproductive organ or stigma. When a flower receives pollen from the same species of plant, successful fertilization can occur to develop seeds that carry the genetic information for new plants. Since plants can't move, all sorts of adaptations have occurred to move pollen around by wind, water and, of course, by pollinators.

Pollinators only inadvertently play a major role in plant reproduction... they're simply seeking their own food sources of nectar and pollen. But their work is essential to us, as more than 80 percent of the 1,400 food crops we depend on are pollinated by pollinators and 90 percent or more of

flowering plants need pollinators to survive. Next time you're at the supermarket, take a look around. That colorful produce aisle full of apples, pumpkins, squash, soybeans and watermelons relies on the activity of pollinators. In the United States alone, the domestic honey bee pollinates over \$10 billion worth of crops.

Why is there increasing concern about pollinators? The numbers of native pollinators and domestic pollinators are declining due to disease, extensive and inappropriate use of pesticides and loss of habitat. Even aside from the very tangible and immediate need for food production, pollinators are part of the intricate and biologically diverse natural ecosystem that sustains both life and quality of life.

As citizens, property owners and stewards of the natural resources that sustain us, we can help by creating landscapes that are pollinator-friendly. We can do this by minimizing and properly using pesticides, and by changing landscape management



strategies to create landscapes that provide food, shelter and water for pollinators. Many pollinators travel long distances in the process of migrating (one of the most notable is the monarch butterfly, which travels all the way from Canada to Mexico). We can help by making sure proper food and habitat is widely available.



The simplest way to help protect pollinators is to realize that the chemicals we apply to kill unwanted insects also kill beneficial insects. Instead of reaching for the nearest bottle of pesticide when something appears to be nibbling on plant leaves, consider using Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategy and only use pesticides when no other option is available.

Take a walk around your property and neighborhood. Is your landscape pollinator-friendly? Is there a variety of plants? A

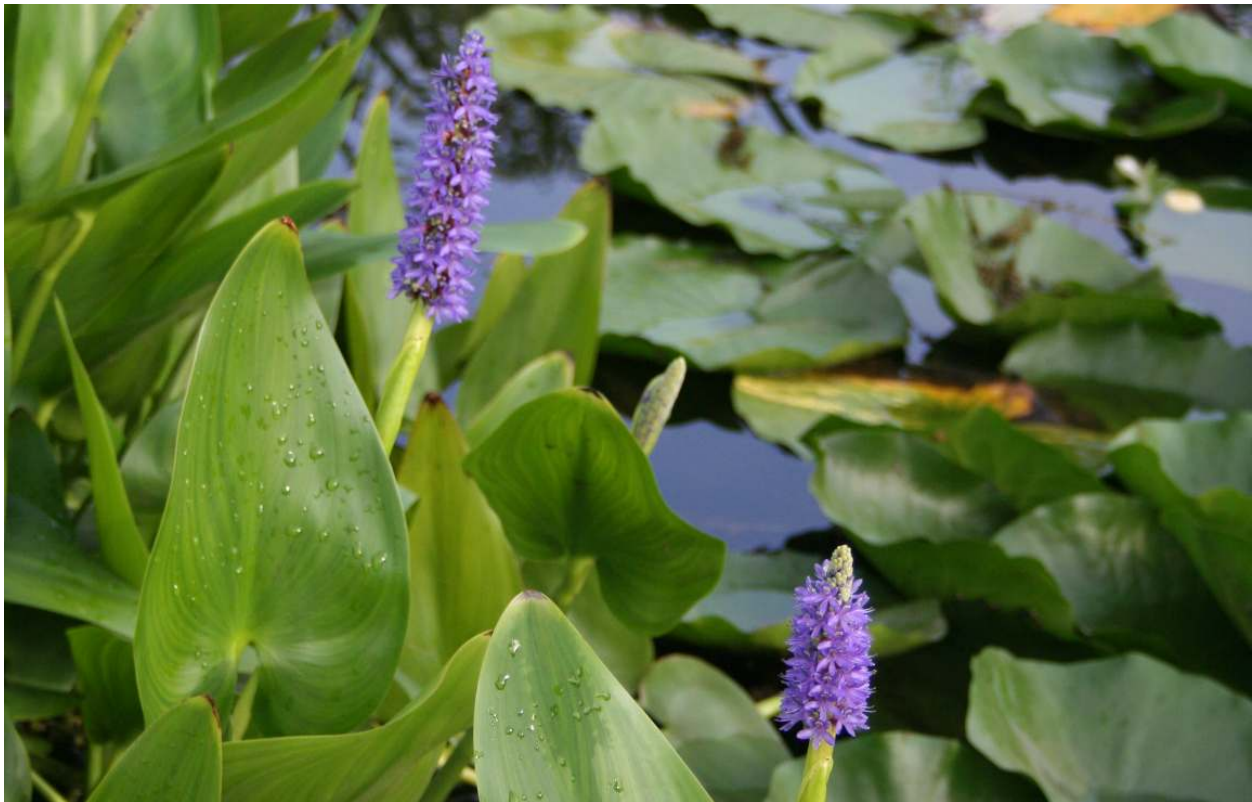
diversity of pollinators? Are the plants in your landscape able to grow without fertilizer and pesticides? What could be added or replaced to attract more pollinators? Trees, shrubs and grasses are important components of the pollinator landscape since they provide food, shelter and resting places. Native plants are always good choices for attracting pollinators and there are adapted and annual plants that attract more colorful pollinators like hummingbirds and butterflies.

Pollinators tend to have very specific needs or preferences in terms of flower color, bloom time, fragrance, etc. Below is a general guide for some common pollinators:

- Honey bees prefer fragrant blue and yellow flowers.
- Beetles frequent white or dull-colored flowers with yeasty, spicy or fruity odors.
- Flies like it stinky, but they also visit plants that attract bees.
- Butterflies and moths prefer sweet-smelling bright blue, orange or yellow flowers.
- Butterfly larvae feed on plant tissues from little bluestem and other native grasses.
- Certain pollinators, such as butterflies, also need access to mud puddles, which they sip to take in salts and minerals.
- Night-flying moths tend to visit highly-scented white or yellow flowers.
- Birds and hummingbirds prefer very large red and yellow flowers that produce an abundance of nectar.

Some plants to consider for a pollinator garden include: milkweed, goldenrod, aster, sorrel, native grasses, gayfeather, coneflower, yarrow, leadplant, New Jersey tea, *Monarda*, *Rudbeckia*, Joe-Pye weed, ironweed, pasque flower, salvias, sedum, clover and daylily.

*Christina Hoyt, June 2011 "In the Garden" from Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, Inc.*



## Plants for Water Gardens

It isn't easy to create or maintain an attractive, natural-looking water garden but ponds or other water features can add a lot of beauty and interest to outdoor spaces. More importantly for plant people, there is a whole range of fascinating water plants that simply can't be grown anywhere else in the garden.

Plants are essential for a pond—they help clean the water and provide food and shelter for fish, wildlife and beneficial insects. The basic types of water garden plants include underwater or oxygenating plants to absorb nutrients that would otherwise feed algae, floaters to filter the water and shade the surface and marginal or bog plants to soften the edges.

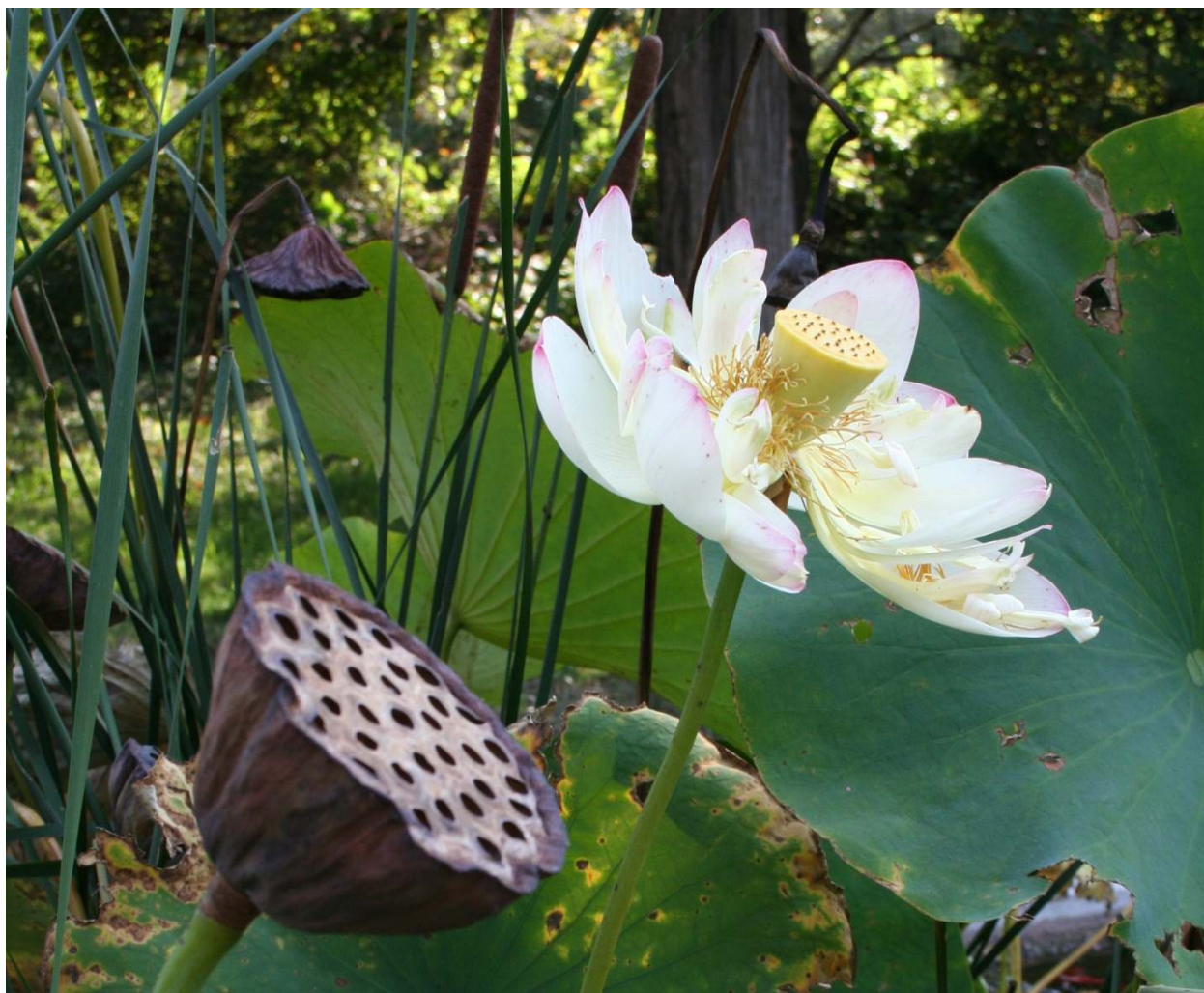
**Cuttings of underwater plants** can be potted up in bunches in very coarse sand, topped with gravel and placed in 6-30" of water. The recommended rate is 1-2 bunches per square foot of pond surface. Water lilies do best when their crowns are covered with 6-12" of water. They should be divided every other year to maintain vigorous plants.

**Marginal or bog plants** thrive on shelves along the margin of the pond. Different plants do best at different depths of water, but start pots in shallow water before gradually

moving them to their proper depth (use bricks or cement blocks for temporary supports). Lilies and marginal plants should be planted in large pots with average garden soil and the crown of the plant at the very top of the pot. Allow space at the top for a top dressing of pea gravel to prevent muddying up the water. Plan on dividing pot-bound marginal plants every other year to encourage new growth. Try planting a couple varieties in the same pot to provide a horizontal and vertical element in the same area. Place groups of tall spiky plants next to understory plants for a natural appearance.

**Floaters** are plants that float on the surface of the pond with their roots dangling in the water. Floaters draw out extra nutrients for cleaner water, but can spread like crazy once established, so you only need to plant a few each year. Pond experts recommend that up to 60 percent of the pond surface be covered with plants to shade the surface. Water quality and clarity are easy to maintain with a good choice of plant materials designed to filter nutrients and reduce the sunlight necessary for algae growth. To maintain some areas of open water, simply pull out any extras and add them to the compost heap. \*Denotes native to Nebraska or surrounding states.





### Oxygenating Plants

\*Anacharis, *Elodea canadensis*

One of the best producing oxygenators; lance-like leaflets.

\*Moneywort, *Lysimachia nummularia*

Small rounded leaves carpet the water sides of pond.

\*Tape Grass, *Vallisneria americana*

Grassy foliage with tiny white flowers.

Water Milfoil, *Myriophyllum* spp.

Delicate, fern-like foliage.

### Floating Aquatic Plants (non-hardy)

\*Fairy Moss, *Azolla caroliniana*

Thick lacy carpet of floating bluish-green foliage.

Salvinia, *Salvinia rotundifolia*

Rather broad, pale green floating foliage on slender stems.

Water Lettuce, *Pistia stratiotes*

Floating shell-like rosettes of pulpy leaves. Sun or shade.

Water Hyacinth, *Eichhornia crassipes* 'Major'

Shiny dark green leaves with expanded pseudobulbs.

### Tropical Marginal Plants (do best with 2" of water over crown)

Egyptian Paper Palm or papyrus, *Cyperus*

Tall 5-8' stalks with tuft of long thread-like leaves on top.

Papyrus, Dwarf, *Cyperus haspan* var. viviparous

A miniature Papyrus with round "mop" heads on 2' plants.

Society Garlic, *Tulbaghia violarea* 'Variegata'

Cream variegation on Allium-like foliage; in or out of pond.

Sweetflag, Japanese, *Acorus gramineus* 'Ogon'

Chartreuse and cream iris-like leaves to 6" tall. Zone 6.

Taro, *Colocasia*

Unique large leaves make for excellent center piece.

Umbrella Palm, *Cyperus alternifolius*

Flat, grassy umbrella-like heads of leaves to 3-5" tall.

### **Tropical Marginal Plants (do best with 6" of water over crown)**

Canna, Variegated, <i>Canna americanallis</i>	Yellow stripes against olive green stems; orange-red flowers.
Parrot Feather, <i>Myriophyllum proserpinaroides</i>	Delicate, feathery leaves form dense whorls; zone 6. (listed as invasive; use only in confined water feature)
Sensitivity Plant, <i>Neptunia oleracea</i>	Mimosa-like leaves spread gracefully; yellow feathery flower.
Water Poppy, <i>Hydrocleys nymphoides</i>	Thick oval, floating deep green leaves; light yellow flowers.
Water Snowflake, <i>Nymphoides</i>	Small heart-shaped, floating leaves; delicate white flowers.

### **Hardy Marginal Plants (do best with 2" of water over crown)**

*Arrowhead, <i>Sagittaria</i>	Distinctive arrow-like leaves; white flower spikes to 2' high.
*Bulrush, Dark Green, <i>Scirpus atrovirens</i>	Attractive, round stems with delicate seedheads atop 4-5' stems.
*Cardinal Flower, <i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>	Fiery red flowers on 2-4' stems; enjoys very shallow conditions.
*Marsh Mallow, <i>Hibiscus militaris</i>	Plate-sized white flowers with red center; native hibiscus!
*Horsetail, <i>Equisetum hyemale</i>	Segmented stems offer unique bamboo-like leaves. A must!
*Iris, Blue Flag, <i>Iris versicolor</i>	Attractive foliage and blue flowers; does well in and out of pond.
Iris, Yellow Water Iris, <i>Iris pseudacorus</i>	Broad, sword-like leaves; bright yellow flowers; aggressive.
*Marsh Marigold, <i>Caltha palustris</i>	Glossy, rounded leaves; buttercups in profusion; early dormancy.
*Monkey Flower, <i>Mimulus ringens</i>	Lavender-blue flowers all summer; shiny foliage to 2' h.
*Prairie Cordgrass, <i>Spartina pectinata</i>	Offers graceful backdrop with yellow fall color; aggressive.
*Rush, <i>Juncus</i>	Selections from native and introduced; also for pond edge.
*Sedge, <i>Carex</i>	Good selections from native and introduced; also for pond edge.
Sweetflag, Variegated, <i>Acorus calamus</i>	Creamy variegation on sword-like leaves to 3' h. In or out.
Water Plantain, <i>Alisma plantago-aquatica</i>	Broad leaves and towering stiff stems with tiny white flowers; 3' h.

### **Hardy Marginal Plants (do best with 6" of water over crown)**

*Arrow Arum, <i>Peltandra virginica</i>	Produces glossy, arrow-shaped leaves that are very fleshy.
*Bogbean, <i>Menyanthes trifoliata</i>	Interesting foliage on creeping root stalks; fringed white flowers.
*Cattail, <i>Typha</i>	Nice dwarf selections recommended; <i>Typha gracilis</i> is awesome!
Floating Heart, <i>Nymphoides peltata</i>	Yellow fringed buttercup-like flowers; floating heart-shaped leaf.
Hawthorne, Water, <i>Aponogeton distachyus</i>	Dark green strap-like leaves; nice white late blooming flowers.
*Lotus, Hardy, <i>Nelumbo lutea</i>	Great concave leaves and huge yellow flowers; native, 3-5'h.
*Rush, Pickerel, <i>Pontederia cordata</i>	Finest hardy aquatic! Shiny foliage with blue flower spikes.

### **Tropical or Hardy Water Lilies, *Nymphaea* (do best with 12" of water over crown)**

*Written by Bob Henrickson, July 2011 "In the Garden" from Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, Inc.*





## Plant Selection Crucial for Dry Shade

One of the challenges of gardening can be dealing with shade, particularly dry shade. Often it's under the canopy of trees so rainwater is deflected away and plants need to compete for moisture, root space, nutrients, even airflow. Narrow spaces between buildings or under north-facing eaves offer the same challenge.

Moisture and sunlight are essential to plants. When those things are limited the plant possibilities are somewhat narrowed, or at least less familiar. This may be because plants for shade tend to be less showy—blooming less and for shorter periods of time. Shadows darken and mute any color, so some of the best plants for shade are ones with pale or variegated foliage or blossoms that can stand out against a dark backdrop. In shade, characteristics like texture and form are just as important as color.

Fortunately there are many plants that can thrive in areas with minimal moisture and sunlight. Hostas are perhaps the best-known, loved and most-used of shade perennials... and for good reason. They're hardy and long-lived and they come in an amazing variety of sizes, textures and colors.

They spread slowly and reliably, just enough to make them the perfect plant for sharing!

Coral bells are available in a huge range also, with foliage ranging from purple to chartreuse to bronze. Like hosta and astilbe, they are stalwarts of the shade garden. Very similar but less familiar is foam flower or *Tiarella*. Some cultivars have dark purple veins and foliage persists into winter. The flowers are delicate and smoky but the foliage is the real star.

Green is the predominant color for shade plants, but using plants of varying size and texture can provide as interesting a contrast as even the boldest color difference. Ferns, with their delicate cut foliage, arching stems and unfurling leaves, are a wonderful contrast to large, glossy-leaved hostas. For subtle but effective color contrast, try Japanese painted fern with purple, silver and almost metallic tones.

Other lesser-known beauties for shade include Solomon's seal with beautiful, bending stems from which flowers and later berries dangle below the foliage. The new variegated 'Jack Frost' *Brunnera* has finally brought more attention to this genus with

large, deeply-veined, heart-shaped leaves and starry blue flowers in early spring. *Corydalis* has small yellow flowers and finely cut, silvery foliage. Like the other plants mentioned above, these are all tough plants that can handle difficult conditions.



For seasonal beauty midwinter, the bright red stems of red twig dogwood and berries of viburnums, cotoneaster and coralberry offer color. For persistent or semi-persistent green, there's periwinkle, creeping mahonia, *Hypericum* and *Myrica*. In early spring, Lenten roses and snowdrops can bloom right through the cover of snow. Both

have beautiful blossoms, but the subtle greenish purples and pinks of the former and the close-to-the-ground greens and whites of the latter demand close attention. The tiny bulb squill, or *Scilla*, has bright blue flowers in early spring, then goes dormant as summer approaches.

For groundcovers, good options are lamb's ear, periwinkle, *Lamium*, lily of the valley, *Pachysandra*, snow-in-summer, lady's mantle, wild ginger, *Epimedium* and perennial *Geranium*. Almost any plants for shade work as groundcovers, as they tend to be grown for foliage more than flower and tend to spread and cover.

Few shade plants are grown for their blossoms alone but daylilies can bloom in fairly dense shade, and columbine, foxglove, coral bells, *Brunnera*, *Bergenia*, *Geranium*, *Corydalis*, foam flower and sedum all offer beautiful flowers. Understory shrubs, many with spring blossoms, include viburnum, black jetbead, snowberry, dogwood, witch hazel, *Kerria* and Carolina allspice.

When planting shade-lovers, consider adding organic matter to increase moisture retention and enrich the soil. Though they can handle dry shade, like all plants they need regular watering until their roots are established.

A final, seasonal idea for shady outdoor spaces is to put houseplants out for the summer. They'll repay you with healthy new foliage when you bring them back inside in early fall. You can leave them in their pots, plant them into soil or bury them, pots and all until it's time to bring them indoors. They'll enjoy the shade and shelter outdoors just as much as you do.

*Written by Karma Larsen, August 2011 "In the Garden" from Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, Inc.*





## Plants for Rain Gardens

A rain garden is a man-made depression in a yard, planted with native or specially adapted plants, that is designed to hold rainwater temporarily and allow it to soak in. Native plants are well-suited because they are deep-rooted and tolerant of local conditions, but many non-native plants work well also. What's important is to include plants that can tolerate extremes since there will be periods that are very dry and periods with standing water, which the plants will help absorb and filter before it enters groundwater.

It's best to have grasses make up about half of the plantings since perennials, left to grow without competition in wet conditions, will tend to flop and to take over the bed. Deep-rooted grasses are better able to slow down fast-moving stormwater and will hide

the dormant stems of perennials into fall and winter, while offering their own colorful, showy seedheads.

Some of the best plants for rain gardens include:

**GRASSES.** Indiangrass, big bluestem, switchgrass, feather reed grass, cordgrass, rush (corkscrew, inland, Torrey's, spike) and \*sedges (bristly, gray's, palm, bottlebrush, broom, tussock. \*Yellow nutsedge is NOT a true *Carex*).

**PERENNIALS.** Iris, sweetflag, nodding pink onion, swamp milkweed, flat-topped and New England aster, turtlehead, purple and prairie coneflower, Joe-Pye plant, *Filipendula*, gayfeather, obedient plant, *Rudbeckia*, bottle gentian, culver's root, meadow rue, hibiscus.

*September 2011 "In the Garden" from Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, Inc.*



# Kids and Nature Go Hand-in-hand



Stomping in mud puddles, digging in piles of dirt, swinging on a tire swing, catching fireflies, picking vegetable from the garden—these are all ways kids and nature go hand-in-hand. The outdoors provides an exciting place for kids to play, explore, observe, discover and be challenged. Yet, in today's modern world, kids are increasingly disconnected from nature.

I recently asked a seven-year-old boy what he liked about nature. He replied, "I don't know, there isn't any nature nearby." Kids believe that nature can only be found in a state park or vacation spot, and not in their backyards and community green spaces. In the past, kids spent hours playing in their yard or running around the neighborhood. Today, kids spend a lot of their time indoors using a variety of modern technologies. Technology is useful but it's no substitute for the natural world. The best way for kids to understand their place in the environment is to get out and enjoy it!

There are many ways to engage kids in nature. First of all, do it yourself! Kids who see adults engaging in nature and enjoying outside activities are more likely to participate too. Ideas for family play:

1. **Backyard campout**—With the bugs and the summer heat gone, this is a great time a year to pitch a tent in the yard. Kids can listen for night sounds and guess what animals are active at night.
2. **Picnic**—Kids love to eat outside! Throw a blanket on the grass and enjoy a meal together. Talk about what other animals eat and where they might "picnic."

3. **Campfire**—Cool fall evenings are best spent around a campfire. Roast marshmallows, sing songs, tell stories and look at the night sky.

4. **Dig in the dirt**—Plant colorful mums or a tree in the yard. Dig out the vegetable garden and prepare the area for next season. Use leftover vegetables to start a compost pile.

5. **Nature Hike**—Walk around the yard or neighborhood a few times a week to notice new things. Look for different fall colors, squirrels gathering acorns and what birds are still in the area.

6. **Scavenger hunt**—Kids love searching for things! Make lists with words or pictures and see how many different things kids can find in their yard. Kids will discover diversity in their own backyard.

7. **Feed the birds**—The fall and winter season is a great time to start feeding birds. Collect pine cones, cover them with peanut butter, and roll them in birdseed. Hang them up in trees in the yard and watch our feathery friends find a treat!

8. **Visit an apple orchard or pumpkin patch**—Talk with kids about harvest time. Kids can help bake treats using apples or pumpkins. Pumpkins can be used for decorations and then added to the compost pile after Halloween.

9. **Rake leaves**—Kids will have fun and get lots of exercise raking the leaves. After the leaves are in big piles, let the kids jump in. Talk about why leaves are so important to a tree and why trees lose them in the fall.

10. **Nature journal**—Kids like to express themselves with pictures and words. Provide them with some paper and have them find a quiet place in the yard. Kids can record what they hear, see, smell and experience in their journals.

For more ideas on how to connect kids to nature, visit [www.plt.org/-every-student-learns-outside](http://www.plt.org/-every-student-learns-outside).



## An Edible Fall Landscape

Fall is a season for all the senses—the brisk feel of cooler temperatures, the sound of wind through grasses and trees, brightly colored leaves, the rustle of them underfoot and even, if you know where to look, things to taste and harvest.

Nebraska has some wonderful edible native plants that can be found in prairies and wooded areas; or planted in the home landscape to enjoy in future years.

**American or Chinese chestnut, *Castanea*.** Chestnuts are often in pairs or clusters and covered with spiny burs. Each fruit has 2-3 teardrop-shaped chestnuts that are shiny brown and somewhat flat and pointed. The chestnuts can be boiled, toasted or steamed for dressings for poultry and meat. \*You need at least two trees for cross-pollination, so it's best to have three or more.

**American Hazelnut, *Corylus americana*.** This thicket-forming shrub is native to borders of woods and stream banks in southeastern Nebraska. At one time hazelnuts were so numerous on the bluffs of the Missouri and Platte rivers that families would go “nutting” each autumn. Today few hazelnuts can be found in the wild, but they

make an attractive large shrub worthy of planting in your back yard. Nutritious, heart-healthy hazelnuts can be used for baked goods, and are also delicious in salads or cooked with vegetables or meat.

**American Plum, *Prunus americana*.**

Wild plum is a small native tree or large shrub that forms dense thickets with sharp-tipped twigs. The abundant ripe one-inch plums in late summer or early autumn make this a favorite of wild food buffs. When ripe, the sweet yellow, red or purple fruits are fleshy and juicy. Plums can be eaten fresh in season, processed into a sauce for meats or used as a dessert. Plum jelly and jam are great for bread or toast, and spiced plum jelly makes a great baste for roasted meats, especially wild game. This hasn't been a great year for wild plum harvesting but if you can find them, they're great for cooking.

**Black Walnut, *Juglans nigra*.** No other nut can compare to the delicious flavor of our native black walnut. The nuts can be used in candies and baked goods, but they also complement baked squash and yams. Black walnut caramels and toffee are outstanding, with a flavor all their own. Harvest the nuts



while the husks are still green. The strong juice of walnut husks can stain almost anything, so wear rubber boots (rolling each nut back and forth under your foot will loosen the husk) and rubber gloves to remove the husks. Clean the nuts in water, draining when the water becomes black. The nutmeats will be ready to use after curing for about a month.

**Clove or Buffalo Currant, *Ribes odoratum*.** This native shrub grows about 5' high. Clusters of spicy-scented yellow flowers in spring are followed by clusters of fruit that turn black when fully ripe. The selection 'Crandall' has large, juicy fruits that make excellent jam, jelly, syrup, and pie and are good as a chunky topping on hot oatmeal.



**Leadplant, *Amorpha canescens*,** is a small native shrub found in scattered, high-quality prairie remnants throughout much of Nebraska. The small leaflets are covered with fine hairs, giving them a silvery or lead-like appearance. Blue-purple flower spikes bloom on the tips of branches in early summer, but it is the dried leaflets that are used for tea. Simply place them in water and bring it to a boil. The leaflets can be used several times.

**Mountain Mint, *Pycnanthemum*.** This herbaceous plant grows to 5' high and can be found in nature along roadsides, in meadows or open woods. Both the flowers and leaves are edible and can be eaten raw or cooked. It has a hot, spicy, mint-like flavor for seasoning

meats or other dishes. The fresh or dried leaves can also be steeped in cold water for a refreshing mint-like herb tea.

**Northern Pecan, *Carya illinoensis*.** Pecans fall to the ground when they ripen so they're easy to harvest if you can get them before wildlife find them. They are best air dried in a cool, dry, ventilated place for several weeks before using them; they should be left in the shell to retain quality or frozen or refrigerated once shelled. \*Cross-pollination requires at least two trees.

**Pawpaw, *Asimina triloba*.** The pawpaw is a small native tree growing in the open woods and ravines of the Missouri River bluffs in southeastern Nebraska. A ripe pawpaw looks like a short, stubby banana and has a rich flavor that's a mix of banana, vanilla custard, pineapple and mango. Pawpaw fruit is high in potassium, iron and calcium and pawpaw trees are beautiful, with large, robust leaves that turn lemon-yellow in fall. The yellow flesh of ripe fruit can be eaten fresh from the tree or scooped out and used in quick breads, cookies or muffins.

**Persimmon, *Diospyros virginiana*.** The orange fruit of persimmon hang like ornaments from bare branches in fall after the leaves have fallen. The fruit is one of the last wild fruits to gather of the season, often after a few light frosts in fall. For the sweetest flavor, harvest them when the fruits are soft and wrinkled. Persimmon often is used in breads, cookies and fruitcakes. One of its best uses, however, is in bread pudding, where its rich flavor stands out. Persimmons are small forest-edge trees and grow best in groupings in the shadow of tall trees.

**Prickly Pear Cactus Fruit, *Opuntia*.** The fruit of the Nebraska native prickly pear is 1-2" inches long and when ripe the thick skin turns reddish-purple. The edible flesh is sweet and juicy and full of crunchy seeds. It can be used like pineapple—diced and used fresh in salads or smoothies, and the juice can be used as a topping for yogurt or cereal.

Nebraska Nut Growers Association offers good local information on cultivars and how to grow nut trees like pecans, chestnuts and walnuts at [www.nebraskanutgrowers.org](http://www.nebraskanutgrowers.org); and wild nuts can be purchased at Heartland Nuts 'n More or other regional sources.

### Wild Persimmon Pudding

4 oz. butter  
2/3 c. flour  
1 tsp. baking powder  
1 tsp. cinnamon  
1 c. persimmon pulp\*  
1 c. granulated sugar  
1 egg, beaten  
½ c. buttermilk  
½ c. light cream or evaporated milk  
1 tsp. vanilla extract



Grease a 9 x 9 x 2-inch baking pan; melt butter in a saucepan and set aside. Sift flour, baking powder and cinnamon together in a large bowl. Add remaining ingredients and mix well. Pour into the baking pan and bake for 1 hour at 350°. The pudding will puff up while baking, then fall back as it cools. Cool pudding in the pan on a rack. Serve cold with whipped cream or vanilla ice cream.

\*To extract pulp: Seeds can be removed from the persimmons by hand, but for larger amounts it's easier to use a food mill or cone-shaped colander and pestle. One quart of persimmons makes 1 cup of pulp.

### Black Walnut Caramels

1 2/3 c. heavy cream  
2 c. granulated sugar  
1 c. light corn syrup  
2 sticks butter  
1 tsp. vanilla extract  
½ c. black walnut meats

Grease a 9 x 13-inch pan and set aside. Combine ½ cup of the cream with the sugar, syrup and butter. Cook uncovered over low heat for 30 minutes, then stir in the remaining cream. Cook over medium-low heat until the mixture reaches 248° on a candy thermometer (about 45 minutes). Remove from heat and cool for about 10 minutes, then stir in vanilla and nuts and pour the candy into the greased pan. While still slightly warm, cut the caramel into bite-size pieces, or shape it with your hands into a long rope about 1 inch thick and cut off ¼-inch slices. Wrap each piece, twisting the ends of the wrapper securely. Makes about 90 pieces of caramel. To store, freeze or refrigerate in a tightly closed container.





## A Winter's Walk

Let's face it. Winter is not typically considered a great time to be outside in Nebraska. There is a reason so many birds fly south for the winter around here—it can be cold! Throw in a sharp north wind and some sleet or snow and it can be downright miserable. And yet, botanically speaking, winter is not completely without merit. In fact there are LOTS of good reasons to bundle up and venture outside to the garden and beyond this winter:

- **Bark!** Not the noise of dogs, but rather the protective layer woody plants produce as their outer skin. Winter is a great time to appreciate the detail of a good bark: sycamore with its cream and gray mottled patches; river birch and its peeling skin; the great reds and browns of ponderosa pine; the sinewy skin of hornbeam (*Carpinus*); the red stems of dogwood; and sloughing, beef jerky-like strips of shagbark hickory.
- **Winter architecture.** Leaf drop helps reveal the true architectural

character of trees. One of the best is the beautiful and nakedly-coarse form of a mature Kentucky coffeetree. Bur oak, with its wide spreading crown and coarse, corky bark is also a winter beauty.

- **Ornamental Grasses!** Many grasses planted in the landscape hold their form well throughout much of the winter. The Great Plains native little bluestem, festooned in hues of pinks and reds, is especially attractive. Other favorites include Korean reedgrass, miscanthus, our native switchgrass and the golden glow of Indiangrass.
- **Winter greenery.** Several species of plants are able to defy “old man winter” and retain greenness throughout the season. We are mostly familiar with pines, spruces and firs. Other uncommon evergreens to watch for include

sharp-leaved hollies; our native holly-like creeping mahonia; several types of viburnum (Alleghany, burkwood, etc.); the groundcover vinca; and even a few herbaceous species such as plumbago and pasqueflower.



- **Birds.** Amazingly, many bird species choose to tough it out right in our own backyards. Tree sparrow, blue jay, cardinal, woodpecker, hawk, owl, waxwing, goldfinch, dove, titmouse, etc. How do they do it? How do their feet not freeze off? One of my favorites is the dark-eyed junco. Easily attracted to a ground feeder, this little fellow will feed right at the back door, and may even come inside if given the right invitation.

- **Winter beauty.** Many facets of winter can be almost magical in the way they play with our senses. The beauty of fresh-fallen snow, especially on the boughs of evergreens; the crisp cold air and the steam on our breath; the crunch of snow and ice underfoot; the clearer night sky with stars so much more twinkly than in summer; and all those holiday decorations scattered about the neighborhood. Even the kitschy ones represent someone's hard work and creative vision.

If you're like me, one of the best reasons to get outside in winter is to fight off some cabin fever. No matter how much we may love our kin, being cooped up inside can get old after a while. Getting outside for a walk around the neighborhood is a great way to work off some cookies, escape whiny relatives, exercise the dog and refresh the mind. And nothing makes the hot chocolate taste better than coming back in from the frigid winter air.

*Justin Evertson, December 2011 "In the Garden" from Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, Inc.*