

## Out With the Rascals!

Plant loving groups such as native plant societies and master gardeners do more than encourage the care and feeding of plants. They spend many volunteer hours pulling up plants! You may debate the cause without reaching consensus on why there are more and more plants that need uprooting but the fact that there are more invasives is unquestioned. And they arrive with a tremendously high price for their removal- hence the volunteer efforts.

There is little argument about why they must not be allowed to take over our native woodlands throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Our remaining open spaces provide a home for the flora and fauna that live in a balanced ecosystem so that the growth of both is controlled and interdependent.

Unfortunately, according to a report titled, "The State of Chesapeake Forests", forest diversity is at its lowest point in history with at least 32 invasive plant species making major changes in the forest structure. The invasives out-compete the natives destroying the essential diversity. At the present time we are seeing invasive plants that used to be seen only in warmer climates. Among the worst offenders are trees such as Ailanthus (tree of heaven), Bradford pear, Norway maple, and the Princess Pawlonia. The shrub list of undesirables includes multiflora rose, autumn olive, and Chinese privet. Nasty vines are also an expensive nuisance and that list has choices we are still harboring in our gardens, their dispersal guaranteed by birds and breezes.

Mile-a-minute vine seems to be the most headstrong but also rampant are pretty porcelainberry, everlasting Kudzu, charming wisteria (not the native) and Japanese hops. Japanese stiltgrass was so scarce years ago then I first found some on my property, it took a lot of time to identify it. Now I have a week's weeding waiting for cooler weather. Despite having pulled it out every year, each time it returns there is more of it.

Invasive plants may never be completely eradicated but by persistent effort they can be controlled so that the essential native ecosystems are not destroyed. The Chesapeake Bay watershed woodlands will never be what they were, but they do not have to be carpeted with garlic mustard or English ivy to the detriment of all else. Research continues in an effort to understand more completely how to help forests recover, to understand the effect on wildlife and insect life as well as economic considerations

### OUT OF THE WOODS AND INTO THE GARDEN:

Every garden is a different ecoculture so by testing and tossing you will find those plants most likely to live happily in yours. A good place to start is with plants having the genes of those native to our area. Even without an exhaustive list, you will recognize them as those that stick around. Aquilegia (wild columbine), Aruncus (goat's beard) Asclepias (butterfly weed), Baptisia (blue indigo) Coreopsis (tickseed), Liatris (gayfeather), Monarda (beebalm), Physostegia (obedience plant) and oceans of asters under their ever-evolving names.

Coneflowers are not only sturdy but fashionable. Echinacea purpurea is the old native and oddly enough this is the first year I have seen the foliage eaten by insects. There is one plant

where the large bronzy cones are petal-less. They have to be left so the goldfinches can bounce from one to another.

In recent years coneflowers have been redesigned with quite astonishing results but as I look around my patch I no longer find any but the familiar rosy petaled one. The curious lime one vanished and 'White Swan' stayed feebly for just a few seasons.

The Mt. Cuba Research Center in Delaware spent three years evaluating five species and 43 cultivars of coneflowers and decided the top two performers were 'Pica Bella' and 'Elton Knight' and they also favored cultivars called, 'Fatal Attraction', 'Tike Torch', and 'Sunrise'. I wonder how much neglect, heat, and drought they factored into those evaluations. You know, it probably isn't that we could not concentrate on perfection and enjoy more success with our perennials, but most of us with a passion for gardening, usually have to balance that love with all our other loves, so we embrace a muddle of less than perfect blooms, quite happily!