

THE FRINGED GENTIAN

A PUBLICATION OF FRIENDS OF THE WILD FLOWER GARDEN, INC.

DEAR FRIENDS,

Once again, it is my pleasure to write you a spring letter—even though it is also a challenge since, at this moment, I am quite unable to see any signs of it. Fortunately, experience tells me spring will indeed arrive, sooner or later, on whispery breezes or with pounding rains, and we will rejoice to see tiny green shoots becoming exquisite, ephemeral blooms in our dear Garden.

The thought reminds me of Thoreau, and a journal entry he made on March 30, 1856. “How silent are the footsteps of spring! There, too, where there is a fraction of the meadow, two rods over, quite bare, under the bank, in this warm recess at the head of the meadow, though the rest of the meadow is covered with snow a foot or more in depth, I was surprised to see the skunk cabbage, with its great spear-heads open and ready to blossom... The spring advances in spite of snow and ice, and cold even.”

And so, with reassuring thoughts of spring in mind, allow me to look back for a moment at Friends’ events in late 2012 before moving on to plans for 2013. On Sunday, Nov. 4, the Friends’ Annual Volunteer Appreciation Event was held in the Terrace Room

at St. Mary’s Orthodox Church in Minneapolis. Members of the Friends’ Board, in partnership with Garden Curator Susan Wilkins and Garden staff, hosted dedicated volunteers, including shelter docents, invasive plant warriors and legacy stewards.

The relaxed evening included a buffet dinner, door prizes and plenty of time for socializing. And we very much enjoyed a visit and gracious comments from MPRB Superintendent Jayne Miller, whom we presented with a framed Anniversary poster. Once again, the most popular door prizes were provided by Larry Gravitz, a Friends supporter, Shelter volunteer, and local potter. Plant design artist Melissa Hansen created our beautiful table decorations, and Susan Wilkins provided a delicious array of desserts, as well as a handy Garden tote for all of the volunteers. A fine time was had by all.

I am also happy to tell you that last fall the Friends received a second grant from the Leuthold Family Foundation of Minnesota in support of our work to protect and preserve the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary. We are most grateful to them for their generous assistance.

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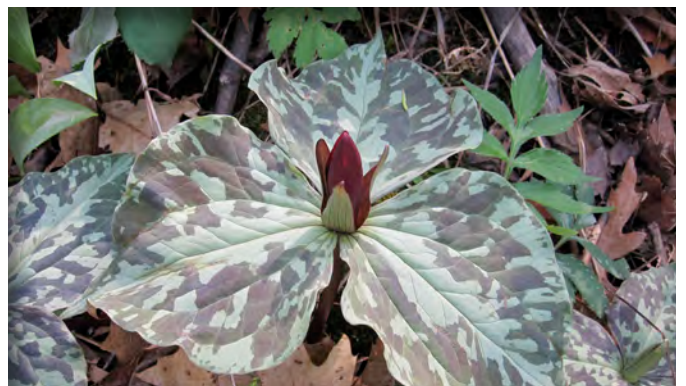
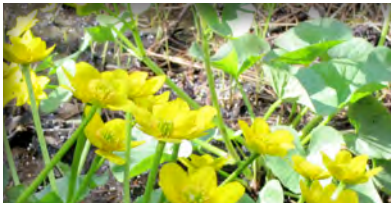
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Photos by Meleah Maynard



GARDEN CURATOR'S LETTER

By Susan Wilkins



I was taken, recently, by a wonderful statement made by esteemed essayist, environmentalist and farmer, Wendell Berry in *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays*. He wrote: "The care of the earth is our most ancient and most worthy and, after all, our most pleasing responsibility. To cherish what remains of it, and to foster its renewal, is our only legitimate hope."

This message struck me as a piece of relevant and timely wisdom from someone who knows well the soil and insects, the songs of birds, decay and rebirth. I trust the poignancy of his words knowing that Berry speaks from direct experience, from the timeless practice of placing his hands in the earth, year after year, and finding not merely a handful of soil, but the entire universe in his grasp.

Berry's message resonates with both the practical and transcendent qualities of what it means to be human in relation to the world around us, and it reminds us of the significance of being connected with nature. While it seems many of us deeply understand that caring for the world is a pressing matter, we don't always know what to do or how to do it. We see that our impact on the planet is real and can be destructive and degrading or enriching and restorative, but we don't always, honestly, know why.

What we've lost sight of, it seems, is that we belong to each other. And we belong to this earth. Unmoored from these relationships, I fear we have forgotten ourselves and muddled our most intelligent instincts to care for this beloved planet. Fortunately, through connecting with and tending to the natural world, and each other, we can rediscover our most pleasing responsibility and take joy in our rooted and deliberate acts of hope.

That is why, as another season in the Garden commences, I feel genuinely uplifted knowing that a community of stewards and stalwart friends of nature is doing the work that Wendell Berry spoke of right here at Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden. We are growing more than a very special botanic garden

within our 15-acre boundaries. We are growing ourselves, and each other, making room for a more beautiful, beneficent world in the process.

Below, I will share some of the highlights planned for 2013. For more information about current and future happenings at the garden visit the Minneapolis Parks & Recreation website (www.minneapolis-parks.org/ebwg). And I hope you'll stay in touch via Facebook (www.facebook.com/pages/Eloise-Butler-Wildflower-Garden-and-Bird-Sanctuary/166629750054157) and the Friends of the Wild Flower Garden website (www.friendsofthewildflowergarden.org) throughout the season.

- Garden staff, Friends board members and volunteers will lead a special program as part of the Ecological Society of America's National Conference in Minneapolis.
- The Conservation Corp of Minnesota (CCM) will be assisting staff with invasive species removal, primarily buckthorn.
- In partnership with Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre, a new program exploring art and nature will be offered for families.
- On June 8 and 9, the Urban Birding Festival will include many family-friendly birding programs and activities in the Garden and Theodore Wirth Park.
- Large plantings along the Violet Way Trail hillside will continue as part of the effort to enhance this area.
- Nature Tots, a new program for parents and toddlers, will be led by staff.
- An expansion of the successful homeschool program developed by program coordinator Lauren Borer will include a new phenology club.
- Several new and special classes will be offered on topics such as watercolor painting, landscape photography, hands-on botany, medicinal plants of the garden and more.
- Honeybees will be housed at the Garden for a second season, and pollinator-focused programming for the public will include classes on bee basics, bumblebee surveys and a honeybee how-to series. ■



OLD TREES HELP MAKE WAY FOR NEW ONES

By Jeff Gillman

Walking around the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden, you can't help noticing that there are a lot of downed trees. But do you ever wonder, "Why doesn't anyone clear these out?" There's a good reason for that. While falling to the ground may seem like the end of a tree's life, it is in many ways just the beginning. When a tree dies, all of the things it collected over its long life slowly work their way out of it to become available to other creatures. At the same time, termites and beetles, as well as fungi and bacteria, infest the dead tree and digest the nutrients in the dead wood, making a home for themselves and their offspring. As they feast, the wood

becomes weaker and falls apart. Bark and wood slough off onto the ground, adding to the existing organic material and helping to build healthy soil on which the surrounding ecosystem depends.

All of that organic material on the ground also helps hold nutrients that come from other decaying plants and from animals depositing their waste nearby. The truth is, as dead trees are fed upon and torn to pieces, they become the best possible place for a young plant to thrive. So if a fallen tree is lucky, a seed from a tree of the same type will land in the midst of the very place where the old tree has completely decomposed, allowing a new tree to grow there. ■

Jeff Gillman is an associate professor in the Department of Horticultural Science at the University of Minnesota and is the author of numerous books, including "How Trees Die: the Past, Present, and Future of Our Forests."



LETTER *continued*

In 2013, which is the Garden's 106th anniversary and the 61st year of the Friends organization, we are poised to move ahead on the Cary George Wetland Project. Though we met our funding goals over a year ago, the project, which began in 2011, has been delayed by the need for a wetland survey and DNR approval. Complicating matters further is the need for integration with adjacent wetland work to be funded by the MPRB.

Despite these delays, and the fact that there will be a great deal of renovation and change going on in larger Wirth Park in the coming year, we intend to see this project to completion. We also remain committed to underwriting busing costs for students who come to educational programs at the garden through our Student Transportation Grant, which was replenished by our fundraiser last July.

In closing, if you haven't seen it already, I want to encourage you to visit our beautiful website (www.friendsofthewildflowergarden.org) created by Friends board member and webmaster Gary Bebeau. On the site, which will continue to develop over time, you'll find an impressive collection of historical materials and gorgeous photos of the Garden. You'll also find information about volunteering, renewing your membership, and gifting a membership, as well as current

details about Friends' meetings and community activities. With the change to three issues of the *Gentian* each year rather than four, the website is a way for all of us to stay connected. You can also stay up to date on Garden happenings by going to the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden Facebook page (www.facebook.com/pages/Eloise-Butler-Wildflower-Garden-and-Bird-Sanctuary/166629750054157).

You are invited to join us for our Annual Membership Meeting on Sunday, May 19, at 3 p.m. in the Community Room at the Kenwood Park Center, 2101 West Franklin Ave., around the corner from Kenwood School and across the street from Kenwood Park in Minneapolis. Hear the latest from the Garden Curator and the Friends while enjoying refreshments and good company. And we would love to hear your ideas and suggestions about our work on behalf of the Garden.

Hope to see you on the Garden path, maybe by the skunk cabbage, someday soon.

Sincerely,

J. Pam Weiner, President

PLEASE JOIN US FOR OUR ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

**Sunday, May 19, at 3 p.m.
in the Community Room at
the Kenwood Park Center,
2101 West Franklin Ave.,
Minneapolis**

Got a story idea, poem, photos or personal essay for The *Gentian*?

Please contact editor

**Meleah Maynard at
meleah@everydaygardener.com.**

FIRST SIGNS OF SPRING

By Gary Bebeau, a Friends board member and website coordinator.

When the Garden opens in April, all is usually somber and brown if not still blanketed with snow. But if the paths are walkable, the first visitors may get to see snow trillium (*Trillium nivale*) poking its head above the snow if temperatures are right.

Snow trillium is not indigenous to the Garden. Eloise Butler planted it in 1910 after bringing some back from Kelsey's Nursery in North Carolina. Over the years, she planted it many times, though in later years she purchased it from Midwest nurseries.

Curator Martha Crone also planted snow trillium a number of times, beginning in 1934. She loved the plant and wrote in *The Fringed Gentian* in the late 1950s, "After a long northern winter, what a welcome sight to find the brave little snow trilliums pushing thru the heavy blanket of leaves. They seem to defy the chilly nights and frosty weather. With the spring's first sunbeam, it blooms briefly, ripens its seeds and disappears for the rest of the season."

SKUNK CABBAGE

Though it's not as showy as snow trillium, skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*) appears in the Garden around the same time and is worth seeking out in wet areas, such as bogs and marshes. Here is how Eloise Butler described the plant in 1911: "The skunk cabbage is one of our earliest spring flowers, for it literally thaws through the soil of the icebound marshes. You will have a greater respect for Dame Nature's ability as a packer if you take apart the leaf bud made up of many leaves tightly rolled one within another and smaller and smaller in the center."

The bud expands into a clump of large leaves that resemble cabbage, she explains, before discussing the plant's smell: "The disagreeable odor is attractive to flies, which find a shelter from the cold within its purplish-red, hood-like spathe and pay rent by pollinating the flowers." Interestingly, temperatures within the buds have been recorded as high as 27°F above the outside air temperature.

Eloise Butler planted the first skunk cabbage in the garden after digging some up near the Lake Street Bridge in Minneapolis in June of 1907. The plant is known for having medicinal uses. For example, a sparse amount of root can produce a somewhat narcotic cough syrup when boiled, dried and used in a tincture. At one time, skunk cabbage was also a sought after contraceptive as taking one tablespoon of root solution three times a day was thought to cause permanent sterility in men and women. Skunk cabbage was even listed in the U.S. Pharmacopoeia until 1882.



skunk cabbage



hepatica

DWARF TROUT LILY

One of the rarest spring ephemeral plants in the Garden is the Minnesota dwarf trout lily (*Erythronium propullans*). It was first identified in 1871 when Faribault botany teacher Mary Hodges sent a collected sample to Harvard professor Asa Gray, who determined it was a separate species and gave it a scientific name. The plant is unique to Minnesota, occurring in the wild only in Rice, Goodhue and Steele counties. And it is the only plant species in Minnesota listed as “endangered” by both the Minnesota DNR and federal government.

In May of 1909, Eloise Butler collected some Minnesota dwarf trout lilies in Goodhue County and planted them in the garden with the remark: “Poor material, probably will not grow.” Well, grow they did, and the plants have been in the marsh area of the Woodland Garden ever since. Similar in appearance to the white trout lily (*E. albidum*), only smaller and more nodding, these



snow trillium



skunk cabbage

lilies usually have five petal-like tepals instead of six. It grows only by offshoots, so it doesn’t spread much, and attempts to propagate it have been unsuccessful.

HEPATICA

Of all the early ephemeral spring flowers, hepatica tops visitors’ lists for early spring viewing. Botanists have settled on the scientific name *Hepatica nobilis* for the plant, with (var. *obtusata*) designating varieties with rounded leaves and (var. *acuta*) designating the sharp-lobed types.

The plant’s small flowers have no petals. Instead, there are six to 12 sepals in shades of pure white to pink and even a bluish blush. Look for them poking up above the dry fallen leaves.

Eloise Butler introduced hepatica to the garden from various places around the Twin Cities and state starting in 1907. When Martha Crone was curator of the Garden, an extensive hillside was devoted to hepatica. It was located along the current Woodland Garden Geranium Path, and known as Hepatica Hill. Over time, a large number of the plants died out, particularly after the loss of tree canopy from Dutch elm disease. So, in 2005, current Garden Curator Susan Wilkins began replanting and restoring Hepatica Hill. ■

Early April in Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden

An oak leaf

hanger-on over winter

blows free from its twig

Quickened on an upwind

It gambols like a brittle bird over last year’s

bracken—then drops anonymously

into thick mulch

I’ve hung on through winter too

Leaning hard on the knob of my cane

I climb a hill and stop to sit on a fresh stump

Tree cutters have already hauled the wood away

The gardener with his cartful pitches

Fresh shreds from its heartwood onto the path for walkers

The path behind him unwinds like spilled cream

I rest here gray as winter wood

trout lily, bloodroot, trillium come

I am here to greet you

—Elizabeth S. Lofgren, Friend of the Garden



hepatica



The Conservation Corps of Minnesota helps remove buckthorn from the Garden.

FRIENDS INVASIVE PLANT ACTION GROUP

There are many reasons to look forward to spring, and some are described in this very publication.

High on our list is seeing what emerges in the Preservation Zone surrounding the Garden. Why? Because with the help of many hardworking volunteers and the Conservation Corps of Minnesota, which we were able to hire last year, we think we've now removed all of the mature buckthorn from that area. Many thanks to Friends members, volunteers and board members for supporting these efforts!

Of course, some buckthorn will re-sprout despite our best efforts, and many new buckthorn seedlings will grow. But we feel like we have turned a corner, so our efforts should be easier in these areas this season now that we will have less buckthorn to pull and more elbow room to work.

In our eagerness to protect the Garden, we've added a new portion of land to the Preservation Zone in 2013.

This section still has a fair amount of mature buckthorn, so once it has been removed we will continue to add areas to the Protection Zone as we are able. There will always be more to do, but the methodical approach is helping significantly reduce invasives within the Garden's perimeter.

In other news, this fall we gave tours of the Preservation Zone to a few interested parties who share our goal of keeping South Wirth ecologically healthy, including leaders from the City of Lakes Loppet Foundation. Staff from the St. Paul Parks, who are interested in learning from our experience as they set up a volunteer effort, also took the tour.

We will be scheduling spring garlic mustard pulls soon. If you can help, check out the website for more information, or email us at invasives@friendsofeloisebutler.org

Thanks!

– Jim Proctor and Liz Anderson,
Invasive Plant Action Group co-chairs.

We'll be pulling garlic mustard soon.
To help, email us at
invasives@friendsofeloisebutler.org.

MEMORIALS AND DONATIONS SEPTEMBER 2012 ~ DECEMBER 2012

GIFTS In support of our programs from:

- Donna Ahrens
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- Sharon Bunnell
- Joy Davis
- Bernice Dickson
- Elaine Eschenbacher
- Ann and Tracy Godfrey
- Heidi Haines
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- Heather and Jeff Ilse
- Steven Leuthold Family Foundation
- Lyle Lofgren
- Marcia Marshall
- Sarah Novotny
- Mary Jane Pappas
- Mary Stanley
- Anthony Waldera

Memorials and gifts to the Friends are much appreciated and constitute an important part of keeping the Garden a special place for generations of people to enjoy. Memorials and gifts are tax deductible. When sending a memorial, please provide the name and address of the family being honored so we can acknowledge that a memorial has been received. An acknowledgment will be provided to all donors. Memorials and gifts should be sent to: Treasurer, Friends of the Wild Flower Garden, P.O. Box 3793, Minneapolis, MN 55403. Checks are payable to: Friends of the Wild Flower Garden or donate on our web site, www.friendsofthewildflowergarden.org.

–Gary Bebeau, memorials chair

MEMORIALS

- For Judith Anne Fust
from Marylea Osier
- For Paul Koch
from John & Joan Haldeman
- For Alice Trebtske
from John & Joan Haldeman

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- Wendy Hughes, Crystal
- Kurt Leuthold, Minneapolis
- Steven C. Leuthold, Minneapolis
- Meleah Maynard and Mike Hoiun, Minneapolis
- Dean Spencer, Golden Valley

– Jayne Funk,
membership co-chair

SHELTER VOLUNTEER UPDATE

Volunteer Position Open at Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden

The Friends of the Wildflower Garden is searching for a new coordinator for the Garden's Shelter Volunteer Program. The position involves scheduling volunteers for shifts at the Martha Crone Visitors Center during the season (April-October) and being the contact for new volunteers.

Most of the duties can be handled online. Communication with volunteers is primarily via email, and volunteers choose shifts using a Google calendar link. In addition to plugging volunteers' names into the calendar and communicating with Garden staff and volunteers about staffing the Visitors

Center, the coordinator is also the contact person for inquiries about volunteering, and is responsible for arranging training at the Visitor Center.

The position is a great way to connect with the Garden and get to know both staff and volunteers—and you can be home in your pajamas while doing most of it!

Interested? Want to know more?

Please contact the current Volunteer Coordinator, Melissa Hansen: melissa@larshansenphoto.com or volunteer@friendsofeloisebutler.org. ■

WEBSITE NOTES

—By Gary Bebeau, website coordinator

Thanks to all of you who have visited the Garden's website (www.friendsofthewildflowergarden.org). For those who haven't yet visited, on the site you'll find Garden history, thousands of beautiful photos and information about future plans and upcoming events. New things to look for include: Quarterly "History of the Garden and the Friends," covering the years 1913, 1938, 1963, 1988 and 2003; information sheets on "Ferns of the Garden"; a comparison key for the six wild roses in the Garden; and over 30 new information sheets on Garden plants.

Take a look! ■

Photo by Don Beimborn



MEMBERSHIP FORM

☐ Individual \$15 ☐ Family \$25 ☐ Sponsor \$100 ☐ Life \$500 ☐ Other \$ _____

Memberships can be ordered online at www.friendsofthewildflowergarden.org or mailed with a check payable to:

Friends of the Wild Flower Garden, Inc.
Membership
P.O. Box 3793
Minneapolis, MN 55403-0793

Please specify if the membership is a gift.

Each membership is tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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The Eloise Butler Wildflower

Garden and Bird Sanctuary

is comprised of cultivated but naturalistic woodland, wetland and prairie environments, 2/3 mile of mulch-covered pathways and a rustic shelter where educational programming and materials can be found. It is the oldest public wildflower garden in the United States. The 15-acre site is located within the city of Minneapolis and is owned and operated by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board. The Garden is open from April 1 through October 15 from 7:30 A.M. to a half hour before sunset.



*White trout lily photo by
Mike Hoium*

The Friends of the Wild Flower Garden, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) Minnesota nonprofit corporation, formed in 1952. Its purpose is to educate by enhancing Garden visitors' appreciation and understanding of Minnesota's native plants and natural environments and to offer assistance for the Garden in the form of funding and other support.

The Fringed Gentian is published for members and supporters of the Friends.

For changes to your mailing address, please write membership co-chair Susan Dean at: members@friendsofeloisebutler.org or 602 Thomas Ave. So., Mpls, MN 55405.

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