

# Annals of the Wild Life Reserve

## The Writings of Eloise Butler



### Garden Principles - 1920

My wild garden is run on the political principle of laissez-faire. Fallen leaves are not raked up unless they lie in too deep windrows and are likely to smother some precious specimen; but are retained to form humus. But the tall dead canes of herbs like Joe-Pye Weed and wild golden glow, which are allowed to stand during the winter to protect the dormant vegetation beneath, are removed from the meadows in the spring for a clear view of the clumps of marsh marigolds, trilliums, etc. I also gather and burn all fallen branches, and in the fall while the late flowers are still blooming, all unsightly evidence of decay. Of course, I do not allow at any time any outside litter to be brought in - - not the tiniest scrap of paper, or string, or peanut shell. The great mass of herbaceous plants, as asters, goldenrods, and most composites, I admire in their fluffy state, after they have gone to seed.

Some species, however, are to me the reverse of ornamental in old age. These are snipped to the ground or torn up by the roots and reduced to ash. Red Clover is one of the offenders. It becomes unkempt and scraggly; and the stalks of the common milkweed that are without fruit, after shedding their leaves, turn black and look like long rat tails. Touch-me-not, *Impatiens biflora* [now *Impatiens capensis*] and *I. pallida*, collapse with the first frost and cumber the ground with a brown slime; and wood nettle, *Laportea canadensis*, is smitten as with a pestilence. A few specimens of stingers and stick-tights are permitted on the grounds. *Laportea* is a persistent spreader and sometimes gets the upper hand, busy as I am with many other things. In the fall I grub it out and plant something else in its place. Then I learn its encroaching ways. The roots are not very deep, but they are woven and knotted together into a dense mat that seems as hard as rock.

#### Notes:

Photo of Eloise Butler, ca. 1920, at top of page courtesy Minneapolis Public Library.

The text of this article is one of a number of short essays that Eloise Butler wrote while curator of the Garden that after her death were collected in a series titled *Annals of the Wild Life Reserve*, but most were never published.

Since Eloise Butler's time, the scientific names of plants and the classification of plant families has undergone extensive revision. In brackets within the text, have been added when necessary, the revised scientific name for the references she used in her article. Nomenclature is based on the latest published information from Flora of North America and the Checklist of the Vascular Flora of Minnesota. Other information in brackets may add clarification to what she is saying.

The Wild Botanic Garden in Wirth Park, became the "Native Plant Reserve" and was then renamed the Eloise Butler Wild Flower Garden in 1929.