

The Writings of Eloise Butler



Lily Declared Crowning Wild Flower near Minneapolis in July; Miss Butler Describes, Also, the Blossoms That Kept it Company - July 16, 1911

Doubtless Everyone Would select as the crowning wild flower for the calendar months of the growing season in Minneapolis the pasque flower for April, violets for May, roses for June and lilies for July.

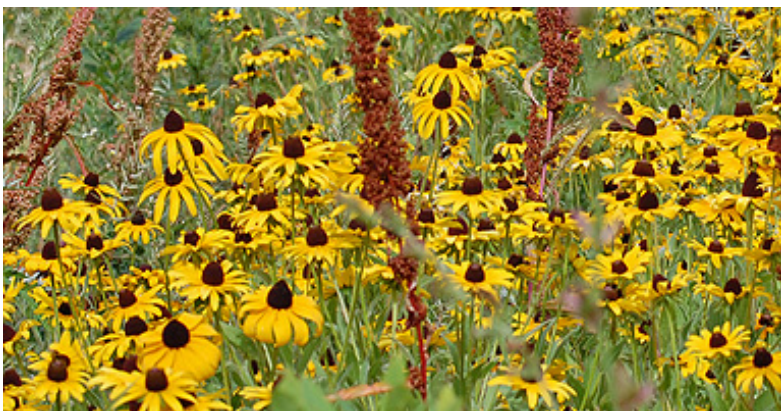


Of our three native lilies the Turk's-cap [shown above], although not the lily of Palestine, may be said to surpass the glory of Solomon, as it is arrayed in recurved orange-red petals flecked with spots of purple and in buds like fingers of (unintelligible in original). Sometimes as many as forty blossoms are borne on a single plant.

Beautiful, also, are [is] the yellow swamp lily, (Ref. 1) with floral leaves spotted with brown and less recurved than those of the Turk's-cap, and the Wood Lily, *Lilium philadelphicum*, with an erect, cup-like flower of deep, glowing red. The vivid colors of all these lilies were developed in crucibles fired by summer's fiercest noon-tide heat.



Wood Lily, *Lilium philadelphicum*
Photo by Martha Crone on June 22, 1949 in the Garden.



Troops of Black-eyed Susans boldly stare at roamers over the hillsides. [photo

below] As we return Susan's unblinking gaze we see that her eyes are a velvety, purplish brown instead of black. This coneflower, *Rudbeckia hirta*, is a composite. The "eye" is made up of many small, tubular flowers, and each yellow eyelash is also a flower.

Another composite adorned with yellow ray petals and towering in splendor above its competitors in rich, alluvial soil, is the Cup Plant, *Silphium perfoliatum*. The large leaves, arranged in pairs along the stem, are united at the base to form a deep cup for holding water.

This may serve the double purpose of tiding the plant over a dry spell and of keeping unwelcome, crawling insects from the flowers. People in the tropics use a similar means to keep the ants from food by inserting the legs of the dining tables in dishes of water.

The interesting Rosin, or Compass Plant of the prairie [*Silphium laciniatum*] is of the same genus as the cup plant. Its leaves are cut edgewise and point due north and south.



Compass Plant, *Silphium laciniatum*

Persons lost on a trackless, uninhabited prairie might find their bearings by this vegetable compass. An army officer stationed on the western plains, the first observer of the plant, thought the leaves must have the properties of the magnetic needle. Failing to prove this theory by experiments, he forwarded specimens of the *Silphium* to Dr. Asa Gray, the American Darwin, who suggested that the peculiar position of the leaves was for the purpose of avoiding the direct rays of the sun in order to check too great a loss of water by transpiration.

Since that time "polarity" has been observed in the leaves of many other plants growing in drought regions or in exposed situations, as the eucalyptus trees of Australia. Such trees, of course, afford no shade. The habit may be noted in the roadside weed prickly lettuce, and

in some degree even in the garden lettuce.

To subdue the brilliant orange and reds of the lilies and composites, Mother Nature has planted among them with judicious and generous hand various white flowers, as *Veronica virginica*, (Ref. 2) with feathery spires of bloom, some branched like candelabras, topping slender stems, clothed at intervals with whorls of narrow, pointed leaves. It is popularly called Culver's Root, or Culver's Physic, because one of that name extracted a specific from the root.

The shrub-like *Ceanothus* [*Ceanothus americanus*] or New Jersey Tea, seemingly covered with sea foam and mist, has drifted from the Atlantic to the valley of the Mississippi. This plant has historic interest



Cup Plant, *Silphium perfoliatum*



Culver's Root, *Veronicastrum virginicum*

as well as refined beauty. It is well that it grows in prodigal masses in wide distribution. For, after the Boston Tea Party, a brew of the leaves of the *Ceanothus* plenished the teapots of our revolutionary forebears.



New Jersey Tea, *Ceanothus americanus*

Who pictures a swamp without the familiar cattails and red-winged blackbirds flying in and out piping their cheerful notes? In an aesthetic craze a few years ago, the cattails, or flags, were the popular decoration of the home, filling large jardineres or embroidered or painted on screens and lambrequins. Though of inherent decorative value they have fallen into “innocuous desuetude” by reason of overuse.

It is a warning to “avoid the obvious.” Individuality, not too pronounced or extreme, should be expressed.

Why, for instance, because a neighbor has a beautiful plant on his premises should every one in the vicinity straightway fill his grounds with the same in monotonous reiteration? Among the hosts of ornamental plants may not something else be selected besides hydrangea, scarlet Rambler, canna and golden glow to prevent satiety? If a plant is “all the rage” it is the very best reason why one should fall out of line and imitate

nature in her endless variety.

The flower cluster of the cattail (Ref. 3) is made up of innumerable blossoms of two sorts, without nectar, fragrance or bright color, because they are pollinated by the wind. The slender spike at the top bears the pollen-producing flowers. These after doing their work wither away and disappear, while the flowers of the stouter body below ripen into tiny, seed-like fruits that are converted by tufts of fine hairs into aeroplanes that will take a long flight through the air before they settle down to propagate new plants.

Cattails are still in fashion with children, who carefully store them for a gala time, when they are dipped in kerosene to use for torches in Halloween processions.



Common Cattail, *Typha latifolia*

Tours to the Garden. The following was also printed at the beginning of the text.

Miss Butler will conduct parties through the Wild Botanic Garden in Glenwood Park, Tuesday and Wednesday mornings, meeting them at the terminus of the Fourth and Sixth avenue north street Railway, Sixth avenue north and Russell Avenue, at 10 o'clock. Also Saturday & Sunday afternoon, meeting then at 2:30 o'clock at the same place. One hour later on the same days, persons coming by automobile or carriage will be met at the entrance to the Garden, on the boulevard, at a point northeast of Birch Pond in Glenwood Park. To reach Birch Pond, turn in at the left on Western Avenue where the Park Boulevard intersects the avenue. Phones - T. S. Calhoun 1021, N. W. Main 4295.

Notes from the text:

1. Swamp Lily - It is not clear how she is referring to these lilies. Only two are native to Minnesota, *L. michiganense* and *L. philadelphicum*. She is probably first referring to our non-native Turk's-cap, *L. superbum*, that she noted growing in the Garden as early as 1908 and Eloise planted more. It is also usually more reddish. *L. michiganense*, with a lighter color would be the second lily she refers to, while *L. philadelphicum* becomes the third species. Unfortunately she uses the term "Swamp Lily" which is the name commonly applied to *Crinum pendunculatum* and *Crinum americanum*, both southern plants, and don't grow here. It is also possible that the "swamp lily" is the non-native Canada Lily, *L. canadensis* whose petals are much less recurved.
2. Culver's Root - now classified as *Veronicastrum virginicum*
3. Cattails in the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden are of two species, Narrow-leaved Cattail, *Typha angustifolia* and Common Cattail, *Typha latifolia*.

The text of this article, along with photos by Mary Meeker of Turk's-cap Lily, Cup Plant, New Jersey Tea, Culver's Root, Compass Plant and Black-eyed Susan, was published on Sunday July 16, 1911 in the *Sunday Minneapolis Tribune*. It was one of a series of weekly articles Eloise Butler published in 1911 to help acquaint the public with her newly established Wild Botanic Garden in Glenwood Park. Some of the plants she discusses are extant in the Garden today. In brackets within the text, and in the notes, have been added the necessary common name or scientific name, that she did not list 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*.

Photo of Eloise Butler, ca. 1920, at top of page courtesy Minneapolis Public Library. Other photos ©G D Bebeau or as credited.

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