The Writings of Eloise Butler

Mint, Abundant in Minnesota, Delights the Senses; Miss Butler Tells of Wild Flowers in Glenwood Park Garden - July 23, 1911

There are many kinds of Gardens. Those are most interesting that have an individual flower and express, as pleasure grounds should, within the bounds of good taste, the owner's personality. Some persons aim to have strictly an old-fashioned garden, loving best the delightful old-time favorites rooted deep in memory. Again, there are literary gardens, devoted to the flowers mentioned by some author, as Keats or Shakespeare; while more, perhaps, make a specialty of a few beautiful plants, and with solicitous care become experts in raising them.

Wild Bergamot, *Monarda fistulosa.*

Mrs. Mable Osgood Wright, in her *The Garden, You and I*, describes a fascinating garden designed by an invalid lady, in which nothing was admitted but plants with fragrant flowers or leaves. In such a garden, the mints would abound, and among them would be *Monarda fistulosa*, the Wild Bergamot, that now enlivens the borders of woods and meadows with large clumps of bright lavender bloom. Abundant as it is, we are never ready to cry "Hold! Enough!" For, besides its delicate perfume, it delights the eye as well. This plant will at once remind one of the cultivated, red-flowered bee balm or Oswego tea (*Monarda didyma)* (ref #1) The mints may be recognized by their square stems, two-lipped flowers, and usually aromatic odor.

The Tofieldia, or false asphodel, (Ref #2) is an attractive little lily. Its compact raceme of feathery, small, white flowers forms the larger part of the plant, surrounded by plants that one would trudge miles to see - wild buckbean, orchids, the pitcher plant, and just now a marsh harebell with a bluish white blossom poised on the frailest imaginable stalk.

In wet meadows, the white flowers needed to offset the garish yellow are supplied by the Water Parsnip (*Sium*) (Ref. #3) and the Spotted Cowbane (*Cicuta*) (Ref. #4), both poisonous, alas! to man and beast. Cattle generally know instinctively that they are inedible and avoid them. But children should be taught not to taste unknown plants. The leaves of the water parsnip are uni-pinnate, while the leaves of the cowbane are twice or thrice compounded. The Poison Hemlock (*Conium*) [*Conium maculatum*], a relative of theirs naturalized from Europe, furnished, according to tradition, the poison by which Socrates was put to death.

The parsley family, to which these dangerous plants belong, together with, strange as it may seem, several food plants, as caraway, parsnip, carrot, celery, may be recognized in the main by the flat-topped flower clusters with stalks arranged like the sticks of an umbrella, each bearing a like bunch of smaller stalks, crowned with a tiny flower. Such clusters are called compound umbels.

Spotted Water Hemlock (Spotted Cowbane), *Cicuta maculata*.

False Asphodel or Sticky False Asphodel (Tofieldia), *Triantha glutinosa*. Photo ©Merle R. Black, Wisconsin Flora.

The Blue Vervain [Hoary vervain], (*Verbena stricta*), a weed common in neglected, vacant lots, is well worthy of attention. It stands up bravely among ignoble surroundings, old tins, broken bottles and ash heaps, which it attempts to mask. Large, downy leaves thickly clothe the stem. The flower spikes are long and slender, having close rows of seed pods at the base with a ring of bright blue flowers above and tapering at the tip with the still unopened buds. The garden Verbena, unlike this weed, has the lazy habit of lying with its elbows on the ground and getting covered with dirt. Another weed verbena, the *hastata*, (Ref. #5), of slenderer habit, but showy in the mass, is abundant in lowlands; also the white verbena, [*Verbena urticifolia*], slenderer still and with still smaller flowers.

Hoary Vervain, *Verbena stricta* (which Eloise called "blue vervain")

Regiments of clover hussars (Petalostemum) bivouac on the prairies with shakos of violet red or of white. Three species respond to muster roll in Minnesota. All are armed with very slender leaf blades and all reek a pungent odor. (Ref. 6).

The amorphas - camp followers of their military cousins, the petalostemums - have pale, hoary, pinnate leaves and narrow flower spikes. The typical flower of their tribe - the pea - is butterfly shaped, with five petals: The broad standard, or banner, two slender side petals, the wings, and two partially united petals, the keel, arched over the stamens and pistil.

The amorphas have but one of these petals, the standard, the purple color of which contrasts pleasingly with the yellow stamens. Amorpha leaves are used in hard times as a substitute for tea. Farmers call the

smaller species of the genus “shoestrings” because the roots thickly interlace the soil and make plowing more laborious. The Tall Amorpha (Ref. #7), is often cultivated and is an esteemed ornament of parks.

Leadplant, *Amorpha canescens*.

Desert Indigo Bush, *Amorpha fruticosa*. Photo ©Derek Anderson, Wisconsin Flora.

Great St. Johnswort, *Hypericum ascyron*

One of our finest native, yellow flowered plants is the Great St. Johnswort, *Hypericum ascyron*. It may be seen in rich lowland about Minnehaha. It is tall and sturdy, a profuse bloomer and interesting in bud and in fruit. The multiplicity of the stamens gives a light-some grace to the flowers of this family. The flower of this species is large, measuring some three inches across. The petals, when aging, roll up lengthwise, forming a spidery appearance, which adds variety to the inflorescence, together with the striking buds and seedpods. We can but wonder that with all its merits this plant has not been seized upon for cultivation. In the wild garden in Glenwood Park, it is well established in two colonies.

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

Miss Butler will conduct parties through the Wild Botanic Garden in Glenwood Park, Tuesday and Thursday mornings, meeting them at the terminus of the Fourth and Sixth Avenue north Street Railway, Sixth Avenue and Russell Avenue North, 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:
1. Also called Scarlet Bee Balm. This is an introduced non-native plant.
2. Now classified as *Triantha glutinosa*, also called Gluten tofieldia, or Sticky false asphodel
3. *Sium suav*e, also called Hemlock Water Parsnip.
4. *Cicuta maculata,* Spotted Water Hemlock.
5. *Verbena hastata*, Swamp verbena
6. These plants are now classified in the genus Dalea. Two species are in the Garden, Purple Prairie Clover, *Dalea purpurea* and White Prairie Clover, *Dalea candida.*
7. We believe she is referring to *Amorpha fruticosa*, Desert Inidgo-bush, or False indigo, one of two Amorpha species native to the state, the other being Lead Plant, *Amorpha canescens*.

The text of this article, along with photos by Mary Meeker of Wild Bergamot, False Asphodel, Great St. Johnswort, Red Prairie Clover, Blue Vervain and Water Parsnip, was published on Sunday July 23, 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 square 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.*

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