

The Writings of Eloise Butler



Common Plantain Is Compared with the Alisma Plantago, Otherwise Known as the Water Variety. - August 13, 1911

The cosmopolite weed, the common plantain or ribwort (*Plantago major*) is presented in this paper for comparison with the somewhat more decorative Water Plantain *Alisma plantago*. But it is hoped that the former will win some favor, although universally considered a homely weed.

The contrast of the wandlike, fruiting spikes with the deeply ribbed rosette of leaves is surely not without charm. The leaves illustrate one of the methods of preventing over-shading, a difficulty met with in the rosette habit. In the plantain each leaf gets its modicum of light and air, by the upper and inner leaves being smaller and shorter stalked than the lower ones. Birds are fond of the seeds enclosed in the little rounded pods, which are lidded like snuff boxes. Farmers put the leaves in their hats to protect from sunstroke in haying time. Again, when macerated, the leaves are deemed a sovereign remedy to use as a poultice for inflammatory bruises.



The flower stalk of Common Plantain, *Plantago major*.



Water Plantain *Alisma plantago*.

The water plantain, fringing pools and lakes, is no relation to the roadside weed. It has received its name from the similarity of the leaves in shape, arrangement and venation. The small flowers are entirely different, being white and arranged in a large, loose, many branched cluster.

Veritable fields of cloth of gold are now gleaming with sunflowers, coneflowers and golden rods, not for kings alone, but for all the people. In this display of gold the tall coneflower, *Rudbeckia laciniata*, [Green-headed Coneflower] takes the lead - a brother of Black-eyed Susan, with eyes of golden brown, fringed with longer, drooping lashes of paler yellow. The palmi-parted leaf readily shows that it is the original of the popular favorite, the cultivated golden glow. Many prefer the single wilding, for it is less insistent to be observed and does not pall upon the taste. It fulfills, moreover, its purpose in nature, that of producing seed.

Lepachys pinnata [Gray-headed Coneflower, now classified as *Ratibida pinnata*] shown in the print above [below in the this text] has a longer cone and more drooping rays. It is abundant on the prairies. *L. columnaris*, (Ref #1) is distinguished by a still longer and slenderer cone, but with shorter rays.



Green-headed Coneflower,
Rudbeckia lacinaia.

A variety has lovely velvety petals of dahlia red, with a dash of yellow at the base. This long coneflower, with its variety, is the pride of a beautiful garden in the city, whose owner delights in native plants. (Ref. #2).

A much admired annual is now in bloom in the wild garden - the partridge pea, *Cassia chamaecrista* (Ref. #3). The beauty of the large flower of clear, bright yellow is enhanced by a purplish brown eye formed by the stamens and the blotching of some of the petals. The delicate, fresh, green leaflets of the compound leaf close together when touched and also for protection from cold at night.

Sensitiveness is an endowment of all forms of life. As plants have no nerve fibers, stimuli are conveyed from cell to cell. Many mem[missing

text] in a marked degree. The tendrils of the common pea and the tendrils or stems of all climbers must have this quality in order to find the required support. The foliage of the mimosas, plants common in warm regions, make instant response to disturbing influences. "At the tramp of the horse's hoof on the turf of the prairies far in advance are closed the leaves of the shrinking mimosa." The natives call the mimosa "shame"; for, presto! a filmy mass of green turns at a touch into a bunch of seemingly dry twigs, which slowly erect themselves and resume their leafy appearance when the danger is past.



Long-headed Coneflower, *Ratibida columnifera*.

A large crop of mushrooms - edible and inedible, of all sizes, shapes and colors - promoted by the frequent

warm showers are daily harvested. The mental, if not the physical, appetite is keenly whetted of those inoculated with a passion for those interesting forms of vegetable life. The photograph shows different stages of development of the edible Parasol Mushroom, *Lepiota procera*. [Note - photo not shown.] The largest specimen was 15" high and the cap measured 8-1/2 inches across. One cap is broken off so that the gills, the spore bearing surface, may be seen. Although the mushroom is taken as a type of rapid growth, the "spawn" - the slender, many-branched, subterranean fibers - are of slow formation and may be of great age. Small round "buttons" appear on these fibers and expand quickly into the aerial, spore-producing bodies.



Partridge Pea, *Chamaecrista fasciculata*.

In this species of *Lepiota*, the cap at the top of the stalk at first resembles a small cone. It finally spreads out like a Japanese parasol,

breaking away the veil - a membrane covering the gills - a vestige of which remains in the form of a ring, which again, like a parasol, may be moved up and down the stem.

In the ring on the stem and the scaly top of the cap, this fungus is like a deadly *Amanita*, but it is without the volva or cap at the base, a character of the poisonous genus.

The question is often asked, how can edible fungi be distinguished from the poisonous form? No infallible rule can be given. One must learn to distinguish carefully one species from another, and never taste of an unknown or doubtful specimen.

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 avenue south and Sixth avenue north Street Railway, Sixth avenue and Russell avenue, at 10 o'clock; also Saturday & Sunday afternoons, 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. Phone - T. S. Calhoun 1021; N. W. Main 4295

Notes:

1. Long-headed or Prairie Coneflower, now classified as *Ratibida columnifera*.
2. This variety is usually known by the name Mexican Hat.
3. Partridge Pea - Now classified as *Chamaecrista fasciculata*.

The text of this article, along with photos by Mary Meeker of Common Plantain, Water Plantain, Long-headed Coneflower and Parasol Mushroom, was published on Sunday August 13, 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.