

A Sad Story from Lawrenceville

In late October of last year a controversy arose in Lawrenceville over the fate of three large, old trees and a plan for school expansion. Earlier, a referendum had unanimously passed by the voters to fund this needed school project, but no one knew that the plans called for the removal of the trees. Thus, a controversy brewed, pitting parent against parent, for a plan hatched by the school board that, if you were against it, that meant you would be denied state funding and much-needed work on the Lawrenceville Elementary school. Those who wanted to protect the trees felt that alternatives were easily implementable to work around the trees. NPS member Chuck Alden devoted untold hours to rally supporters, craft alternative plans and “spoke for the trees.” The Native Plant Society weighed in to defend the trees. Lawrenceville is a “Trees USA” town.

“God has cared for these trees, saved them from drought, disease, avalanches, and a thousand tempests and floods. But he cannot save them from fools.” - John Muir ■

WHILE AWAY A WINTER'S DAY WITH NJ TALES AND TRAILS

THE STATE WE'RE IN

*By Michele S. Byers, Executive Director
New Jersey Conservation Foundation*

Tales and Trails: New Jersey's Places, People and Past is a collection of essays written by Henry F. Skirbst for the weekly Star Gazette newspaper out of Hackettstown in Warren County. With a background that includes work as an Army counterintelligence special agent and a high school guidance counselor, Skirbst brings a background to his writing as diverse as the state he loves.

But one thing shines through - his passion for New Jersey: an appreciation for our State's rich history, for environmental stewardship and preservation of our open spaces, and for motivating people to get out and explore New Jersey's wide variety of natural and historic places.

Skirbst's wife and children collected nearly 400 of his essays, then chose 230

for the book in honor of the author's 75th birthday. Their family gift has now become a great gift for anyone who fancies New Jersey history, environment and legend.

As Skirbst writes in the introduction, “Those who have taken the time to travel, hike, sightsee, or bike throughout the length and breath of this compact little state called New Jersey cannot help but be impressed.”

A whole section is devoted to our State's special places - by region, county and sites. It's here that Skirbst's love of New Jersey's diverse natural lands shines. From his home in the Highlands all the way to the Pine Barrens and Cape May, he tells the tale of our state through its natural features and history.

“Though small in area, New Jersey is large in natural phenomena,” Skirbst writes at the beginning of a chapter on the Pine Barrens. “An interesting illustration is the “Pine Barrens”: a vast region of desolate sand trails, mysterious marshes and wild pine stands, as well as extensive cranberry bogs and luscious blueberry plantations.”

Woven throughout is the longer tale about sprawl and over-development in New Jersey. In fact, the people, places and events Skirbst reviews lends a deeper context to the way different parts of our State have developed.

So grab a copy of *Tales and Trails: New Jersey's Places, People and Past*, throw a log or two into the fireplace (or grab a blanket or two), curl up in your favorite reading chair and meander down New Jersey's trails. Anyone with even a passing interest in this State we're in will enjoy this entertaining and informative trip! ■



Down goes the mighty oaks of Lawrenceville Elementary School. The tragedy is that this disaster was quite avoidable.

**“I speak for the
trees for the trees
have no tongues.”**

— Dr. Seuss, *The Lorax*

YOUR MEMBERSHIP SUPPORTS THE PRESERVATION
OF THE NATIVE FLORA OF NEW JERSEY

Good as Goldenrod

Thursday, October 10, 2002

By Valerie Sudol Star-ledger Staff
Associated Press

Like a prophet without honor in his own country, goldenrod — embraced for more than 100 years by European gardeners — is spurned by gardeners in its native land.

Here in the United States, where more than 100 species grow wild along roadsides, in abandoned fields and on sandy, coastal dunes, goldenrod is eyed with suspicion. Many blame it for the itchy, wheezy discomforts of fall allergies, and wouldn't let it in the garden gate on a dare.

Let's set this myth to rest right now: Goldenrod is not the culprit causing your "hay" fever. Beloved by bees and butterflies, this flower has heavy, sticky pollen meant to be carried by insect pollinators, and it is not readily blown around by the wind. (The presence of bees and butterflies is in general a tip-off to those plants that won't aggravate your sinuses.) The real villain this time of year is ragweed, a plant that blooms around the same time with the inconspicuous flowers typical of wind-pollinated plants.

Ragweed's Latin name, *Ambrosia* — literally "food of the gods" — is a complete misnomer, since neither people nor insects find it the least bit tasty. The greenish and unremarkable flowers of the ragweed escape notice, even though it is a plant pest common in waste places, and particularly fond of corn fields and cultivated farmlands found throughout the state.

Goldenrod, on the other hand, has a long history as a healing herb. *Solidago* (sol-i-DAY-go) means "to make whole," and refers to this plant's role as a natural pharmaceutical.

Native Americans used preparations of goldenrod to cure headache, ulcers, stomach spasms and wounds, including the saddle sores of their horses. *Solidago bicolor*, a variety native to dry woodlands, was called bellyache weed, and colonial observers in the Carolinas of 1705 reported that natives favored it as "a preserver of sight and strengthener of the brain." When tea was boycotted in the colonies at the Boston Tea Party, a soothing "Liberty Tea," in which goldenrod was a chief ingredient, became quite popular and was considered a cure for melancholy.

There was even a school of thought that invested goldenrod with, well, golden properties. Carry it with you, and you will find treasure as the flower heads nod to indicate buried riches or lost objects. Wear a sprig, and by the next day, you will see your future love. Find a plant springing up near your door, and unexpected good fortune will soon be on its way.

For modern gardeners, the rich, golden wands of this carefree plant are reward enough, a pot, or rather mound, of gold in the late-season garden. Its virtues are many, its downsides few.

Here's a plant you can virtually ignore until it slowly develops its showy color. Its sturdy, upright stems with clean, lance-shaped foliage rarely need staking no matter how tall it grows. Its leaves are seldom disfigured by insects or diseases, although its flowers are extremely attractive to butterflies and bees, which produce an esteemed honey from its pollen.

Goldenrod is drought resistant once established, doesn't require fertilizer or pruning, and makes a handsome cut flower, fresh or dried. While most varieties prefer full sun, many will thrive in part shade, and none have picky soil preferences — there is a goldenrod for thin sandy soils, as well as heavy clay. Finally, it's a plant that seldom interests rabbits, woodchucks or deer, so it can be grown in open ground with no protection.

"Deer may nibble them at the beginning of the season, but goldenrods are too tough to care," says Rich Pillar, who owns the Wild Earth Native Plant Nursery in Freehold, which carries about a dozen types.

While it's the new border hybrids that grab the attention, let's consider first the wild things that can set the more naturalized areas of your yard aglow. The first of the native species to bloom, usually in July, is *Solidago odora*, named for the anise-scented leaves which release their fragrance when crushed — an extra deterrent to chompage, since browsers avoid strong-smelling plants.

Other recommended species for naturalizing are the 2 to 3 foot showy goldenrod, *Solidago speciosa*, which will grow even in thin, dry, sandy soils. Stiff goldenrod, *Solidago rigida*, starts blooming in late summer with broad flower heads resembling those of tall yarrows, and tops out at 5 feet.

Roan Mountain goldenrod is among the shortest, growing only about a foot tall, but completely covers itself with abundant flowers. Gray goldenrod, *Solidago nemoralis*, stays around 2 feet tall, and while it is often short lived it will readily self-sow.

For partial shade, as along woodland margins, Pillar recommends *Solidago caesia*, the blue-stemmed goldenrod; *Solidago flexicaulis*, the zigzag goldenrod; *Solidago puberula*, downy goldenrod; or *Solidago bicolor*, the only type to sport creamy white flowers rather than the standard golden-yellow.

"The last to bloom is *Solidago sempervirens*, seaside goldenrod, which is adapted to extreme drought and is one of the few plants that can endure salt spray," he adds. "People think this means it can only grow along the beach, but seaside goldenrod will grow anywhere, even inland, and provides color through October when little else is blooming."

It should be clear by now that the native types

are tough plants, widely dispersed and highly adaptable. But bear in mind that the free-growing goldenrods can be quite aggressive, and some are giant specimens (to 7 feet) that, while perfect for a flowering meadow, might be difficult to work into the average garden border.

If the only choices were the wild species, goldenrod probably wouldn't be enjoying such popularity among gardeners in the know.

The fairly recent development of named hybrid with well-behaved characteristics is what has catapulted goldenrod into the short list of superb fall perennials. That it combines gracefully with other stars of the season like asters, sedum, mums, salvia, boltonia, liatris and ornamental grasses is all to its credit.

In Europe, and especially England, plant breeders have developed named hybrids seldom seen here — 'Leraft' and 'Lesden,' for example — primarily from *Solidago canadensis*, a North American native that is there the most widely grown. Early in the 20th century, the French crossed *Solidago* with aster to produce the showy, soft yellow *Solidaster*, usually found in the variety 'Lemore.'

But Americans are catching up. If you need a final piece of evidence supporting goldenrod's garden worthiness, consider how completely it has been welcomed (and developed) by major American botanical gardens. Goldenrods grow at the New York Botanical Garden and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, the Denver Botanic Gardens and the Chicago Botanic Garden, where 31 species were the subject of a five-year evaluation project.

"Long ignored by American gardeners, goldenrods are finally gaining respect," writes garden designer Stephanie Cohen in an article for the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. "If the name still conjures up memories of allergy attacks in the past, just call them Autumn Golden Glories."

One of the most beautiful of the new hybrids 'Fireworks,' was salvaged by the North Carolina Botanical Garden from a spot near Wilson, N.C. that was due to be bulldozed for an auto repair shop parking lot. Propagated in cooperation with Niche Gardens, a native plant supplier, 'Fireworks' has gone on to worldwide fame. Its uniquely thin flower wands, shooting in all directions like an aerial starburst, has endeared it to gardeners on both sides of the Atlantic.

'Golden Fleece' was introduced by the Mount Cuba Center for the Study of Piedmont Flora in Greenville, Delaware. Growing just 18 to 24 inches tall, it is a compact fountain of gold. 'Golden Baby' is another dwarf variety just 20 inches tall, bearing multi-pronged spikes of flowers that somewhat resemble the feathery celosia. Other outstanding border varieties include 'Cloth of Gold,' also about 20 inches, with primrose yellow flowers, and 'Peter Pan,' with flowers concentrated at the top of 28 inch stems.

Even if it were not so beautiful and obliging,

(cont'd on page 8)



NPS booth at ANJEE Conference Rider College in January

ANNOUNCEMENT

Attention Teachers:

The Executive Board of the NPSNJ is committed to two workshops for teachers at the following locations/dates:

October 12, 2004 at the NJSTA Convention (Somerset) and potentially November 4 or 5, 2004 at the NJEA Convention (Atlantic City).

Help Your School Go Wild with Native Gardens! Step by step instructions for turning a plot of lawn into a vibrant, diverse outdoor laboratory. Your instructors will be a panel of leading practitioners in native landscaping and design from the Native Plant Society of NJ. Get your planning done this fall and winter and be prepared to implement your garden in the spring with your students or the following fall. Lots of science and math and practical applications of life that will truly be, natively yours.

We are excited about the prospects for this grand connection.

Teachers who go to this workshop will leave with the tools, knowledge and a manual that will outline the step-by-step process to construct your own native eco-garden. Grab your shovel and get ready to work. 1.0 hour Workshop at the NJS Convention October 2004

The NPSNJ and the BTANJ are searching out grants to subsidize the

development of the manual and this program. Your pre-registration will help us to coordinate our efforts and planning for this unique event. Your feedback will impact our potential to gain a grant to support this effort and the resulting manual. Your participation will guarantee the success of this shared endeavor. Please email your intention to attend to one of the following:

Contact: BTANJ: Bunny Jaskot bunnyj19@aol.com; NPSNJ: Tony Federici fedmail2@yahoo.com

Be part of this groundbreaking effort to bring native gardens to NJ schools. First come-first served. ■



Rain gardens reduce runoff, filter stormwater and are gorgeous!

Wildflower Weekend, April 29 - May 2, 2004

THE GORGE IN BLOOM!

Join us for the annual Natural Bridge State Resort Park. Wildflower Weekend is an opportunity for native plant enthusiasts to enjoy one of Kentucky's most ecologically diverse areas in bloom. On Saturday and Sunday we'll have dozens of field trips throughout the park and the adjacent Red River Gorge National Geologic Area for all levels of participation, from beginners to advanced wildflower enthusiasts and from short easy walks to long hikes. Trips focus on a variety of topics, from trees to rare plants, and are led by university professors, professional biologists, and experienced hobbyists.

This year our evening programs are scheduled to include Dr. Wilson Francis, co-author of the new "Wildflowers and Ferns of Kentucky," the Indiana Department of Natural Resources' Mike Homoya on native orchids of the region, and ferns of the Smokies with Dr. Patricia Cox of the TVA Natural Heritage Program.

Registration Fee: \$5/adult, \$2/child age 6-12, and free for kids age 5 and under, payable upon arrival, no preregistration required.

For accommodation information please call 1-800-325-1710. For event information please contact Zeb Weese, Park Naturalist, at 1-606-663-2214, ext 2104 or jason.weese@ky.gov.

For park information please go to www.naturalbridgepark.com. ■

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goldenrod would be worth planting as a valuable, late-season magnet for butterflies.

"Goldenrods in general are an important nectar source for butterflies, and are a fall favorite food of monarchs, which need a boost to be able to make that long, migratory flight," says Jeffrey Glassberg of Morristown, founder of the North American Butterfly Association and author of a series of field guides entitled "Butterflies through Binoculars" (Oxford University Press, \$18.95).

Although bright orange-and-black monarchs are commonly found throughout the state around now, winging their way south, their flight is often concentrated along the coast where seaside goldenrod is abundant. The New Jersey Audubon Society's Cape May Bird Observatory has for 10 years operated a Monarch Monitoring Program from Sept. 1 through Oct. 31 to assess the migratory populations.

Although numbers have been pretty thin this year, possibly due to die-offs at the monarch's wintering grounds in Mexico, Glassberg says this is no disaster, but rather part of natural fluctuations that can vary from year to year by "a factor of 100." While the mass migration phenomenon may be under stress, monarchs are still plentiful and extremely well distributed in the United States and Mexico.

Besides, there are plenty of other butterflies that will feed on your goldenrod. Pat Sutton, who oversees a model backyard habitat garden at the Cape May Bird Observatory in Cape May Court House, grows seaside goldenrod in the meadows surrounding the "dragonfly pond." What kind of butterflies come fluttering to the goldenrod?

"Oh, all of them," says Sutton. "Monarch, of course, and buckeyes, sulphurs, American ladies, hairstreaks, American coppers, cabbage whites — the goldenrod meadows are a very happening

place, rich with nectar."

Eastern-tailed blues, great swallowtails, painted ladies, red admirals and viceroys also are said to favor the sweet nectar of goldenrods. Combine them with perennial asters, purple coneflower, butterfly bush (buddleia), sedum and phlox, mix them up with long-blooming annuals like cosmos, marigolds and zinnias, and you'll have an irresistible outdoor cafe for the butterflies of late summer.

Goldenrod cultivation is simple and undemanding. Except for the shade-loving varieties mentioned above, give them full sun and good air circulation. Don't fertilize, or you'll encourage weak, lax growth. Water them until plants establish a healthy root system, and then forget them unless drought is prolonged.

Goldenrods generally are propagated by division, and are probably best planted in spring or early summer, guaranteeing bloom in the same season. But fall planting is not incorrect, providing plants have time to settle in before frosts.

Pair goldenrods with vivid asters, especially the deep violet 'Purple Dome' or vivid rose 'September Ruby.' Let it arch casually over sedum 'Autumn Joy' or Montauk daisies, which are only now hitting their stride. Combine it with the blue-green switch grass 'Heavy Metal,' Cohen suggests, or let it mingle with purple coneflower and the wands of purple gay feather (*Liatris*).

If you want to set the wilder, more invasive types loose in a rougher piece of ground, perhaps at the edges of your property, you might try the method recommended by reader Bill Lockwood of Princeton. Just cut branches of goldenrod after they've bloomed and lay them on the ground where you want them to grow. The seed, which often requires a period of cold to germinate, will be effortlessly sown, and the rest can be left to Mother Nature. Voila -Instant meadow.

Native Plant Society

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Just don't turn your back on this robust beauty. It's a plant that will capture your fancy without wearing out your patience (save that for fussier garden subjects). Give goldenrod a chance, and watch it become a key player in the season's grand finale, the anchor of any garden that doesn't pack it in come Labor Day. It's a winner. Try it — you'll like it. ■



The Native Plant Society of New Jersey

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