

## *Garden in the Woods*

By Kim Smith

You would like this place called garden-in-the-woods. The name bespeaks its loveliness. Emerald and gold spangles through the leafy tree-canopy, dappling the gentle paths that rise and fall with the contours of the hillside, paths curving this way and that, and beckoning the question, what lies beyond. In this “wildest” of New England wild flora and fauna sanctuaries, the living collection inspires and encourages learning about, and contemplation of, the one hundred million-year-old association between flowering plants and their pollinators. A woodland sanctuary and native plant botanic garden, adult and children education center, retail nursery and bookstore, Garden in the Woods, located in Framingham Massachusetts, is the home of the New England Wildflower Society. Begun in 1931, Will C. Curtis, the original owner and visionary landscape designer, gave Garden in the Woods in 1965 to the NEWFS to stave off development. As a youthful plant enthusiast, Curtis dreamed of one day growing a garden of native plants collected from all around the United States. Rather than design with monocultures planted in formal beds, Curtis espoused naturalistic plantings that adhered to the contours of the landscape.

As was Garden in the Woods given to protect and conserve, the New England Wild Flower Society was founded in concern for conservation. During the nineteenth century household manuals advised gathering and collecting wild flowers, ferns, and greenery for exhibiting in Wardian cases, gardens, greeneries, and all sorts of decoration. The florist trade hired immigrant labor to pick large quantities of wild plants such as Mayflower, mountain laurel, and ferns. By the 1890’s, botanists and naturalists became concerned as the native New England plants were becoming increasingly rare. Led by Amy Folsom, a group of conservation-minded Boston women organized the Society for the Protection of Native Plants (now New England Wild Flower Society). Jane Loring Gray, widow of the influential nineteenth century botanist, Asa Gray (Gray Herbarium at Harvard University), was named honorary president in 1901. Part of their effort to protect indigenous flora included printing weather-resistant muslin signs to dissuade the digging or uprooting of plants and the extirpation of populations from lack of seed, which read as follows:

*Spare the flowers.  
Thoughtless people are  
destroying the flowers by pulling them up  
or by picking too many of them.  
Cut what flowers you take  
and leave plenty to go to seed.*

The New England Wild Flower Society is the oldest plant conservation organization in the country. Courses and workshops in native plant studies are available at all levels of comprehension—beginner, amateur botanist, professional, homeowner, and teacher. I highly recommend the floral structures class, taught by Professor Kanchi Gandhi, or any of the botany classes taught by Dr. Gandhi (Dr. Gandhi’s classes are also available through the Arnold Arboretum’s education programs and the Landscape Institute of the Arnold Arboretum at Harvard University).

Hands-on family and children's programs are designed to instruct and inspire. From now through October 31<sup>st</sup>, *Big Bugs* are making an encore appearance at Garden in the Woods. Behemoth bug sculptures by David Rogers are sited throughout the trails. As Rogers states on his website, "These little creatures which we often take for granted outnumber us one million to one. Many live in communal groups working as one for the common good of all. Their ranks include engineers, soldiers, weightlifters, weavers, hunters, stalkers, gatherers, and even royalty. When you take this remarkable and diverse group of "hidden gardeners" and recreate them on a gargantuan scale using all-natural materials, you have the Big Bugs. The effect is a role reversal of dimension and perception." The sculptures are created using combinations of cut green saplings selectively harvested from the willow family, dry branches, whole trees found standing or fallen, and an array of other forest materials.

Big Bugs family activities celebrate Damsel Friday Weekend, Butterfly Festival, and more. Related classes for bug-curious children feature evocative excursions such as Insect Safari and Night Flashers Night Hike. Garden in the Woods is open from April 15 through Labor Day, daily, 9 a.m. – 7 p.m., and September 2 – October 31, daily, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. For directions and more information about native plant courses and exhibits, visit their website at [newfs.org](http://newfs.org).

A note about the photograph of the wild flower taken at NEWFS, in mid-April: *Anemone patens* earns its common French name of pasqueflower for its habit of blooming around Easter time. Pasqueflower is found throughout mountainous regions of Europe. The North American variation *multifida* is native to prairies and rocky outcrops of the Northwest and south to Idaho, New Mexico, and Illinois. One of the earliest flowering perennials, iridescent, silvery hairs help protect it from late season frosts. Beginning its florescence as the snows melt, in shades of pale to deep lavender and violet, and occasionally white, the flowers give way to silky ornamental seedheads.

Kim Smith is a residential and garden designer. Preorders for her forthcoming book *Oh Garden of Fresh Possibilities! ~ Notes from a Gloucester Garden*, September 2008, are available through her website at [www.kimsmithdesigns.com](http://www.kimsmithdesigns.com) and Toad Hall Bookstore at [www.toadhallbooks.org](http://www.toadhallbooks.org). Kim will be happy to respond to readers' questions and comments at [kimsmithdesigns@hotmail.com](mailto:kimsmithdesigns@hotmail.com).

*Pasqueflower (Anemone patens var. multifida)*



*North American Bullfrog (Rana catesbeiana)*

