

Trails and Sails

By Kim Smith

Did you know that Essex County is home to over 200 wild life refuges, historical sites, museums, farms, and nature trails? During the upcoming weekend of September 26th through the 28th the Essex County Trails and Sails festival, which is the premier event sponsored by the Essex National Heritage Commission, will be taking place all around Essex County. The festival is designed to celebrate the natural, cultural, and historic treasures of Essex County and features 200-plus *free* touring, hiking, and water activities.

The website of the Essex National Heritage Commission, www.essexheritage.org, was created to present a wide range of information. Detailed information is provided, including directions and calendar about a host of events such as Trails and Sails. The website is also a handy umbrella listing for a diverse variety of places to go and interesting things to do. For example, find the What to Do and Places to Visit page and click on the Birding Trails photo. There you will find descriptions, town by town, of spectacular trails and sites, along with the bird species one might encounter, visitor information, and website links. The same convenience is available at the Garden page, Agriculture, Museums, Historic Houses pages, and more.

The newly restored Willowdale Estate, with its elegant courtyard butterfly garden, is just one of the many featured events of the Trails and Sails festival that is free and open to the public. Come join me Saturday morning at Willowdale, located in the Bradley Palmer State Park in Topsfield, from 9:00 am to 12 noon. The garden is richly planted using a combination of native and well-behaved ornamental plants, affording both nectar for adult Lepidoptera and larval host plants for caterpillars. I will be giving tours of the butterfly garden and providing plant and butterfly species information specific to Essex County. The garden is thriving, despite the cooler temperatures, and the Monarchs and other migratory species are on the wing. I cannot think of a more elegant and naturalistic place to hold a special event. The courtyard garden, where wedding ceremonies are typically held, is bordered by the fairy tale-like Arts and Crafts stone manse, encircled by the woodland forest of the Bradley Palmer State Park. With weather on our side, this is the perfect time of year to take a tour and/or investigate for future events.

It would be virtually impossible to explore all the fabulous sites that are open and free of charge during the Trails and Sails festival, however, just a short bike ride or twenty minute drive from Willowdale Estate, one could easily enjoy a tour of beautiful Long Hill, located in Beverly. Long Hill is the former summer home of *Atlantic Monthly* magazine publisher and editor Ellery Sedgwick and his first wife Mabel, author of *The Garden Month by Month*. Long Hill is the rare combination of a series of cultivated garden “rooms,” surrounded by over one hundred acres of woodlands, wetlands, fields, and orchards, all accessible by two miles of well-marked trails. The garden rooms reflect Mabel’s design intuition of garden design as an expression of the relationship between people and landscape and feature an attractive and healthy mix of native, edible, and ornamental plantings. Following Mabel’s death, the gardens came under the guidance of Marjorie Russell, Ellery Sedgwick’s second wife. English horticulturist in her own right and propagator of rare plants, she worked with the Arnold Arboretum to expand and catalogue Long Hill’s plant collection. Although the collection of trees, shrubs, and perennials were unusual at the time of introduction, their use today is widespread.

I had the pleasure of meeting Beth Zschau, the recently appointed Horticulture Educator. She shared the trustee’s vision of creating a horticultural and educational center, developing

certificate studies and year-round programs in botany, propagating, seed starting, and grafting. With the success of Long Hill's expanding food project and children's programs, and horticultural and educational center in development, this is an exciting time in which to become a member and get involved.

The Sedgwick Gardens at Long Hill are maintained to sheer perfection under the careful guidance of Superintendent Dan Bouchard. Designed to create a sequential array of flowering and fruiting interest, the gardens provide four seasons of beauty. I have found, no matter the time of year, the gardens will not disappoint. In late summer, the allée of crabapple trees is in full fruit, and in another few weeks the same trees will smolder in a kaleidoscope of autumnal hues. Winter brings snow-covered bows and spring is truly memorable, when the crabapples are awash in blossoms of white to crimson and the myriad shades of pink in between. Adjacent to the carriage house is a vigorous specimen of the native redbud (*Cercis canadensis*). The clapboards of the carriage house are painted a lovely muted tone of plum rose, perfectly complementing the fine red brick of the main house. I imagine that redbud, come May and in full bloom, clothed in rosy-magenta pea-shaped flowers and juxtaposed against the plum-painted clapboards, must be simply gorgeous. At this writing and of particular note for autumn interest, flowering and fruiting are the *Lespedeza thunbergii* (white fountain bushclover), creating a stunning cascading effect covered in sprays of sweetly fragrant white flowers. The glassine red berries of the Wrighti viburnums, offset by blue-green foliage, make a splendid mid-sized shrub for a lightly shaded woodland border. Sited under the high canopy of the grove of trees edging the side entryway is the very old cultivar of Japanese toad lily *Tricyrtis* x 'Sinonome.' Opening from chocolate-colored buds along gently arching stems, the purplish wine-red freckled 'Sinonome' flowers in late summer to early autumn. Planted in rich, moist soil, 'Sinonome' forms an upright non-spreading clump of green, clean foliage.

For a complete listing of events, including family and child-centered activities, click on the Events page of the Long Hill page of the Trustees of the Reservation website, www.thetrustees.org. There you will also find visitor information and directions.

For information about Willowdale Estate including a complete calendar of upcoming public events, visit their website at www.willowdaleestate.com. Please see the article Growing Native at Willowdale Estate posted on the eColumn page of my website, www.kimsmithdesigns.com.





Long Hill's Tricyrtis x 'Sinonome'