

Updates and Events

Dear Gardening Friends,

I had planned to write about asters, but there is much good news to share. I will have to postpone asters until next week. Kathy Purdy from [Cold Climate Gardening](#) has written a positively wonderful review about *Oh Garden*. When you have a few spare moments, please read the review and take the time to peruse Kathy's beautifully redesigned and well-organized website, which hosts her informative blog and essays, a state-by-state directory of other websites devoted to gardening, and book reviews. A copy of *Oh Garden* and several terrific gardening books are offered as giveaways on their online scavenger hunt.

I am very excited to be teaching a new class—[Your Garden as Habitat](#) on Tuesday evenings in May, from 6:30 to 8:30, at the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard. Our gardens provide each of us with a wonderful opportunity to create a welcoming haven, not only for our family and friends, but also for myriad species of birds, bees, butterflies, and other wildlife. I will help you assess your existing garden to create a more life-sustaining ecosystem by providing suggestions for developing the framework, as well as discussing specific plants and examples of architectural features based on their value to particular vertebrates and invertebrates. Through lectures, photographs, discussions, and supplemental reading you will gain a deeper understanding of the interconnected world that we human beings share with plants and wildlife, and how to translate that information to your own garden. I am also inviting students to research a specific habitat that is of interest and make a presentation to the class, and to bring photos and sketches of your outdoor space to class for comment and discussion. It is very easy to [register online](#) and if you have any questions, please call Pamela Thompson at 617.384.5277.

One of the many benefits of becoming a member of the Friends of the Arnold Arboretum is that cost of classes are offered at a discounted rate. Member benefits also include subscriptions to Arboretum publications, the quarterly journal *Arnoldia*, and the semiannual news magazine and education catalogue, [Silva](#), with news and noteworthy articles and instructively fun 'Arboretum activity for kids of all ages' pages.

Recently I had the pleasure of visiting the [Stevens-Coolidge Place](#), a Trustees of Reservations property located in North Andover. I have been invited to have a book signing and help with the butterfly walks that will be held during their hugely popular annual [plant sale](#), which is Saturday, May 9, from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. Perennials, annuals, and old roses will be offered for sale and the plant preview begins at 9:00 am. Chris Ward, the superintendent, gave me the grand tour, and we met with Russell Hopping, the Ecology Program Manager for the Trustees properties, who is giving the guided the butterfly walks.

The Stevens-Coolidge Place, formerly known as Ashdale Farm, was the summer residence of John Gardner Coolidge and Helen Stevens Coolidge from 1912 to 1962. Coolidge was a descendant of Thomas Jefferson and nephew of Isabella Stewart Gardner. Helen's family farmed Ashdale for six generations, having originally acquired the property in 1729. The Coolidges transformed the farm into an elegant estate, combining agriculture practices with the gracious country living enjoyed by wealthy Bostonians of the era.

Late winter is not the time of year I would ordinarily tour a garden, but without the distraction of flora and fauna, it was inspiring to see the 'bare bones' of the design. I thank Chris for this thorough tour and am very interested to return in warmer weather. Of special note is the elegant and recently restored old rose garden and the French potager, which is bordered by a

stunning serpentine brick wall planted with espalier peach trees. Bucolic orchards, hay fields, and woodlands surround the formal gardens.

Located about a mile from the Stevens-Coolidge Reservation is [Weir Hill](#) (pronounced “wire hill”), another property managed by the Trustees. Weir Hill is a double drumlin (a drumlin is an elongated whale-shaped hill formed by glacial activity) located on the shores of Lake Cochichewick, offering hiking trails through a patchwork of ten different types of plant communities. Several threatened state-listed and watch-listed species can be found on Weir Hill, including the white bog orchid (*Habenaria dilatata*), violet bush clover (*Lespedeza violacea*), and butternut trees (*Juglans nigra*). The aforementioned Russ Hopping is one of the land managers for the Trustees, and the decisions made by the ecologists impact the natural resources and wild life habitats of the properties. Russ writes in the current issue of *Massachusetts Butterflies*, “This can be a complicated and dynamic task since most properties are constantly changing and have multiple user groups and goals. Seldom is the prescription simple or based on a single purpose factor.” Just some of the many issues the land managers are grappling with are the most effective method to eradicate invasive purple loosestrife, selective clearing, prescribed fire, and when to cut hay. I have heard this question of when to cut hay asked frequently. One logical solution for homeowners, recommended by Doug Tallamy, author of *Bringing Nature Home*, suggests alternately mowing half a field at a time. Hopping continues, “... fields may provide habitat for grassland wildlife, such as butterflies, but these same fields may be important for the income generated by hay production; either way the fields need to be cut or they will succeed into shrub lands and later forests, without regular disturbance. The decision to cut may seem an easy one, but when—June for high-quality hay, or later in the season for dependant wildlife—is not always clear. If cutting to promote wildlife habitat, should cutting occur annually or every other year? Good stewardship requires these types of questions be asked and answered.”

You can read more about land stewardship and butterfly conservation at Weir Hill in Russell Hopping’s article in the Spring 2009 issue of the [Massachusetts Butterfly Club](#) semiannual publication. Membership to the Massachusetts Butterfly Club also includes membership to the North American Butterfly Association (NABA), and you receive their publications as well, [American Butterflies](#) and [Butterfly Gardener](#) magazine. I am out of space, but I hope the links help.

Which brings us full circle, back to asters and butterflies. Flat-topped aster (*Aster umbellatus*) growing in the nearby open meadows at Weir Hill supports the declining Harris’ Checkerspot butterfly. We’ll talk more about asters to plant in spring, for fall blossoms, in next week’s column.

I hope you will join me at the [Manchester-by-the-Sea Public Library](#) for an informal talk and book signing on Wednesday, April 15th, at 6:30 pm. With purchase of book, I am including a packet of New England aster seeds.

With all best wishes,
Kim



Smooth Aster and Pearly Crescentspot