

---

# SUNNYSIDE THYMES

---

Volume 32, Issue 11

“Helping Others Grow”

November 2023

---

## Know Your Natives

By Freda Bonebrake, SMG Member

### Indiana Native Wildflowers

With blooms that last from early spring ephemerals to late fall asters, Indiana native wildflowers provide beauty to the eye and food and habitats to pollinators. Relatively low maintenance, they tolerate a wide range of soil, water and sun requirements. A few suggestions below:

**SPIDERWORT**, *Tradescantia ohiensis*. Spiderwort grows in a clump with a height of 2 – 3 feet and has a three-petaled, bright blue flower that opens in the morning and closes by early afternoon with each bloom lasting only one day. But the plant is an over producer providing blooms from late spring into midsummer. After flowering, cut the foliage to the ground to force a second growth and bloom in fall. Spiderwort likes full sun but will accept light shade and prefers moist, sandy soil. Plant fresh seeds in spring or root stem cuttings in sand and within 2-3 weeks new roots will form. It provides an abundance of pollen to Bees and Flies.



Spiderwort. Photo: Freda Bonebrake

**PALE PURPLE CONEFLOWER**, *Echinacea pallida*. Pale Purple Coneflower grows to about 3 feet with a spiny center cone and long, slender, drooping flower petals. A most attractive prairie perennial, it blooms from late spring to midsummer. It prefers full sun with well drained soil and is tolerant to drought, heat and humidity. Plants can be propagated by seed, dividing in spring or fall, or by root cuttings. Bees, Butterflies, and hummingbirds are attracted to its nectar.

**BUTTERFLY MILKWEED**, *Asclepias tuberosa*. Butterfly Milkweed is popular to beneficial insects as well as monarch caterpillars. Considered a micro food

web, Oleander Aphids eat the sap and are then eaten by parasitic wasps. Large Milkweed Bugs feed on stems, leaves and seed pods. Mostly causing unattractive damage, they are useful in reducing seed production. Flowers are a nectar source for butterflies and leaves are a food source for monarch butterfly larvae. Easily grown in full sun, it grows in well-drained as well as dry soils. Plants grow 1 – 3 feet tall and have a long bloom period from June through August.

**CARDINAL FLOWER**, *Lobelia cardinalis*. Growing 4 – 5 feet tall, Cardinal Flower prefers rich, wet or moist soils. It grows well in full sun to part shade, but the soil shouldn't dry out. Plants reseed and if given bare soil and moisture may propagate. Cuttings should be cut from new growth. Cardinal red, two-lipped blossoms from midsummer to early fall are magnets for hummingbirds and bees.



Cardinal Flower.  
Photo: Univ. of North Carolina Extension

**BLACKEYED SUSAN**, *Rudbeckia hirta*. Black-eyed Susan is fast growing and will bloom the first year from seed. Although named “Black” the flowers are actually a brown center with bright yellow or orange petals. It blooms beginning early summer and if cut back, will continue to produce new plants and blooms well into fall. It tends to be aggressive but can be controlled by shearing. Also a member of the aster family, it prefers full sun and well-drained soil. It appeals to a variety of pollinators including Bees, Butterflies/Moths, Flies and Wasps.



Black-eyed Susan  
Photo: Freda Bonebrake

• Continued

---

---

**HOLLOW JOE PYE WEED**, *Eupatorium fistulosum*. A member of the Aster family, there are seven varieties of Joe Pye Weed native to Indiana. It blooms in clusters of mauve-pink flowers. A very tall plant growing 5 – 10 feet tall, it prefers moist, well-drained rich soil in full sun or light shade. Hollow Joe Pye Weed may be propagated by seeding thickly in the fall or with division or stem cuttings in late spring. Bees and Beetles find it attractive and cavity nesting Bees use the hollow stems as nesting sites. Leave your stems standing overwinter and allow pollinators to emerge before cutting back.

**SMOOTH ASTER**, *Aster laevis*. Indiana boasts 10 varieties of native asters. Smooth Aster is a late bloomer carrying us into late fall. Covered in daisy-like flowers, it grows 2 – 4 feet tall, tolerates full sun and grows in well-drained, dry to moderate soil. Propagated by root cuttings, seed or division. To encourage

density, cut plants back in late spring to within 6 inches. Very attractive to pollinators for providing a late-season source of nectar to Bees and Beetles, it is also the host plant for the Pearl Crescent caterpillar.

*Sources:*

- “Go Native! Gardening with Native Plants & Wildflowers in the Lower Midwest”
  - “Protecting Pollinators: Recommended Indiana-native Plants for Attracting Pollinators” Purdue Extension publication POL-6-W
  - Indiana Wildlife Federation
  - Missouri Botanical Garden
  - North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox
  - “5 Ways To Increase Nesting Habitat For Native Bees” The Xerces Society
-