

Out in the Garden

Rockport Garden Club, March 2020



Garden Diary: Planting a Native Garden

I bought a house whose backyard is Mill Brook and its wetland. The Conservation Committee used my house as a testing ground for good land-use practices. They limited any disturbance (read: garden and lawn) to a limit of about 25 feet from the building and required that the builder install a rain garden to prevent any kind of runoff. They also told me that I should be planting only native plants.

First, what's a rain garden? Mine is an oval in my backyard. All of the water from my gutters goes straight into the oval. The composition of the soil (top to bottom) is designed to allow water to easily filter down and not beyond. The rain garden protects nasty stuff from reaching Mill Brook.



I'd been gardening for 37 years in a Newton Victorian with shade. I designed my garden with a Victorian sensibility so I had lots of hydrangea, roses, lilies and hosta. I knew very little about native plants, but I was totally on board with going native and I had sun for the first time.

I spent many hours researching native plants and discovered that almost everything I had grown was not native.

How do you choose? I made it simple. I found an online catalog that offered native plants and looked for flowers I liked. I either hit the buy button or found them at our local nurseries or the Garden Club's Plant Sale. (My go-to site for reference is [North Creek Nurseries](#).)

The way I've always planned my gardens is to buy ankle, knee, hip and head height plants. Because my rain garden has the backdrop of the wetland, I used it like it was a wall. I put the tallest at the "back." If I were planting any other circle, I'd plant with the tallest in the center, then hip, knee, ankle on either side. Then I staggered petalled, daisy-like flowers, with spikey flowers.

And, yes, I overbuy. Always have, always will. It's probably not a good practice, but life is short and I like to see results this year. It means more plants for the Plant Sale...maybe.

The overall strategy for me is height and petal shape, in a nutshell. Colors can be coordinated or higgledy-piggledy. I've gone with the latter.

I have a preference for enjoying a late summer garden so I bought late-blooming natives for the rain garden.

What flowers did I plant in my garden?

Head high:

Joe Pye Weed (*Eupatorium fistulosum*)

Native Clematis (*Clematis virginiana*)

Hip High:

Bee Balm (*Monarda*)

Bluestar (*Amsonia*)

Cardinal Flower (*Lobelia*)

Dog-toothed Daisy (*Helenium*)

Phlox Paniculata



Knee High:

Beardtongue (*Penstemon*)

Coneflowers (*Echinacea*)

Hyssop (*Agastache*)

Hoary Skullcap (*Scutellaria*)

Tickseed (*Coreopsis*)



Ankle High:

Dwarf Aster

Poppy mallow (*Callirhoe*)



That's most of them, but there are more! I've found that "limiting" my garden to native plants has few limits. Most flowering natives are excellent pollinators and my garden is abuzz with bees, butterflies, colorful moths and all kinds of interesting insects. Going native is a responsible way to garden and eminently rewarding.

—Submitted by Lisa Simms



The Garden Cart: Golden Alexander

Who wouldn't want a plant with the name *Zizia aurea* or Golden Alexander? It sounds exotic, but it is a humble plant. I started growing them



for the novelty of having a native member of the carrot family that is not Queen's Anne's-Lace in my garden.

This native perennial has showy, tiny, yellow flowers arranged in a flat-topped umbel and are a cheerful sight in spring. The blooms last for about six weeks and lend a light and airy feel to arrangements. The flowers attract small beneficial bees, wasps, and flies. Most important, it is the larval food plant for the black swallowtail butterfly.

Golden Alexanders need to be planted in groups to draw your attention. Once established, it will spread by seeds to form a colony. It is not a thug.

Zizia aptera is similar but has thicker textured heart shaped leaves.

Attributes:

Height: 12-24 inches

Spread: 10-12 inches

Hardiness Zone: 4-9

Bloom: Yellow

Exposure: Sun or Part Shade

Soil Moisture: Moist but is happy in Average

Maintenance: Low

Winter Interest: Evergreen

Ecoregion: East of the Rockies



Photo: North Creek Nurseries

—Patty Hock

"The earth laughs in flowers."

—R.W. Emerson

March Garden Reminders:

• Maintenance:

Rake perennial beds to prepare for compost or fertilizer.

Cut cold-season ornamental grasses to the ground.

Prune roses before the buds swell.

Pruning ([see shrub pruning calendar](#))

Clean out birdhouses.

Clean and sharpen hand tools and mower.

Start a Garden Journal and record temperatures, purchases and the first signs of spring.

On a warm day get ahead of weeds by pulling any that emerged during the winter.

• Pest Control:

Apply dormant oil to shrubs and trees to smother overwintering insects and eggs.

To make your own: add 1/2 cup of canola or safflower oil and a few drops of dishwashing liquid to one gallon of water. Spray when above 50 degrees.

• Garden Club:

Our first meeting is Monday, April 6th.

It's time to renew your membership! Consider new opportunities to volunteer.

Start thinking about what plants you'll be digging and donating to the Plant Sale.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

What's Happening

The Boston Flower & Garden Show

"Garden Party:

Celebrating Friends & Family"

March 11 – 15, 2020

Seaport World Trade Center

200 Seaport Boulevard

Boston, MA 02210