

# What's Growing On? The Fletcher Wildlife Garden Newsletter

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August 2011

## Summertime in the Garden

***The Backyard Garden is in full bloom, as are many plants in the Butterfly Meadow.***

Do you remember spring? The rain? The slow start on anything green? Well, hard to imagine such cold weather now! In the BYG we've had to turn on the pond pump to ensure sufficient water for our aquatics, and while most plants soldier on without too much issue (the beauty of native plants - they just get to it and grow!) some look decidedly toasted. Balancing plants and their needs in a garden is essential to ensuring you have something nice to look at all season long. Staggered flowering times, varying height and form as well as watering as necessary all help keep a garden looking lovely no matter the weather. Don't forget in toasty times to cater to our little visitors. Birds and bees benefit from shallow baths, just make sure to keep containers clean from growth. Shady spots or nooks and crannies within rock piles appeal to chipmunks and other small friends. Squirrels love a good, safe branch or platform on which to sun.

We invite you to revisit a fun story sent to us from FWG fan Tom Brown of Pennsylvania on our website at [http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/our\\_animals/squirrels/TomBrown/squirrel-house.php](http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/our_animals/squirrels/TomBrown/squirrel-house.php)



T Brown

### Take Note!

This summer, Sundays from 12-4 pm will see volunteers keeping the Interpretation Centre open for visitors and answering questions in the garden.

If you want to come out and pull DSV or weed in the BYG, that is a great time to do it!

### Contact Us!

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Where IS my iced tea? ...



## The Silent Invader that's not from Mars

A silent invader is craftily taking over our gardens and green spaces. Innocent enough in first appearances, it quickly spreads until, before we realise, it dominates green spaces and defies resistance! No, we're not talking about aliens from Mars, though these aliens are as green as the Martians are reputed to be. This is the ignored and sneaky Dog-Strangling Vine, also known as Pale Swallow-wort, and by its scientific names *Vincetoxicum rossicum* and *Cynanchum rossicum*. Once you know what it looks like, you'll be seeing it everywhere.

DSV arrived in eastern North America from the Ukraine and Russia over a century ago. First establishing itself in New York State in the 1880s, it has spread into southern and eastern Ontario. Earliest observations in Ottawa date from about 1907, but it was relatively unknown until about 15-20 years ago, when for reasons not well understood its growth exploded exponentially.

While it is establishing itself, DSV is pleasant enough in appearance: opposing, deep green, lilac-shaped leaves on a nodding stem and clusters of small yet pretty flowers coming in May. It's easily missed in a field or hedgerow. What makes this vine such a danger, and why should we care? DSV has few or no natural Canadian enemies and so, where conditions suit, is able to spread unchecked. As yet, there is no biological control and won't be for years yet.

Its growth habits are also invasive. A twining vine, DSV climbs up into anything it reaches: trees, shrubs, and nearby plants, including other DSV vines. The result can be thick mats of almost impenetrable plant matter, perhaps the true source of the name Dog-Strangling Vine. By this stage, other gentler, less prolific – and often more desirable – plants have long disappeared.



DSV has other advantages as an invader. It is highly prolific, able to produce up to 2000 seeds per square meter. Furthermore, the seeds are often polyembryonic, so instead of producing a single plant, they could produce 2, 3 or more. While it thrives in sunlight, DSV can equally take over the understory of a woodlot. Early research suggests that DSV can even modify soil chemistry in its favour.

Related to common milkweed, DSV also disperses its seeds on the wind after its dried-out pods have opened up and released them. Cutting or pulling DSV loaded with mature pods can actually facilitate this dispersal, as pods of the cut plants dry out and release their seeds more quickly. Milkweed is the primary food plant of the Monarch butterfly, which lays its eggs on the plant so that the hatching larvae have a ready food source. Unfortunately, DSV is close enough to milkweed to fool the Monarchs, but the larvae find it incompatible and slowly starve. Thus, DSV is a danger to our most iconic, already threatened butterfly as well as our gardens and green spaces.

What can be done about DSV? Where it is well established, it is extremely difficult to eradicate. Early detection and continuing vigilance are key to not having it take over in the first place. Small patches can be dug up, by hand or by tiller, and roots sifted out. Note those roots! Numerous buds surround the crown, out of sight just below ground, waiting to spring up as new vines.



DSV can be cut down – scything works – where it occurs in larger patches; cut over areas can be covered with tarps or thickly mulched with newspaper and wet leaves. This will not permanently eliminate DSV, however, and such areas need to be checked. Tarps should be in place for at least a couple of years and, given the sensitivity of DSV to light, should be opaque rather than translucent. Keep an eye on the tarp, as DSV will send stems for several feet under it and pop out at the edges. Old pool liners work well, as do boat covers, often discarded at the end of winter – enquire at your local marina. Spraying with herbicides has not proven to be particularly effective and will hurt desirable plants as well.

A final point: DSV must be disposed of appropriately. Young, immature plants can be used as mulch on cleared sites, but mature plants should be bagged up in heavy duty garbage bags destined for the landfill – DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT COMPOSTING! This is especially the case for roots and pods with viable seeds; once these plants are cut, pods will dry out and release their seeds even more quickly than those on uncut plants. Seeds mature in late July and August, so pods should be monitored when cutting late in the season. In the end, then, it seems the only enemy DSV has is us. Check your garden, hedges and public spaces. Watch your neighbours' side yards and school playgrounds. We are the first, best and only line of defence.

**by Barry Cottam**

*Barry Cottam is a volunteer and a member of the management committee at the Fletcher Wildlife Garden. He got to know DSV first hand during the 2010 season and it was hate at first sight.*

## Science Corner: Vitamin "G"



Spending time in the outdoors is healthy. We feel it instinctively. We turn our faces to the morning sun. We draw the fresh air deep into our lungs. We listen for birds singing, for water tumbling over rocks, for leaves rustling in the wind.

Research reveals just how healthy green space is for human beings. A report published by the Faculty of Public Health, the leading professional body for public health specialists in the UK, includes various types of land in its definition of green space – from parks and other formal spaces, to less managed areas such as corridors along river banks, and even green roofs and tree-lined streets. The report states that contact with safe green spaces is good for physical and mental well-being. Spending time in a green environment can, for example:

- reduce symptoms of stress and poor mental health,
- enhance mental wellbeing for people of all ages,
- boost levels of physical activity for all age groups,
- increase communal activity for various social groups,
- raise resident satisfaction with the neighbourhood.

Another "natural health" report, published by the UK's Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, stresses that green spaces play important roles in stimulating and encouraging physical activity, in enhancing our emotional state, and in alleviating a wide range of mental health problems. The report encourages people to volunteer their way to health by joining groups doing outdoor work in natural areas.

A team of researchers in the Netherlands, led by Peter Groenewegen of Utrecht University, calls the benefits of green space "Vitamin G." That's an element we get in abundance when we volunteer at the Fletcher Wildlife Garden!

**by Renate Sander-Regier**

*Renate Sander-Regier is a naturalist, gardener, avid FWG volunteer and PhD candidate in geography at the University of Ottawa.*





## FWG Notes

The Tuesday Invasive Species Group has a great blog used to track their progress and work. Give it a visit at <http://tisgatfwg.blogspot.com/> to read what they are up to, and also to send them words of encouragement! Full of photos and useful information, the blog also takes a lighter tone when needed - such as this super joke submitted by Hedrik:

**Q: How do demented weedpullers (aka TISG associates) get thru a newly emerging of patch of DSV ?**

**A: They take the psychopath!**



*DSV, the way we like it - cut!!!*

### WANTED: Items FWG Could Use!

The Butterfly Meadow Group is looking for a used pool liner for their work. Contact: [dlepagehibou@sympatico.ca](mailto:dlepagehibou@sympatico.ca)

Do you have excess Common Milkweed in your garden you could dig up and donate? The Butterfly Meadow is looking for more!

We can always use 4-inch square pots without any cracks. Anything larger or smaller doesn't fit our trays, nor does anything circular. We also like large round pots, the kind that come with shrubs or very big perennials. Just drop them off by the nursery!

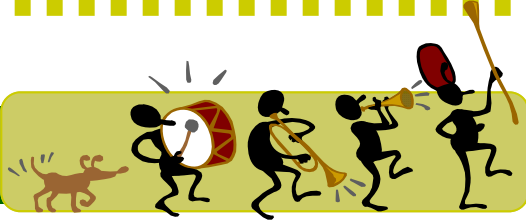
THE SUCCESS OF OUR JULY WEED BEES HAS US VERY EXCITED FOR MORE! WE'RE HAVING TWO MORE DSV WEED BEES - SUNDAY 14 AUGUST, AND ONE SUNDAY 11 SEPTEMBER, BOTH FROM 9 UNTIL 1. WHEN THE LEAVES START TO CHANGE WE'LL BE HAVING SOME BUCKTHORN BEES, SO KEEP YOUR EYES PEELED!





Gaps in the garden? We still have plants for sale. Come by a Sunday afternoon or a Friday morning to see for yourself with a helpful volunteer, or check our list here (<http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/WhatsUp/2011-Post-PlantSale-list.pdf>) to see what is available and email your order to [fletcher@ofnc.ca](mailto:fletcher@ofnc.ca) stating what you would like, how many, and most importantly WHEN you can pick them up. We'll let you know how much your purchase will be and how to pay! So easy!

## Butterflies on Parade



Between our weeding bees and the Evergreen/FIDO contest, a lot of effort and focus has recently been devoted to our Butterfly Meadow. Here are some of the winged lovelies spotted -when you visit, try and pick them out yourself!



American Snout (*Libytheana carinenta*) D. LePage

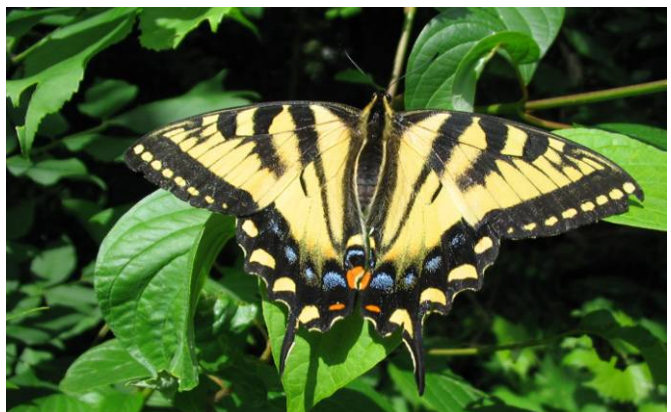


Banded Hairstreak (*Satyrium calanus*)  
D. LePage



Tiger Swallowtail (*Papilio canadensis*)

C. Hanrahan



Great Spangled Fritillary (*Speyeria cybele*)  
C. Hanrahan





## Bonkers for Beebalm!

Native plants are nice to look at, great for wildlife and frequently have hidden bonus properties for people. One such plant is Beebalm, or Wild Bergamot (*Monarda didyma* for the red flower and *Monarda fistulosa* for the pink flower). That it is part of the mint family is no surprise given the aromatic qualities of its leaves! This plant grows very well in a variety of soils, but is especially suited for medium to drier soils. Every season, bees and other pollinators go wild, frenetically zipping from flower to flower in an ecstasy of pollen collection or nectar sipping. If Beebalm was a club, it would be the 'It' spot in town! FWG sells this plant every year at the plant sale. We suggest planting it in large clumps for full effect, and when possible using both the *M. didyma* and *M. fistulosa* together, as the latter blooms at a slightly later time.

Beebalm has an interesting history from an anthropological perspective. Used extensively by First Nations people, the plant was commonly taken as an infused tea for a variety of ailments. In fact, after dumping so much tea in Boston harbour in 1773, the settlers were forced to look elsewhere for their fix – the bergamot-like flavour of Beebalm probably seemed quite close to a most citrusy cup of Earl Grey and was called Oswego Tea after the tribe who introduced them.

Dried plants are aromatic and make a lovely potpourri. Mix with dried cedar, lavender and mint to create your own sachets to help keep clothes fresh-smelling. Another neat aspect of Beebalm are its high levels of thymol – a natural antiseptic frequently used in mouthwash! Lastly, flowers are comestible in salads or cakes – try the recipe below, which substitutes Beebalm for Earl Grey tea. Once a plant begins to flower, the leaves tend to change in flavour and become more bitter, so plan your sugar accordingly!

### Beebalm Cupcakes

- 1/2 cup unsalted butter, softened
- 1/2 cup light brown sugar\*
- 2 eggs
- 1/2 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 1/4 tsp baking powder
- 3/4 tsp salt
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 2-3 tbsp dried or fresh Beebalm leaves or flowers

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Simmer the leaves or flowers in the milk for 15-20 minutes or until the taste is sufficiently intense for you. Strain and cool so that you have 1 cup of milk left. Beat butter, vanilla and sugar together until light and fluffy, then add each egg ensuring the wet mixture is thoroughly combined. Mix dry ingredients in a second bowl, then add half of this slowly to the wet mixture. Keep mixing to make sure you get a uniform batter. Add the milk and

remaining dry ingredients, all the while mixing. Bake 20-25 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean. Makes 12 cupcakes or 1 smaller cake.

### Lemon Buttercream Frosting

- 1/2 cup unsalted butter, softened
- 2 cups icing sugar
- zest of one lemon
- 2 tbsp lemon juice

Cream butter, then add the icing sugar and beat until fluffy. Add the lemon zest, juice and beat until smooth. Spread over cooled cupcakes. Try it with orange for a different take!

*\*Taste the batter once mixed - you may wish to add more sugar to taste.*



# What's Your Volunteering Match???

Quiz time! Who doesn't like a good quiz that tells them more about themselves? Today, you find out to which sort of volunteering you're best suited according at FWG!

Keep track of you're a, b, c and d answers

1

- a) I have a 9-5, Monday to Friday job, and lots of activities on weekends.
- b) I have a 9-5, Monday to Friday job, and hate to commit my free time regularly.
- c) My time is 100% flexible.
- d) My time is flexible, and I tend to take advantage of making my own long-weekends in the spring and summer.

2

- a) I like to get down to business and make a difference.
- b) I can either get down to business or take it easy.
- c) Hard work appeals to me – I enjoy workouts!
- d) While I can do hard work, I prefer a more sedate pace and socialising.

3

- a) I like a focus to my work – I want to know how my helping makes a specific difference.
- b) I'll do whatever needs doing.
- c) I don't mind doing the same activity each week.
- d) I like some variety in what I am doing.

## **Mostly As**

You are perfect for the Butterfly Meadow Group! Weeding, planting and doing whatever it takes to make a perfect home for our winged friends! The Butterfly Meadow group meets every Wednesday evening, from 6~6:30 until dusk. For more information on activities or about joining, contact Diane at [dlepagehibou@sympatico.ca](mailto:dlepagehibou@sympatico.ca)

## **Mostly Bs**

Keep an eye out for our special events, which we usually hold on weekends to tackle a specific issue. We love an extra infusion of help! If you want to do more than the occasional helping hand, consider talking to us about what sort of opportunities we may have available. Contact Sandy at [sgarland@teksavvy.com](mailto:sgarland@teksavvy.com)

## **Mostly Cs**

The Tuesday morning Invasive Species Group wants you! Tasked with battling and researching ways to strike down our invasive species foes, the TISG does a lot of hard labour as well as more delicate, and less physically strenuous activities. But, if you think a wildlife garden is all about tea in the turtlehead flowers, come learn how wrong you are! Contact Barry at [b.cottam@rogers.com](mailto:b.cottam@rogers.com)

## **Mostly Ds**

Our Friday morning Backyard Garden Group is right for you! This group primarily tends to the beautiful ornamental back yard we maintain behind the Interpretative Centre. However we also have volunteers who do much more strenuous work and choose to come Fridays to enjoy the social nature of break. If interested, contact Isabelle at [isabelle@igs.net](mailto:isabelle@igs.net)



## Activity: Seed Collection!



The BYG is as lovely as ever. We're collecting lots of seed for next year's Plant Sale! Volunteers are hard at work tending plants and moving around what doesn't seem to do as well. For example, we've planted Great Blue Lobelia in different areas to see how it fares in different soil and shade regimes. The dry weather is taking a bit of a toll, but overall the garden is lush and vibrant!

## Nature Notes: In Bloom

Bit of a cheat, but how animals use plants is a focus of activity at FWG. It is a busy time for this little muskrat in the pond. Back and forth she goes, back and forth, busily cutting down the cattail stems from the shore. As well, Christine was tickled to see her working away on the flowering rush (*Butomus*) and ferry large mouthfuls of that to her den too. Flowering rush is not native, nor something we want at our pond - but it is nice to see it having a modicum of use!



## Nature Notes: Bug of the Month



These pretty, bright red long-horned beetles (Cerambycidae) are common on milkweed right now. *Tetraopes tetraophthalmus* finds as much joy from our restoration efforts as our target Monarchs!

## Nature Notes: Bird of the Month



A gorgeous photo of a very busy young downy woodpecker (*Picooides pubescens*). Barry says this one was working the sumacs by the pond for quite a long time, allowing some close photos.

B. Cottam

## Knowledge Note: An Orderly Mess

Walking in a residential neighbourhood and garden watching can be fascinating - the folks who prefer the manicured lawns, those who go for the naturalized look and then those, well, who don't do a thing and it shows. While in nature we embrace the seeming random assemblage of plants, for some reason, with the human species this doesn't translate into our living environments. Posits are many and varied: we like evidence of control as this reduces fear; we like control as it shows our ownership of a space; we like the cleanliness as it shows a degree of respect for social norms; we like the organized landscape as it represents the savannah where we initially evolved and dodged lions. Well, varied ideas to a fashion, but essentially linked by the notion that we like order because it represents an intervention and care by us.

Nature, however, is not orderly. We encourage naturalization of lawns for pollinators (habitat and food sources), but this esthetic doesn't always appeal to our neighbours. Research points to a solution: provide visual cues that show a human is caring for a space, aptly named "Cues to Care" by investigators at the University of Michigan. Mowing a border around your yard, or using only 3/4 of the space for the wild look, the key action is demonstrating that your mess is intentional. Or, make a border of stones to create a textured look. Toss in a butterfly ornament or two to reinforce the message, and perhaps even a birdbath. Messy chic can be made appealing to the general public!

