

Bringing Autumn's Bounty to Your Yard Will be Appreciated

By Eric Buehl
Habitat Coordinator

Soon, the buzzing sound of flies and mosquitoes will be replaced by the crunching of the leaves beneath our feet. We'll be enjoying cool nights, clear skies, and a crispness in the air we haven't seen in months. All these changes are signs that fall is on its way, bringing welcome relief from the oppressive heat and humidity of summer's stifling grasp.

Not only is the change from summer to fall a welcome time for many of us, it's an easy one to prepare for. All we have to do is turn off the air conditioner, pull out a jacket or sweater from the closet, and drop the storm windows on those cooler nights.

Other than that, we don't make too many changes to our normal routine as fall slowly descends on Delmarva. We still go to the same grocery store and can even find much of the same produce that the summer season had to offer, although we may have to pay a few cents more.

Sure, many of the restaurants and our favorite summer haunts have moved the tables off the sidewalks and patios, and most outdoor pools have closed for the season, but that's not much of an inconvenience for us. We'll just sit inside and make due until next

spring. It's not that way for many of the animals that call this area their home though.



BUEHL

Have you ever wondered how the change from summer to fall affects many of the animals that migrate through or live our area?

Questions like: What do they eat? Where do they go? Do they survive the winter here or do they lay eggs and die?

As we move from summer to fall, think about all the wildflowers in bloom, and trees producing fruit and nuts this time of year.

Ever notice that many larger animals give birth to their young early in the year? Is this a coincidence or a matter of timing and survival? For many, it's the latter of the two.

By now, many animals born in later winter and early spring are weaned from their mothers or don't depend on their parents for food. This allows the parents to begin bulking up for the winter ahead. Unlike us, they can't run to the store, throw on an extra jacket, or crank up the thermostat in the den.

The "last hurrah" of many wildflowers gives bees, butter-

flies, and other winged insects that last shot of nectar for migration, laying eggs, or preparing to overwinter. And the fruits and nuts produced by many shrubs and trees will provide a source of food that will have to last an entire winter season for birds, squirrels, and numerous other animals, large and small.

As forests and open space in the Inland Bays watershed diminishes, animals are pushed into smaller and smaller areas, and are forced to compete for less and less food. Unfortunately, this means that slower or injured animals, or late arrivals, are going to go hungry. And during a long, cold winter in nature, hunger can often lead to illness or death.

Even though it would be difficult to replace the lost forests and meadows, there are things we can do in our gardens, yards, and landscaped areas to help smaller animals have a greater chance of making it through winter.

As I mentioned earlier, there are numerous plants (grasses, flowers, shrubs, and trees) that produce seeds, fruits, berries, nuts, and nectar towards the end of summer. For example, *rather than use an exotic ornamental flower that will wilt and die after the first frost, why not plant a bed of Blackeyed Susan or Cutleaf (Green-headed) Coneflower;*



A Spicebush Swallowtail (*Papilio troilus*) taking in much-needed nectar from the autumn blooms of native Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*).

which will produce both nectar and seed, and bloom during the critical summer/fall period.

Or rather than plant a non-native tree simply for its unusual shape or color, *why not pick a native tree that provides the beauty of early spring blossoms and berries later in the year.* The Flowering Dogwood is one such choice, and the Black Gum is another native seed producer that is also unrivaled for its brilliant fall color. *Don't forget about all the birds and small mammals that utilize native oaks and hickories. Not only do these majestic trees produce incredible amounts of food and shelter; they also pro-*

vide endless hours of bird and animal watching as they gather to feed.

In this article, we've included an *Action Box* that lists a variety of native plants to consider as you plan your garden and landscaping alternatives. As you think about what you'd like to plant, give consideration to color, shape, and all the aesthetic qualities you like in certain plants. Then, to balance things out, throw in a few natives that produce food and shelter to help nature's creatures make it through the winter.

They'll appreciate it and so will you.

Katrina

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spared the city of Mobile, where wind was estimated to be only 60 knots, but the beachfront property of Gulf Shores and Orange Beach were devastated.

One year later, it has happened yet again!

By now, we are all quite familiar with Katrina, but we may not recognize one similarity that she shared with the hurricanes of 2004.

Katrina, Charley, Ivan and

Frances all made landfall in "estuaries of national significance," each the location of a National Estuary Program(s) (NEP).

Charley impacted the Charlotte Harbor NEP, the Tampa Bay NEP, and the Sarasota Bay NEP; Frances plagued the Indian River Lagoon NEP and the Tampa Bay NEP; Ivan wrought its terrible destruction in the Mobile Bay NEP area; and finally, Katrina's catastrophic winds and water destroyed many areas in the Barataria-Terrebonne NEP.

These storms are cautionary tales for all of us who live and work in the Inland Bays water-

shed, another "estuary of national significance;" with costly lessons about our compromises with Mother Nature.

Wetlands are among our most productive lands, providing countless services; unparalleled filtration systems for cleansing our ground water, sponges to mop up excess rain, and, in the wake of the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, a reminder that there is no better shock absorber against the fury of wind and tide than vegetated dunes and tidal wetlands. Let us all work together to protect those resources that ultimately protect and provide for us.

Desirable Native Plants for the Home and Garden

Many of these plants are recommended since they produce nectar and fruit during the late summer and early fall. Additionally, some provide shelter and food into the winter as well.

Trees

- Flowering Dogwood
- American Holly
- Native Oaks (Red, Black, Chestnut, Post, Willow, Pin, or White)
- Native Hickories (Bitternut, Pignut, or Shagbark)
- Native Ashes (Green or White)
- Black Gum
- Persimmon
- American Beech
- Eastern Red Cedar

Shrubs


- Native Sumac (Smooth or Staghorn)
- High-bush Blueberry
- Downy Serviceberry (aka Shadbush)
- Buttonbush
- Sweet Pepperbush
- Native Hawthorns
- Native Plums (Beach or American)
- Northern Bayberry or Wax Myrtle

Flowers

- Cardinal Flower
- Blackeyed Susan
- New York Ironweed
- Cutleaf Coneflower (aka Green-headed Coneflower)
- Joe-Pye-Weed
- Native Milkweed (Swamp or Butterfly)
- New England Aster
- Black Bugbane (aka Black Cohosh)
- Blue Vervain

Grasses

- Big Bluestem
- Little Bluestem
- Indian Grass
- Coastal Panic Grass (aka Switchgrass)




Re-engineering Suburbia: Restoration and Refuges

Speakers Include:
John Peter Thompson
Former Governor Russell Peterson
Nick DiPasquale
Dr. Tom Evans
Dr. Doug Tallamy
and many more . . .

October 28, 2005
University of Delaware - Townsend Hall
Newark, Delaware

Tentative Agenda
8:30 to 12:00 Presentations and Speakers
12:00 to 1:00 Lunch
1:00 to 2:00 Agriculture and Wildlife Habitats
2:00 to 2:30 Business Meeting



SEATING IS LIMITED AND BY ADVANCED PURCHASE ONLY
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