

HOTWGPS Newsletter

Volume 12 issue 8

August 2020



HOTWGPS Events

Our August meeting will be on the 18th at 6:30 PM. As of this writing, it looks like we will be having another virtual meeting.

For those of you who missed last month's meeting for whatever reason missed a great one!! The ZOOM format is not hard to work with – just plan ahead and if you don't have it on your computer already, go to zoom.com and download it. It is free!

Once you have it on your computer, follow the tutorials to learn how to use it. We want to see you so be sure to turn video on! Hope this will get you “in the know” in case you were “afraid” to try it.



Humility is not thinking less of yourself - it's thinking of yourself less.

— C.S. Lewis



Pond Vac

As a reminder, this is a “Members Only” benefit. You can rent this super-duper pond cleaning machine very reasonably! John Enders is the “official pond Vac keeper”. Call him 254-848-9596 or send him an email at jnenders@aol.com to schedule your time with the machine. One note of caution when using the pond Vac, watch how much water you are removing from your pond!! It works so well sucking up the “yuk” that one can easily forget how much water is also being removed! That is the voice of experience talking!!

This from the Native Plant Society of Texas
July Newsletter



Ten tips for creating a home wildscape

Posted on [July 20, 2020](#) by [Lauren Simpson](#)

After severe drought killed much of our traditional landscaping, my family decided to adopt new landscaping that would support local wildlife. This kind of gardening is sometimes called “wildscaping,” which is simply landscaping with the primary purpose of supporting wildlife. The thing is, I didn't know anything about wildscaping or even about gardening! But I found mentors in various local groups, like the Houston Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas; I read voraciously; and I experimented in the gardens, learning as much from my mistakes as from my successes. Now, six years later, our home gardens have welcomed 50 species of butterfly and around 30 species each of bee and wasp, among many other insects. And because insects provide many important eco-services, our local eco-system also benefits from their abundance in our gardens.

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I wanted to share ten helpful things I've learned on my wildscaping journey, for those looking to start their own home wildscape:

Use native plants.

The most important rule of thumb is to incorporate plants that are native to your eco-region as much as possible. There are many reasons for this, but one of the most important is that insects often cannot consume plants with which they have not co-evolved because they cannot digest the chemicals in the leaf or pollen. Moreover, if an aggressive native plant gets out of your garden, it doesn't matter because it has been part of the local eco-system for millennia. In contrast, if a non-native, invasive species that nothing here eats gets out, it will have an advantage over our native plants, crowding them out and leaving less food for our native insects. Always lean toward using native plants and if you incorporate non-native plants, first ensure that they are not invasive.



Don't use pesticides. Pesticides are equal-opportunity killers. They might kill those insects eating your plants, but they will also kill many other insects, including those that

would keep pests in check naturally. In a healthy garden, predators and parasitoids, many of which are insects themselves, will take care of the pests in our gardens.

Plant in clusters of species. The more you plant clusters of individual plant species, the more intentional your garden will look. A good rule of thumb is that you want to plant clusters of odd numbers of a single plant: three, five, seven. You can have multiple clusters of the same species in different parts of the garden. Not only does clustering serve an aesthetic purpose, giving the eye a place to rest and looking intentional, but it also serves a biological function. For example, some insects (especially bees) practice "flower constancy," where they like to feed on the nectar and pollen of a single plant species before moving on to another. If you give them a big cluster of a single plant species, you make their life easier. The same goes for pollen and leaf specialist insects, who can digest the leaf or pollen of only those plants in a particular family, genus, or species. By clustering some of your plants in the garden, you might be helping them find the food sources they need more easily.

Plant a variety of colors, shapes, and sizes. Variety is the spice of life, including for insects! This takes several forms. First, you want to ensure that you have something blooming in the garden during all seasons, so that critters can feed throughout the year. When you select plants, consider their bloom time. Second, you want flowers of different colors. Insects do not see colors the same way as each other or as humans do. For example, bees have a hard time distinguishing red from green, but they can see yellow, white, and purple particularly

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well. Likewise, hummingbirds and butterflies are particularly drawn to reds. Having an assortment of colors in your garden supports more insects. Third, you want a variety of flower shapes and sizes. Insects have a wide range of mouthpart shapes and sizes, and their bodies are bigger or smaller, relative to each other. The more shapes and sizes of flowers you have, the wider variety of insects you will invite.

Plant for the babies.

When we think of pollinators, we often think of the adults and what they need to survive, for example, adult butterflies and the nectar sources they need. But insects may eat very different things in their larval stages. Make sure to incorporate plants that feed the larvae, not just the adults. To support a robust butterfly population, you need not just nectar plants, but also plants with leaves the caterpillars can eat (host plants).

Aim for density.

You want to think about how the plant will eventually fill the space. Density without overcrowding is a good thing, just as plants grow in the wild. Dense plantings suppress the growth of weeds underneath and this means less time spent weeding.

Put plants with similar needs together.

Make sure that you plant things that have similar needs in the same area. In thinking about the needs of plants, consider sun, water, and soil. You don't want to put a plant that wants lots of water beside a plant that doesn't.



Think about plant height.

You also want to think about how tall any plant you install might ultimately become. Put those tall “structural” plants in strategic areas, with medium and low plants around them, to make your garden look intentional. “Layering” plants like this will also help support wildlife, which may use different plant layers for shelter, nesting, etc.

Use borders.

To make your garden look more intentional, border your garden beds distinctly. Doing this shows deliberate design, which can help the community accept your wildscape.

Embrace imperfection.

Doing less in a wildscape can actually benefit wildlife. For example, do not cut back stems over winter. Some native bee and wasp species nest in pithy or hollow stems, so that if we cut and compost dead stems, we might be throwing out their larvae. Leave the leaves that fall on the ground, or collect them and use them in place of mulch, because some wildlife will overwinter under them, and insects' pupae

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might still be attached to them. For the same reasons, don't shred these leaves, wherever they are placed. And also avoid mowing over early spring wildflowers because these may be the only food source available to insects coming out of diapause (like hibernation).



From the Pond Guy 8/1/20

My water turned brown last year. How do I stop it from happening again?

ASKED BY: Nick of Charlestown, WV

A: There's only one thing worse than green water—and that's brown water. In some ponds or water features, the end of summer or beginning of fall brings with it this discolored water. It's caused by one of two reasons:

Debris Tea:

When leaves or pine needles fall into your pond, the tannins in them create a type of all-natural debris tea, which turns the clean and clear water in your backyard feature a shade of brown. This is the most common cause of tea-colored water.

Sediment Stew:

If you have a lot of floating particulates or sediment in your pond, playful fish, wind or some other action can sometimes disrupt it, mixing it into your water column via your pump or aeration system.

To determine what's causing the brown water, grab a glass jar from your kitchen, dunk it in your pond and fill it with the

water. Let it sit for 24 hours and take a close look at the results. Is the water still tea-colored? Then you have tannin-colored debris tea. Do you see sediment settled at the bottom of the glass? Then you have some sediment stew.

Once you pinpoint what's causing the brown water, here's how to treat the problem.

Clean It Up:

Because both causes start with an abundance of organics in the water, your first course of action is to clean the bottom of your pond to remove any muck, leaves and remaining debris with a **pond vacuum** or **skimmer net**.

Water Change:

Next, do a partial (10 to 25 percent) water change, which will freshen things up and clear the water. Don't forget to add a **water conditioner** to treat the water for your finned pals.

Add Beneficial Bacteria:

If you have sediment stew, add some **Nature's Defense**® (if water temps are above 50°F) or **Seasonal Defense**® (if water temps are below 50°F). The beneficial bacteria will digest any accumulated organic debris and eliminate the brown water.

Use Activated Carbon:

If you have debris tea, toss a media bag filled with **Activated Carbon** into your pond. The carbon will absorb the tannins, leaving behind clear water.

To prevent the discoloration from happening again, keep the organics out of the pond. Clean up the muck regularly with a skimmer net or vacuum, and when the leaves or pine

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needles start falling, cover the water with pond netting, like the **The Pond Guy® PondShelter™** or **Premium Pond Netting**.



Old Man Selling Watermelons ...

At the watermelon stand, the price list read:
1 for \$3, 3 for \$10.

A young man stopped by and asked to buy one watermelon.

"That'll be 3 dollars," said the old man who owned the stand.

The young man then buys another one, and one more, paying \$3 for each.

As the young man walked away, he turned around and grinned. "Hey old man, do you realize that I just bought 3 watermelons for \$9. Maybe business is not your thing."

The old man smiled and mumbled to himself, "I sold him 3 watermelons when he only wanted one and he thinks I'm the one who needs business lessons."



Points to ponder

"Being tolerant does not mean that I share another one's belief. But it does mean that I acknowledge another one's right to believe, and obey, his conscience." *Viktor Frankl*

"To know what is right and not do it is the worst cowardice." *Confucius*

"The content of your character is your choice. Day by day, what you choose, what you think, and what you do is who you become." *Heraclitus*

"It is morally as bad not to care whether a thing is true or not so long as it makes you

feel good, as it is not to care how you got your money as long as you have it." *Edwin Wtry Teale*

"If we were all to be judged by our thoughts, the hills would be swarming with outlaws." *Johann Sigurjonsson*

"Reputation is character minus what you've been caught doing." *Michael Lapoce*

"A socialist is somebody who doesn't have anything, and is ready to divide it up equally among everybody."

George Bernard Shaw



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