

# Home/Garden

## Wildflower gardening can be a beautiful experience

**W**ith so many of us living in cities, towns and suburbs, our gardens become more cultivated and more spectacular as devoted gardeners look for more improved flowers with bigger flowers made of more petals and more ruffles in rainbows of brilliant color. Yet with all this gorgeous bloom, we find our breath is taken away by tender, unassuming flowers growing secretly in a wild garden.

Apparently Henry W. Art, chairman of the Biology Department at Williams College, found he had just whetted peoples' appetites last year when he published *A Garden of Wildflowers* (Garden Way Publishing, \$12.95), because he is back again with *The Wildflower Gardener's Guide* (Garden Way Publishing, \$9.95).

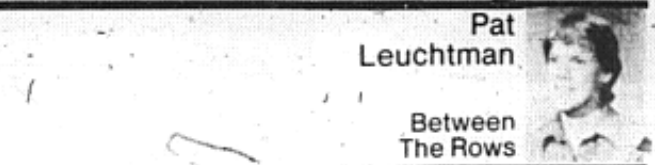
If you think you are so jaded that wildflowers hold no charm for you, Art tempts you with 16 pages of color photographs of flowers that thrive in sunny meadows, shady woods and wetlands. Then he tells you how you can cultivate your own wild garden, where to buy wildflowers and how to propagate your own once you have established plants.

That there is an interest in wildflower gardening is attested to by the proliferation of wildflower seed mixtures that promise to turn an ordinary field into a colorful and everblooming meadow. I don't know of anyone who has had much success sowing all those seeds in an overgrown field, and I'm exhausted by the advice to use herbicides and till a field to start your meadow.

**Another tactic**

Art suggests another tactic. He recommends tilling small, random sections of field, keeping them mowed and then transplanting young plants at the proper time. But that's jumping into the middle of a book or organized along logical lines.

The first half of *The Wildflower Gardener's Guide* is given over to general information about different



Pat Leuchtman  
Between The Rows



wildflower habitats, conservation guidelines, and botanical information about plants and their parts. Art goes on to discuss what conditions wildflowers require and the different methods for propagating your stock. His directions are clear and complete; his enthusiasm is engaging and infectious.

The second half of the book is devoted to specific information about 32 or so individual flowers. A clear botanical drawing is provided along with a description, culture requirements, propagation methods and

some suggestions of other wildflowers that might be planted nearby giving you a varied and congenial grouping.

Even in a suburban yard you can find a corner that could be allowed a touch of wildness so you could enjoy the sturdy delicacy of a wildflower. Sharp-lobed hepaticas, pale and low, only three to six inches tall are shy, bloodroot is more spectacular and trillium with its showy three petalled flowers all have the same requirements and bloom early in the spring.

I like all the odd information Art

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gives along the way, about the many times a Jack in the pulpit changes its sex over its life, and the secret way a bumblebee finds the heart of the closed gentian. And I'm charmed and fascinated by how completely he names these wildflowers.

**Wildflower names**

Common names can be a curse because often you aren't sure if two people are talking about the same plant. At the same time common names are fascinating because they show how different attributes have caught a community's attention. It is not hard to understand that the purple trillium is also called the red trillium, but why wake robin? Does it appear at the same time as the earliest robins? And why stinking Benjamin? I have never noticed any bad smell.

There is a wetland surrounding my pond and a good colony of marsh marigolds. Recently I have planted some white iris and some blue flags around the edge of the pond. After reading this book I am eager to add turtlehead, which is about one to three feet tall with white flowers in the summer, and cardinal flower, which is about the same height with spikes of red flowers in late summer and early fall. The closed or bottle gentian, famous for its intense blue color, blooms at the same time as turtlehead and cardinal flower.

Art makes it easy for gardeners who might be inspired by his book by providing an appendix of suppliers. The first rule wildflower gardeners

learn is not to dig up plants in the wild and to use suppliers who propagate their own plants. He also gives a list of botanical gardens that have natural areas devoted to native plants and native plant societies.

As the mass media and communication make our nation a smaller neighborhood all the time, there is a desire to keep those regional differences in cuisine, custom, outlook and language that add a little spice. Cultivating even a few wildflowers in our gardens is a way to beautify our yard while we help preserve our regional heritage.

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