



The Vine Line

September 9, 2014

Dear Vine Liner,

I hope you will enjoy the 5th installment of our Vine Line newsletter. As promised, our goal is to offer a variety of topics and Vine Line #5 does just that.

Please let me know your impressions and recommendations for future topics. I welcome these responses and look forward to hearing from you.

Fall is one of the best times of the year to visit the Garden. The colors, smells, and light patterns, especially late in the afternoon make this a very special place and offers you an experience that is hard to duplicate.

Thanks for your interest in the Garden and for being one of our Vine Liners.

Jim

Composting in your Back Yard

Going back a generation or two, most gardeners made compost. I really don't remember anyone making a "Big Deal" about doing it. Composting is simply the process of natural decomposition of organic matter so that it can be returned to the soil. If you go into a wooded area in late November, the soil is carpeted by a thick layer of fallen leaves. By spring, most of them have broken down or decomposed, being carried into the soil by earthworms, with the help of bacteria and fungi, renewing and returning nutrients to the soil.

When you plant and tend a garden, you are always pruning, weeding, and mowing...so, you are accumulating organic matter that you need to deal with. Instead of it going to the curb to be put in the landfill, it is a simple matter to find an out-of-the-way corner on your property to make one or more compost piles. A simple 3-sided bottomless box made of pallets works well. Just pile the materials in the space as you collect them. To really make the compost decompose quickly, you can run a lawn mower over coarse materials such as oak leaves, to make the particles smaller. The best plan is to alternate layers of green materials, such as fresh lawn clippings, vegetable

peelings, and similar items, with dry materials such as fallen leaves. Each layer should be at least 6 inches thick. If you have access to fresh manure to mix into the compost pile, decomposition will occur even more quickly. If you have enough material to make the pile three to four feet across and about the same depth, and you have alternated the layers of fresh and dried material, the pile should “heat up” and you will see steam emerging from the pile. After a few days, turn the pile with a pitch fork so the less decomposed material on the outside of the pile is mixed with what is broken down at its center. When the pile is cool to the touch and the texture of the ingredients resembles crumbly mulch, it is ready to use. This process can take anywhere from several weeks to a year, depending on what materials you used and how you handled them.

Compost can be incorporated as a soil amendment in planting new beds. As a top dressing around trees, shrubs, and perennials, or, if you have an abundance, as a mulch. Further, you are recycling nutrients in your corner of the world, instead of filling a city garbage dump.

Finally, here are a few things to not put in your compost: Weeds that have gone to seed, meat products or grease (these will attract rodents), manure from animals that eat meat (such as dogs or cats). Manure from chickens, rabbits, cattle, horses, sheep and goats are all fine because they eat plants and grain. If you do nothing more than pile your fallen leaves and lawn clippings in a back corner of your property and let them decompose on their own, you are at least doing more for the planet than those who don't.

By Rick Pudwell, Director of Horticulture

Nick's Corner



The Japanese Festival held at the Memphis Botanic Garden is and has been a special event dating back into the 1980's. This year's festival will be held on September 13th and will feature demonstrations on tea ceremony, origami, bonsai, stones arrangement, and the always-impressing Kaminari Taiko drummers. But the most important aspect of the festival, at least in this gardener's opinion, is showcasing Seijaku-en, the Japanese Garden of Tranquility, here at MBG.

Our garden was established in 1965 through the support of the Bamboo Chapter of Ikebana International and was originally designed by Dr. Takuma Tono, of Tokyo, Japan. During the late 80's, the garden underwent a massive overhaul led by local landscape architect Ritchie Smith, with consultation by Dr. Koichi Kawana, a renowned garden designer whose resume includes several Japanese gardens within public institutions, such as Missouri Botanic Garden, Chicago Botanic Garden, and Denver Botanic Garden.



In preparation for the festival, I have been spending much of my time in Seijaku-en, working on a variety of projects, mostly weeding, to make the garden look great for our visitors during this special time. Now, as I'm sure you know, your thoughts can go just about anywhere and everywhere while doing something as monotonous as weeding, especially when you have close to 5 acres to manage. But, if you can concentrate and focus your thoughts during these tedious times, you can come away with some really great ideas and reflections.

During a recent bout with some unwanted greenery, I started thinking about the gardens I experienced while I was in Japan. I say "experienced" because that's exactly what it was; it was not just something to look at and admire. I started pondering about what the creators of these gardens were thinking to make them such powerful sources of contemplation. It was then that I had what an old design professor of mine liked to call an "a-ha moment." It wasn't necessarily the design of the space, but rather the attention to detail and the care of the design that made it such a special work of art. These gardens are meticulously maintained in every facet imaginable. Moss is watered and swept twice daily: gravel is raked at least weekly if not more: there are no weeds to be found, and if you see a plant you think is a weed, it is really part of the scene.

While learning and working in Japanese gardening, I often hear from people that Japanese

gardens require a lower level of maintenance. The misconception here is that, since the design is simple and subdued, there is not much work to be done to keep it looking good. This is far from the truth. Japanese gardens, as well as all other gardens, take an excessive amount of work to make them look great.

Gardens are metaphors of the universe; it is both infinitely big and infinitely small, all at the same time. It ranges from galaxial garden beds full of life down to microscopic micorrhiza fungi symbiotically supporting its plant host. It is at the gardener's discretion to what level of detail the garden is to be presented. So what does all this cosmic mumbo jumbo mean? Work in the garden is never complete; it can only come infinitely close to competition.

By Nick Esthus, Japanese and Asian Garden Curator

Fall is Coming

Fall is fast approaching, bringing with it cooler temperatures, lower humidity, and an intensity and richness of color unmatched by the ephemeral spring show. I enjoy most the interplay of blooming annuals and perennials with the changing of the leaves, the ripening grasses, and the slanting, soft light, and I tend to choose plants and colors that are enhanced by or capture the light in enchanting ways.



Some of my favorite native plants for fall blooms are asters, goldenrods, Joe-Pye weed, coneflowers, (which need to be cut back after the early summer bloom in order to rebloom) and the various autumn sages, all of which bloom reliably beginning in mid-to-late September and continue until the first frost.

The Ever-Present Mulberry Weed

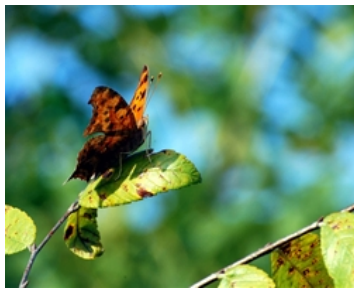


The topic most on my mind today is weeds. They are never ending, appearing year-round in cycles. Some weeds are wildflowers, while some that you call weeds are herbs. There are a few plants that, no matter where they are, are weeds: uninvited and unwanted.

One of these unwanted, uninvited plants is mulberry weed. Do you have it? We sure do! It is everywhere...especially virulent in the herb garden. It is so bad, I don't even compost this hateful weed anymore- I put them in garbage bags, seal the bags and place them into the garbage where it will be taken to a sealed landfill. Hopefully we can at least slow the cycle, if not stop it. After all, this lovely plant begins flowering and setting seed when it is only 2 inches tall – and it can grow to 4 feet tall, so



These are all tough plants, enduring heat and drought to produce spectacular displays, especially in combination with native trees and shrubs such as serviceberries, chokeberries, winterberry hollies, and fothergillas, which offer excellent fall color, winter berries, or both. Add in some ornamental grasses -I particularly like Panicum 'Shenandoah' for its small stature and ruby/wine foliage- add a few late-sown zinnias, a couple of flats of pansies, maybe a few potted mums if you're so inclined, and Voila!



In addition to producing a long-lasting show, these plants are visited by hummingbirds, butterflies, and many species of birds, providing what Doug Tallamy calls "ecosystem services." As if this wasn't enough, these plants require only average soils and minimal maintenance to strut their stuff year after year.

By Chris Cosby, Senior Manager of Gardens

that it is almost shrub-like...ick.



Mulberry weed

Botanical Name: *Fatoua villosa* (Thunb.)

Family: Moraceae

Genus: *Fatoua*

Species: *villosa*

Category: annual

Height: 3-4 ft.

Width: 1 ft.

Light Requirement: any

Moisture Requirements: none

Soil requirements: average

Color: white to lavender

Time of Bloom: mid-summer

Other Information: Introduced from China, mulberry weed first appeared on the North American continent in Louisiana in the 1940's. It takes its name from its resemblance to white mulberry seedlings. It is regarded as invasive in many states. It seems to have no medicinal or culinary application, which puts the lie to the canard that a plant that is widespread must have many uses. It is an unscheduled plant (aka WEED) in all areas of the herb garden, in spite of repeated attempts at eradication by staff and volunteers.

Other names: hairy crabweed

Source: The University of Michigan

By Sherri McCalla, Herb Garden Curator, and John Petersen, Herb Garden Volunteer