



Pine Tree State Arboretum

....to promote the knowledge and appreciation of Maine's trees and other flora for people of all ages by offering educational, recreational, and inspirational opportunities.

October 2009 —Volume 20 Number 3

Printed on recycled Paper

A Busy Autumn by: Stephen Oliveri

The Arboretum was pretty quiet for most of the summer, but kicked off the autumn with a big bash on September 23. That evening the Arboretum was the setting for the Kennebec Valley Chamber of Commerce's "Business After Hours" event. Each month the KV Chamber holds this event at the place of business of one of its 650 members and the Arboretum's Board of Directors had been planning for many months to showcase the Arboretum and make this a successful event. The Arboretum invited the Augusta Rotary Club to co-host the event and the partnership worked extremely well. By splitting the duties and the costs, the combined organizations were able to put on an evening that neither of us could have carried off nearly do well on our own.

The event began with a guided tour of the Native Plant Collection and Hosta Garden led by Board Members Hillary Schultz and Bernie Slofer while executive Director Steve Oliveri provided guided tours of the Viles Visitors Center. A string quartet from the Augusta Symphony played beautiful background music and Sonya and John Skoog from BayWrap provided a delicious array of hors d'oeuvres and beverages. Board president Dean Corner welcomed the attendees, as did KV



Business After Hours Event

Chamber director Peter Thompson and Rotary Club president Dan Nichols. It was a warm evening so many guests were able to enjoy their food outside and still hear the music with the doors and windows wide open. Over the course of the evening, some 85 guests representing many Augusta area businesses and organizations experienced the beauty and hospitality of the Arboretum.

On Oct. 3rd, the rain kept some members away, but those who braved the weather enjoyed a tour of some of the Arboretum collections as well as some good food at our membership event and annual meeting. The business portion of the meeting was brief, with the main order of business being to elect Mike Smith to the Board of Directors for his first term and to re-elect Jerry Nault and Dean corner to their second three year terms.

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Special points of interest:

- *Annual Appeal Underway*
- *Super Sunday Table Tour VI tickets on sale now! This event will take place on February 7, 2010. A limited number of tickets are available. Tickets sold out before the event last year. Call Toni or Steve @ 621-0031 or e-mail ptsaedu@roadrunner.com.*

Board and Staff Changes by: Stephen Oliveri

Mike Smith was elected to the Arboretum's Board of Directors at the Annual Meeting on October 3. Mike has been an avid visitor to and supporter of the Arboretum for about 10 years, with a special interest in the birds that occur here and their habitats. Welcome aboard, Mike.

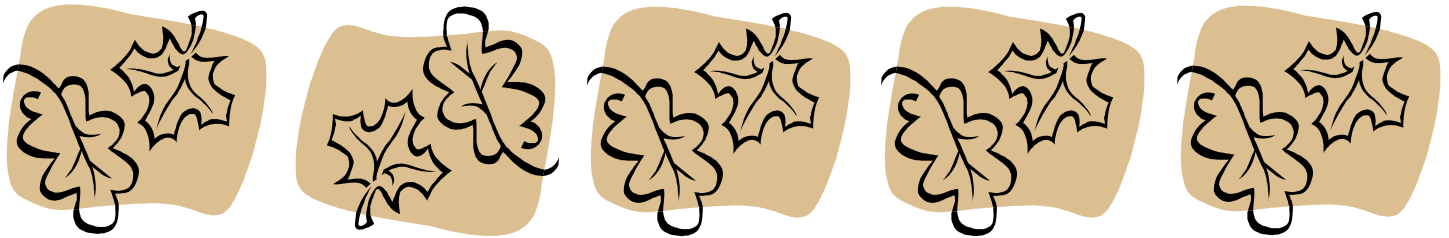
Re-elected to the Board for a second three-year term at that same October meeting were Dean Corner and Jerry Nault. Dean is currently serving as president of the Board and Jerry as treasurer.

Susan Cottle stepped down from the Board after serving for five years. Susan was instrumental in a number of initiatives during her tenure on the Board, especially the Arboretum's new strategic plan. In addition to her tireless work on many committees, she served as vice president and president of the Board. Her energy and enthu-

siasm will be missed.

There are currently 10 vacancies on the Board. If any member is interested in serving, contact Steve Oliveri at 621-0031, or just talk to any of the current Board members listed on the back page of the newsletter.

Laura Minich will take over as the new Project Canopy Outreach Coordinator. Laura will fill the position recently vacated by Loretta Huttman. Laura comes to the Arboretum after working as a biologist for Maine Audubon and serving as the acting executive director of The Nature Trust of New Brunswick. In her new position at the Arboretum, Laura will focus on fundraising to protect and promote trees in Maine's communities, including street trees, parks, and community forests. Project Canopy is a cooperative program administered jointly by the Arboretum and the Maine Forest Service.



It All Averages Out by: Stephen Oliveri

June and July were two of the wettest summer months we have ever had. Some trail sections stayed wet most of the summer and fields that are usually dry by mid-May stayed wet well into August. Arboretum hay fields were not cut until after the breeding season for field-nesting birds, which was the case throughout much of the state. But I do wonder if the wet weather had some bad effects on the size and survival of our feathered neighbors that might tend to cancel out any gains from the late mowing.

The cool wet weather provided ideal conditions for fungal diseases. Home gardens were hit hard. Although there were localized outbreaks of disease on trees and shrubs, the Arboretum came through the wet summer in pretty good shape with no obvious ill effects. As I write this in early October, it looks to be a pretty good year for fall color and I expect it will last a little longer than usual as well.

A dry September tried to make up for the wet summer and largely succeeded. Visitors to the Arboretum stayed

away in droves during the summer, but the numbers picked up substantially since Labor Day. If the snowfall pattern of the last two winters repeats itself, February will once again be our busiest month of the year for trail users.

It was not too many years ago that we experienced an opposite weather pattern with heat and dry weather coming early in May and lasting until September. As I recall, that weather pattern persisted for a couple of years shortly after the ice storm of 1998, placing added stress on injured trees and frustrating a lot of replanting efforts. Given these two extremes, I'll take 2009 over a hot dry summer with no rain at all, though I'd prefer a more "average" type of year.

The story of these weather patterns are captured in the growth rings of trees. Years from now, some sharp eyed observer will contrast and compare growth rings and draw conclusions about the weather over the past decade, long after you and I have forgotten all about the wet summer of 2009.

What About Lettuce? by: Mary Oatway



What should I do with a thirteen foot lettuce plant towering above the black-eyed Susans and other wildflowers that show their colors in my backyard? Gaze at it in awe, study it, and share its presence with others, are what I have been doing since its discovery!

This lettuce is wild lettuce, *lactuca canadensis*, a biennial, native to North America. The first

year's growth, a basal rosette, never did show itself. This year's growth, a surprising, tall, smooth stalk, bears lower leaves that are ten to twelve inches in length, and deeply lobed, with irregular, sharp-toothed edges. Other leaves, which vary in size and shape, grow alternately up the stalk to where the flowering top begins.

From July to September, this plant has been crowned with a blooming succession of tiny yellow flower heads in long branching clusters. Each flower head, about one-fourth inch across has turned light purple as it aged. They are now in the fruit-building stage. The seeds will become ripe in October, with parachutes to aid their dispersal.

Flower field guides offer very little information on wild lettuce, only a few sentences mentioning color, leaves, height and habitat. They are inconsistent. Two guides say the plant grows 3-10'. They all do agree that the leaves are very variable in shape and size, and their habitat is clearings, thickets, roadsides and edges of the woods.

Lactuca canadensis is not the only wild lettuce. With it, several others are listed in Volume I of *Wildflowers of the United States*. They are: *L. serriola*, *L. ludoviciana*, *L. floridana*, and *L. pulchella*. What does this big book say about them? They "are unlovely weeds and merit only brief notice in this work." *Lac*, in the botanical name, is the Latin word for "milk" and refers to the white, milky juice that exudes when the leaves or stem are cut or bruised.

Which one of these "unlovely weeds" is the progenitor of the lettuce that we eat today? Jonathan Roberts, in the

book, *The Origins of Fruits and Vegetables*, explains it like this, "Trying to sort out which is the ancestor of which is not easy. The best guess is that a fifth, probably extinct species hybridized with *serriola* to make *sativa* or vice versa, or that *sativa* and *serriola* were part of the same hybrid population that diverged at an early date: the one being selected for human cultivation, the other adapting to waste ground niches created by man...It is thought that the earliest lettuces may well have been brought into cultivation occurring as weeds in the first crops of wheat and barley that were grown in the valleys of the Nile, Tigris and Euphrates. They were probably first tolerated and then deliberately planted.

"Lettuce is one of our oldest vegetables. Egyptians were first to cultivate it, followed by Greeks. Today, the three basic types of cultivated lettuce, *lactuca sativa*, are, loose leaf lettuce, head lettuce and romaine, with many subdivisions and "one hundred varieties." History says it may have been the Romans who introduced the idea of serving salad before a meal.

As a medicinal herb, lettuce has rated highly in the past. In the book, *Heirloom Gardening*, the author, William Woys Weaver says, "Medieval references to lettuce abound, especially as a medicinal herb. Hildegard Bingen (1098-1179) the famous practitioner of natural medicine, mentioned lettuce in her medical writings. Likewise, lettuce appeared in many of the earliest published herbals." William Woys Weaver also says, "Of all the European vegetables, its history is one of the most colorful".

Now, what am I going to do with my wild lettuce, *lactuca Canadensis*, cousin of the ancestor of our lettuce today, *lactuca sativa*? After consulting the book, *Common Weeds of the United States, Prepared for the United States Department of Agriculture*, I have found that this "unlovely weed" is not a threat to gardeners and the farming industry. So, I am going to keep it. It can live out its second and final year solidly locked to the gravelly shoulder of the antiquated country road where it began life as a leafy rosette a year ago.

It is fading now. The extravagant lower leaves are withering and turning black. Its golden flower crown has turned to brown, where seeds are ripening for another generation. I wonder if any of them will grow a lettuce that can top this thirteen footer!



Schedule of Events

- Oct. 12—**Visitor Center Closed** (Trails are open!)
- Oct. 20—**McGlaughlin Foundation:** Please come hear about the McGlaughlin Foundation and their beautiful gardens, 6:30pm, free.
- Oct. 29—**Maine Author Series:** Dr. Lisa Belisle, "Our Daily Tread". 6:30pm, free.

October 2009







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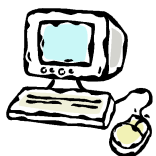


Schedule of Events

- Nov. 11—**Visitor Center Closed** (Trails are Open!)
- Nov. 12—**Maine Author Series:** Tom & LeeAnn Szelog, "By a Maine River—A Year of Looking Closely". 6:30pm, free (This is co-sponsored by the Natural Resources Council of Maine).
- Nov. 14—**Abnaki Ski Sale: Located @ the NEW Cony High School.** New and Used items. Sale is 9am-1pm. Drop off used items to sell on Friday, Nov. 13, 6-9pm (20% commission to benefit local trails and school programs). Call Dave Auclair for more information @ 623-4351.
- Nov. 19—**Kennebec Land Trust:** Please come learn about the KLT, 6:30pm, free.
- Nov. 26 & 27—**Visitor Center Closed** (Trails are Open!)

November 2009

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Please go to www.pinetreestatearboretum.org for more information and the most up-to-date schedule.



Schedule of Events

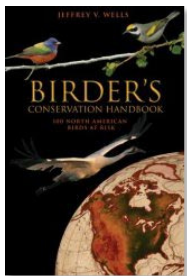
- Dec. 10 - **Maine Author Series:** Greg Marley, “Mushrooms for Health: Medicinal Secrets of Northeastern Fungi”, 6:30pm, free.
- Dec. 25—**Visitor Center Closed** (Trails are Open!)

December 2009

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Maine Author Series at PTSA by: Toni B. Pied

During the months of October, November, and December, the Pine Tree State Arboretum will be hosting a *Maine Author Series*. All programs will start at **6:30pm** in the **Viles Conference Room** and are **free** and **open to the public**.



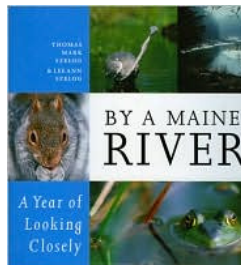
“Birder’s Conservation Handbook”, by Jeff Wells. Jeff will be talking about his book on **October 8th**. This book is a comprehensive guide to North America’s 100 most at risk birds and how to protect them.



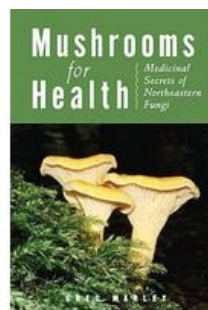
“Our Daily Tread”, by Dr. Lisa Belisle. Lisa will talk about her book on **October 29th**. “Our Daily Tread” was created by Lisa Belisle and

friends in honor of the late Hanley Denning, Dr. Belisle’s classmate at Bowdoin College. Hanley founded the or-

ganization “Safe Passage” to educate children whose families earn their living picking through the trash at the Guatemala City Dump.



“By a Maine River—A Year of Looking Closely”, by Tom & LeeAnn Szelog. This program will take place on **November 12th**. In this book, Tom and LeeAnn document – in Thomas’s photos and in writings by them both – the experience of looking closely at their 70 acres of the Maine woods through the passage of one full year. This program is co-sponsored by the Natural Resources Council of Maine.



“Mushrooms for Health, Medicinal Secrets of Northeastern Fungi”, by Greg Marley. This program will take place on **December 10th**. This book is written for anyone interested in the potential health benefits of medicinal fungi.

Container Gardening by: Joe Scott



Container gardens give a great amount of opportunities to grow special plants, especially when you have a deck or areas in the landscape you wish to have some special accents. In many instances today, people have a condominium or apartment and therefore decks are their only choice for growing beautiful plants.

It is important to have containers at least 15 inches in diameter, and no less than 12 inches. A large container retains moisture longer than a small one and plastic containers hold moisture longer than porous clay or wood. Be sure no matter the container, it has a drainage hole in the bottom.

Successful container gardening requires a soil mix that provides air for the roots to breath, moisture and nutrients, and allows for root and water movement. Prevent weed seeds, insects, diseases and waterlogged soil by avoiding the use of garden soil and instead, use commercially prepared soilless potting mix or compost. All garden centers carry good garden potting mixes for use in containers for sale, the same mix they are using for all of their plantings.

When starting to pot your plants do not fill the bottom of the container with gravel or pieces of broken terra cotta thinking that it will improve drainage. Drainage is a property of the potting mix (air/water relationship) and you cannot encourage water to drain away by adding gravel. Containers have a bottom which interrupts the gravitational flow of the water from the potting mix to the outside. This is why it is so important to have a drainage hole in the bottom of the container. The excess water will run out and your upper soil in the container can breathe. The roots need air to breathe or they become starved for oxygen. So that is why it is so important to have good soil that will satisfy the need of the plants in all ways – air, water, and proper drainage.

It is best that you lightly moisten the soil mix if it is on the dry side before filling the container. Don't pack the mix too tightly when planting and water your containers thoroughly after planting. Once containers are watered the trickiest chore of when to water is dependent on the weather, if containers are in sun or shade, and the type of plants used. Just poke your finger into the soil daily to see if they are still moist enough. On sunny hot days you may have to water daily.

Plants in containers will need to be fertilized on occasion. A water soluble fertilizer can be applied once a week depending on how often the plants are watered. Be sure and follow the directions for the amount of fertilizer to use per gallon of water. Or a slow release fertilizer can be used called osmocote. This is made up of small pellets that dissolve slowly and supply fertilizer for several weeks.

Don't hesitate to prune back plants when branches are too long and gangly. Cut the stems back to a pair of leaves and in turn shaping the plant. Plants will send out new growth becoming fuller and at the same time produce more blossoms.

There are many flowering plants and vegetables that can be grown very well in containers. I have grown tomatoes in containers for many years and found them to do very well. Plant one tomato plant in the center of at least a 15 inch diameter container and place the container in as much sun as possible. I have found that two such plantings will give a family of four all the tomatoes needed for table use. It is necessary to place support around the tomato plant, the same as in garden planting.

Pepper plants will do very well also. Plant three pepper plants in a 15 inch diameter container. Cucumbers may be grown but must have a trellis support to cling to. In addition to tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers, I have grown onion sets, radish, lettuce, and spinach.

There is no end to the possibilities of flowers you can plant in containers. And, remember at this time of year to enjoy the beautiful wildflowers blooming in the fields at the Pine Tree State Arboretum.

I want to help support the Pine Tree State Arboretum's Plant Collections, Trails, & Education Programs!!!

Please _____ renew my membership for 2009 _____ become a member _____ give a gift membership

Please make any necessary changes to your mailing label on the other side, or write the full name and address for a new or gift membership in the space below:

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Visa Mastercard Card Number: _____ Exp. Date: _____

or You can donate online @ www.pinetreestatearboretum.org

The Arboretum is a 501(c)(3) corporation. Membership fees are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual Appeal Underway...

The Arboretum has just launched its 2009 annual appeal. As a member, you should have received the appeal in the mail a few weeks ago. Membership support through the annual appeal is extremely important to the Arboretum. The Arboretum receives no government funding, so it is the thoughtfulness and generosity of our members that makes the Arboretum possible! Many thanks to those of you who have already donated.

Please let us know if you did not get your annual appeal letter, or would like to get another one to pass on to a friend!

Sweet and Yellow Birch; one more difference by: Stephen Oliveri

In the June issue of this newsletter, I outlined some of the differences between the yellow birch (*Betula alleghaniensis*) and sweet birch (*Betula lenta*) that are growing in the Arboretum's Native Plant Collection. After observing them for these past few months, I couldn't resist adding one more difference that I found quite striking. The summer of 2009 was an especially bad one for Japanese beetles (*Popillia japonica*), at least here at the Arboretum. These pesky insects devoured the leaves of several trees in the collection, while leaving others untouched. The yellow birch appeared to be a favorite target, but the sweet birch escaped their attention entirely. These two species are closely related and resemble each other in many regards, from leaf texture to internal chemistry. One would think that they would appear equally attractive to the voracious beetle. After all, the Japanese bee-

tle is not known for being especially choosy in its eating habits. Why the beetles descended in great numbers on the yellow birch, but avoided the sweet birch is a mystery to me.

Individual tree genetics could be a factor. Perhaps this particular yellow birch was especially tasty or, for some reason, this individual sweet birch much less so. I did not notice any other yellow birches in the Arboretum that appeared to be heavily infested and we don't have enough sweet birch around to make anything more than a casual observation. But the difference with these two trees being so close together was certainly striking. I would love to hear from any of our members who have had a similar, or a completely different, experience with either of these two species.



153 Hospital Street
Augusta, ME 04330

Phone: 207-621-0031
Email: ptsaso@roadrunner.com

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Inquiries to: Stephen Oliveri, Executive Director

Phone: (207) 621-0031

E-mail: ptsaso@roadrunner.com

Website: www.pinetreestatearboretum.org

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Newsletter Compiled By

Toni B. Pied

Steve Oliveri