



Elderberry in flower.



Annie Stubbs of Buttonwood Forest Farm processing wild-caught *Sambucus canadensis* for Elderberry syrup.  
Photo: Michelle Johnsen

Background: Wild bunch of *Sambucus canadensis*.

## American Elderberry

*Sambucus canadensis* or  
*Sambucus nigra* L. spp. *canadensis*

Elyse Jurgen, M.Ed., CBLP | Owner and Founder of Waxwing EcoWorks Co. ([www.waxwingecoworks.com](http://www.waxwingecoworks.com))

Elderberry packs a punch in providing essential ecosystem services — provisioning, cultural, supporting, and regulating. Whether one chooses to grow elderberry for wildlife, wellness, and/or wealth, it has proven worthy of our consideration in our pursuits of rewilding our pieces of the planet. Let's explore what makes this a powerhouse native plant!

From the upper growing range in northeastern Canada to southern Texas, elderberry can be spotted with its eye-catching lenticled stems, umbrella blooms, and juicy, dark berry drupes bearing in late summer. Like elderberry's wide geographical presence, its growing conditions are diverse from full sun to woodland edges, with the "happy place" residing in rich, slightly acidic, moist/wet soils. In these moist, riparian soils, elderberry is known to stabilize eroding banks, thus supporting the health of regional watersheds.

Growing wild in riparian woodlands or planted to build biodiversity in the 'burbs, elderberries hold a fan base among wildlife and humans. Wild rodents and bears are known to delight in the berries, along with songbirds like song sparrows, mockingbirds, and cedar waxwings. Birds seek shelter and create nests in the multi-stemmed elderberry and cavity-nesting bees, 30% of wild bees according to the Xerces Society, utilize the pithy, hollow nature of the stems to lay their eggs in self-generated "brood chambers." The root word of *Sambucus* ("sambuce") is latin derived meaning flute/whistle, hinting to the use of the hollowed stems by Native Americans as ceremonial tools.

In addition to the vital ecological elements offered by elderberry, farmers can build economical resiliency in growing elderberry in untillable riparian lands. This concept of "multifunctional riparian buffers" is gaining traction in grant efforts funded through state and regional watershed agencies.

Marginal lands that were once management nightmares for farmers, become fertile grounds for supplemental cash crops in the making of elderberry liquors, jellies, and immune system support medicines, rich in dark-pigmented anthocyanins and Vitamin C. A further bonus for farmers propagating elderberries is the attraction of beneficial predatory insects drawn to its fragrant blooms, symbiotically helping to reduce less desirable insects on nearby crops, in theory reducing the need for spraying harmful pesticides.

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## PRESIDENT'S LETTER



Hello Members,

When anyone asks me, which season is my favorite, I always answer spring. While I love living in a place that experiences all four seasons, after a long cold winter, I eagerly await the signs of spring: an unexpected gentle warm breeze, those first green shoots pushing through the damp

ground, the birds singing out their arrival and the oozing puddles of mud. To me, it's a time of renewal, light, and hope.

In our tumultuous times, this spring will be even more meaningful to me. We are on the cusp of defeating a virus that has brought the world to a standstill. We've ushered in a new administration that believes in science and cares about our people and the environment. The devastation of the last few years has taught us that it's possible to imagine society differently — one that is more in tune with nature and less with consumption. And just like that first green shoot propelling itself into the unknown, we can dare to hope for a world where we can all grow, thrive, and flourish.

Spring is also a great time to plant elderberry, our featured shrub for 2021! To learn more about this marvelous plant and its many benefits, take a look at Elyse Jurgen's engaging article in this issue. Also check out Karen Smith's article on spring ephemerals to get you in the mood to garden or to explore that nearby patch of woods. In the spirit of all things new, I'd like to thank our members and Board of Directors for their support and confidence in me as I start my term as president of PNPS. And a special thanks to Danielle Lanagan for serving as president for the last two years and for her assistance in getting me up to speed so I can hit the ground running. Here's to a new season in plants and in life!

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## PNPS Event News

*As vaccinations for COVID 19 proceed, event information may change. Please visit our website for updates and more information. [www.pnativeplantsociety.org](http://www.pnativeplantsociety.org)*

### Buy Native Celebration – May 1, 2021

Regretfully, due to the pandemic canceled the spring 2021 Central PA Native Plant Festival. Instead, we are promoting May 1st as a **"Buy Native"** Celebration. We encourage you to support the many loyal vendors who traditionally participate in our sale by ordering your spring natives from them. We've created a guide on our website for your convenience. Many vendors will be open by appointment, and several vendors are planning special events on May 1. Details will be posted on our website as they are finalized.

Please join us in supporting our vendors during this difficult time — either on May 1 or anytime during the year. See a list of our festival vendors here: [www.pnativeplantsociety.org/plant-sale-vendors-and-plant-list.html](http://www.pnativeplantsociety.org/plant-sale-vendors-and-plant-list.html)

### 2021 PNPS Annual Meeting

Planning is underway for our Annual Meeting. We hope to meet in person this fall (date to be determined) and will be sharing information on our Website and via email as it becomes available. Visit our website for updates: [www.pnativeplantsociety.org](http://www.pnativeplantsociety.org)

### Lancaster Native Plant and Wildlife Festival

April 24, 8 AM–12 PM (In-Person) Overlook Park, Lancaster PA  
<https://habitatmt.wordpress.com/about>

### Volunteer Acknowledgements

- The Board of PNPS welcomes Jaclyn Braund of Dauphin, PA as our new Treasurer. Jaclyn was appointed at the February meeting of the Board of Directors.
- Many thanks to Chad Clem of Doylestown for stepping up to manage our e-newsletter. You can sign up by emailing [info@panativeplantsociety.org](mailto:info@panativeplantsociety.org) — Please put **Attention e-Newsletter in the subject line.**

To volunteer, email [info@panataivesociety.org](mailto:info@panataivesociety.org) — Please put **Attention Volunteer** in the subject line.

# It's Time for A New National Park

Jim Green, Native Plant Enthusiast and author of 'gardening for birds' in Iycoming Audubon society's newsletter

**H**ave you heard talk about a new national park? If not, you may be surprised to learn that it can happen right in *your* own backyard. And mine. And everyone else's, as well as our front and side yards.

I first learned about the idea in 2020 as I read Dr. Doug Tallamy's book: **Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard**. Doug, an entomologist who seems to be just fine using his first name in conversation, calls it 'Homegrown National Park'.

Doug has teamed with Michelle Alfandari, who has a strong business background, to create the website as a tool to promote the concept of Homegrown National Park and document its progress. Their goal is to have 20 million acres of native plantings throughout the country, which equates to about half of the current acreage of privately owned lawns.

No doubt some think 20 million acres is an ambitious or even unreachable goal, but Doug explains with a passion why private

citizens need to take action *now* to slow down and even reverse the steady decrease in habitat for birds, insects and other wildlife that's been happening for decades right here in the U.S.A. Inspired in part by recent alarming scientific studies about the diminishing populations of birds, bees and other insects and the chain-reaction impacts of these losses, Homegrown National Park is a "grassroots call-to-action to restore biodiversity and ecosystem function."

Explore the concept of a Homegrown National Park system here: [homegrownnationalpark.org](http://homegrownnationalpark.org)

As Doug explains on the 'Tallamy's Hub' section of the site, "We are at a critical point of losing so many species from local ecosystems that their ability to produce the oxygen, clean water, flood control, pollination, pest control, carbon storage, etc., that is, the ecosystem services that sustain us, will become seriously compromised." Click on the 'Gardening for Life' section of 'Tallamy's Hub' to get an in-depth understanding of Doug's rationale for what millions of us need to do to make a difference. Many of us are on-board already, but what about our friends, relatives, neighbors, places of worship, etc.? Your front yard can set an example and get the conversation started.

And then there's the Map. Are you on it? If not, it's easy to sign up. As I write more than half the counties in Pennsylvania don't have a single user on the map. No doubt there are many PNPS members who can add to our state's total.

I know many of us are making a difference. Yet whenever I travel, I look around and see what I call the 'impoverished' habitat that dominates so much of our communities. I really applaud

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# Enchanting Ephemerals

Karen Smith, Nature lover and amateur botanist, Duncansville, PA

Spring is announced by a parade of ephemeral wildflowers. An ephemeral plant sprouts and blooms in the short time between frozen winter ground and a summer canopy that provides too much shade. The leaves of most ephemerals wither away once the plants are fully shaded. These understory forest dwellers have just a month or two to accomplish what takes other perennials most of summer. The variety of ephemerals provides delight for hikers and sought-after nectars for insects emerging in early spring. This article highlights the spring ephemerals that are best suited for a garden setting with moist, rich soil in dappled sun or part shade. These plants grow in rich woodlands and bottomlands in the wild.



**Trout lily (*Erythronium americanum*)**

A lily-shaped yellow bloom with reflexed petals nods at the top of a 6–8" stalk with purple and green mottled leaves. Trout lily prefers acidic soil and forms large colonies in the right conditions. They don't transplant well, so pick your spot wisely. Members of the *Erythronium* family support the *Andrena* miner bees which are important pollinators of woodland and garden bulbs, berries, and flowering trees and shrubs.



**Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*)**

The foliage cradling the flower buds emerges purple and turns green as the 1–2' stalks form and the buds open. The clusters of lavender, blue, or pink bell-shaped flowers are showy from early spring to early summer. The plants self-seed and also spread via rhizomes to form dense colonies in well-draining soil. Bluebells have a long taproot and transplant best when dormant or as seedlings. They attract hummingbirds, hummingbird moths, and long-tongued bees.



**Jack-in-the-pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*)**

What appears to be the "flower" is actually the spadix inside the spathe (hood) that is usually shades of green and maroon. The real flowers are tiny green or yellow dots lining the spadix. Three large leaves often hide the beauty below. Jack-in-the-pulpit grows 1–2' tall with some very happy specimens reaching 3'. In late summer or fall, clusters of bright red fruits which Thoreau described as resembling "a very short thick ear of scarlet corn" form on female plants aka Jill-in-the-pulps. Jack and Jill prefer slightly acidic, rich soil and tolerate poorly drained areas which makes them great additions to rain gardens. They can be propagated by planting the corms or ripe seeds. The plant and fruits contain calcium oxalate which can irritate the skin, so wear gloves when handling the plant, especially the fruits. Jack-in-the-pulpit's primary pollinators are fungus gnats which is an interesting story for another time!

It goes without saying, but I'm going to say it. These plants should never be removed from the wild. Spring Haven Natives in Newburg, PA, specializes in native woodland plants, so give them a call at 717-423-6652.

## New National Park

*continued from page 3*

Doug and Michelle for working hard to get the word out about diminishing habitat and viewing our own properties as important habitat for ecosystems. And of course, native plants, especially those that serve as food for a variety of insect species, are at the forefront of enriching privately-owned 'habitat'.

The sweet songs of Cardinals, Song Sparrows and many others are telling us warmer days aren't too far away. As a new growing season approaches, let's all embrace the Homegrown National Park and get all of our gardens on the Map! And keep setting goals every year to better our share of the park!

### HOMEGROWN NATIONAL PARK 10 STEPS TO GET STARTED

1. Shrink the lawn
2. Remove invasive species
3. Plant **keystone** genera (Oaks, Cherries, Willows, Birches, Goldenrods, Asters, and more)
4. Be generous with your plantings
5. Plant for specialist pollinators
6. Network with neighbors
7. Build a conservation hardscape
8. Create caterpillar pupation sites under your trees
9. Do not spray or fertilize
10. Educate your neighborhood civic association

# What Is A Nativar?

Danielle Lanagan, PNPS Past President

While we in the native plant world agree with and promote the use of native plants over non-native, there is a lot of discussion/confusion over the use of another type of plant called a “nativar” which is a cultivar of a native plant. You can spot nativars by their name tags. They will have a sub-name, usually in quotes, along with the name (ie. Black-Eyed Susan “Goldsturm”). Sometimes it is a natural variant that has been found in the wild and brought into cultivation, but often it has been developed by a plant breeder and would never be found in nature (Marinelli, 2016). Tweaking of native plants is done to enhance perceived desired traits including:

- aesthetics — different color leaves or flowers, double blooms, etc.
- growth habit — size, compactness
- greater disease resistance

While the breeders may achieve their goals, native plant gardeners need to ask some important questions. What do these changes do to the plant? What do these changes mean for our efforts to support wildlife and a healthy ecosystem?

Current research shows that some nativars are good, some are bad and some make no difference when it comes to insect involvement. It is very difficult to do this type of research. How beneficial or not nativars are is very cultivar specific, meaning each cultivar needs to be studied to determine its potential benefit or harm, which takes years of observation. A challenge is that plant breeders are constantly creating new nativars, so the task of studying each one must be overwhelming. Also, sometimes observation alone does not tell the whole story. A nativar may appear to support more insect activity, but that could be because there may be less nutritional value in that plant, so the insect needs to feed more to receive the same nutrition.

## Doug Tallamy Research

In one of his studies, Doug Tallamy examined the interaction between woody plants and insects, he found that altering the leaf color consistently deterred insects because changing leaf color changed the

leaf chemistry. Insects find their host plant by chemistry and if that changes, they probably don't recognize it, or they don't have the adaptations to be able to deal with that chemical change.

Tallamy states two issues he has with cultivated natives (Roach, 2018):

Most nativars are propagated clonally, which means there's zero genetic variability. We've always needed a lot of genetic variability in our plants, but in the age of climate change, it's particularly important. We've got all these wild swings. And putting plants with no genetic variability out in the environment is just not a good idea.

The other thing that bothers me, is if the only thing that we sell in nurseries are designed for aesthetics only, it perpetuates the idea that plants are just decorations. But we also want to think about those vital functions that they must be performing in our yard.

Tallamy's team examined the interaction between woody plants and insects, but what about birds? A larger berry size may affect a bird's ability to feed on them. What about pollinators? What cultivated changes affect flowers?

## Annie White Research

Another often cited study was done by Annie White. In her research and in an updated article (White, 2016), she looked at the “floral rewards” of native plants as compared to cultivated natives and found that nativars with certain characteristics are typically less desirable to pollinators. These include:

- sterile flowers — unable to produce seeds (which also affects food supply for birds)
- double or triple flowers — any altered plant form that makes reaching the nectar difficult
- color that does not attract the pollinator

She stated that cultivated natives that have been altered in more ways than one not only make them unattractive to pollinators but can also weaken the plant.

Through her research, White developed the following chart.

Native Species		Native Cultivars	
BENEFITS	CHALLENGES	BENEFITS	CHALLENGES
Adapted to local soils & climate conditions	Less predictable in the landscape	Unique aesthetic traits (e.g. new flower or foliage color)	Loss of genetic diversity
Preferred host plants for native insects and food source for native birds	Less uniform in size/shape	More uniform in size/shape	Less adapted to local soils & climate
Promote biodiversity	Aesthetic perception that they are “too wild” and “too weedy”	Some have more flowers and longer bloom times	May not be open-pollinated and will not self-seed
Promote conservation and stewardship of our natural heritage		Easier to propagate	May be less attractive and provide less and lower quality floral resources to pollinators

Source: A. White. <https://pollinatorgardens.org/2013/02/08/my-research/>

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# Biodiversity Makes for A Beautiful Lawn

## One Gardener's Story of Greening Her Lawn

Doris Armstrong Goldman, Biologist at The Nature and Culture Institute, Waynesboro, PA, [rfgoldman@comcast.net](mailto:rfgoldman@comcast.net)

Lawns are America's largest crop. Unfortunately, they aren't great for supporting pollinators and other wildlife. We successfully reduced our sterile lawn footprint with islands of more environmental, rain-absorbing and wildlife-friendly native trees & wildflowers. But these take maintenance and you can't sled or play ball on them. To green your remaining lawn, do as we do: transplant low-growing native species and let them seed in or creep around. We have over 30 in our home lawn. It's not as lush as neighboring watered and chemically treated spreads but looks pretty normal and hosts lots more native lepidopterans and bees.

Most lawn grasses are imported fine fescues, bluegrass, or coarse Kentucky 31. For a more environmentally friendly lawn, try mixing in some native grasses, sedges and herbaceous plants. Nimbwill (*Muhlenbergia schreberi*) and Pennsylvania sedge\* (*Carex pensylvanica*) are fine leaved and will creep around your lawn. You can also include clumping fine-leaved sedges such as white-tinged (*C. albicans*), creek (*C. amphibola*), yellow-fruit

(*C. annectens*), Appalachian (*C. appalachica*), plains oval (*C. brevior*), oval leaf (*C. cephalophora*), slender wood (*C. gracilescens*), sand (*C. muhlenbergii*), eastern star (*C. radiata*), and rosy sedge (*C. rosea*). If you're looking for coarser-leaved sedges, try Frank's (*C. frankii*), grey-green (*C. glaucoidea*), loose-culmed or spreading (*C. laxiculmis*), or fox sedge (*C. vulpinoidea*). Just be sure to check their preferences (sun, shade, wet, dry) before you plant!

Threaded throughout our lawn are a variety of low-growing native herbaceous plants most of which are adapted to dry woods, path edges, or open rocky areas—called barrens here in Franklin County. The prettiest of these are pussytoes\* (*Antennaria neglecta*, *A. howellii*, *A. plantaginifolia*, and *A. virginica*); downy and hairy wood mints (*Blephilia ciliata* and *B. hirsuta*); spring beauties (*Claytonia caroliniana* and *C. virginica*), green and gold (*Chrysogonum virginianum*); blue mistflower\* (*Conoclinium coelestinum*); elephant foot (*Elephantopus carolinianus*); Virginia and woodland strawberries (*Fragaria virginiana* & *F. vesca* spp. *americana*); field mint (*Mentha arvensis*); yellow wood sorrels (*Oxalis stricta* and *O. dillenii*); running or roundleaf ragwort (*Packera obovata*); moss-pink phlox (*Phlox subulata*)\*; dwarf and old-field cinquefoils (*Potentilla canadensis* and *P. simplex*); lance-leaf selfheal (*Prunella vulgaris* ssp. *lanceolata*), fringe-leaved and stalked wild petunias (*Ruellia humilis* & *R. pedunculata*), lyre-leaved sage (*Salvia lyrata*); blue-eyed grasses — sharp-tipped (*Sisyrinchium mucronatum*) for drier areas and narrow-leaved (*S. angustifolium*) for moister ones; calico aster (*Symphotrichum lateriflorum*), common blue (*Viola sororia*) and its paler form (*V. sororia priceana*), as well as striped cream violet (*Viola striata*); and barren strawberry (*Waldsteinia fragarioides*).

\* divide & transplant these poor self-seeders

Editors note: the Pennsylvania Native Plant Society does not support harvesting native plants from the wild. Please see our list of native plant nurseries for commercially-available plant sources.



*Carex pensylvanica* (Pennsylvania sedge)  
Photo: Public domain



*Sisyrinchium angustifolium* (Blue Eyed  
Grass) Photo: The Marmot from USA



*Phlox subulata* (Moss Pink)  
Photo: Doris Armstrong Goldman

# American Elderberry

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*Sambucus canadensis*  
(Elderberry) berries.

Without a doubt, elderberry packs a punch as a powerhouse native plant given its ability to:

- support the habitat needs of wildlife
- provide wellness benefits to humans
- create wealth opportunities in regenerative agricultural systems.

*What rewilding adventure will you embark on with elderberry seeds, livestock, or seedlings in hand?*

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## 2021 Facebook Photo Contest

### 2021 PNPS Facebook Photo Contest

Get your cameras and smart phones ready for the 6th Annual PNPS Facebook Photo Contest. To enter you must be a member of the Facebook group. Just post your photo in the comment section of the Facebook event. We will announce the winner on Facebook on August 6th. The winning photo will be featured on the back cover of our print newsletter PNPS Notes, Fall 2021. All entries will be posted on our website: [www.panativeplantsociety.org/facebook-forum.html](http://www.panativeplantsociety.org/facebook-forum.html)

#### Rules:

- Pennsylvania Natives only: Plants must be listed as native to Pennsylvania — check [www.paflora.org](http://www.paflora.org)
- Submit photos of PA native plants, taken between August 2020 and July 2021.
- Enter as many photos as you like but please enter each in a separate comment field.
- All entries must include:
  - your name
  - the date and location the photo was taken
  - the plant name (common and scientific)

*By entering the contest, you are giving permission for PNPS to use your photo on our website and in our newsletter and other educational materials. Your photo will be credited with the information you provide.*

### Winner of the PNPS 2020 Facebook Photo Contest:

*Photo by Pete Swauger, Silene virginica, also known as Fire Pink, taken at Raccoon Creek Wildflower Reserve on May 25, 2020.*



See entries from past contests here: [www.panativeplantsociety.org/facebook-forum.html](http://www.panativeplantsociety.org/facebook-forum.html)

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