

# Habitat Gardening

*Habitat Gardening in Central New York*

*A Chapter of Wild Ones: Native Plants, Natural Landscapes*

## No Mow, No Mo': So Far So Good

Last spring HGCNY embarked on an experiment to determine whether Prairie Nursery's *No Mow* grass would work here in CNY.

Why an experiment? Yes, it's true that the No Mow mix of six low-growing Fine Fescue turf grasses is recommended for our region, but it just seemed too good to be true!

The description in the catalog says it will:

- Form a dense turf
- Thrive in full sun or partial shade
- Require little if any

watering or fertilizing

- Biologically reduce weed growth, once established
- Require limited mowing, usually only once or twice a year.

HGCNY purchased a five-pound bag to conduct our experiment. After reading the directions, we realized fall planting was recommended, so we distributed very small amounts to people at our meetings, and saved the bulk of it for fall.

Despite being the less-preferred planting time, our spring planting more than



*John Allen prepares for a larger test in a challenging location near the road*

fulfilled our expectations. It does have a slightly different look (*see photo*) since it lays down in rolling mounds, but it's an attractive look. It's a rich green and has a fine texture. We think it compares very favorably to "regular" lawn. And just as advertised, it has been maintenance-free—as well as fossil fuel and pollution-free.

We're eager to see how the fall crop grows, and we're preparing a much larger area in a more challenging site.

A successful test could point Central New Yorkers to a much "greener" lawn (and save them hours of lawn care each summer!)

**For more info, go to:**  
[www.prairienursery.com](http://www.prairienursery.com) and look for No Mow grass



*Our small test plot between our flower bed and regular turf grass*

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**Fall 2007**

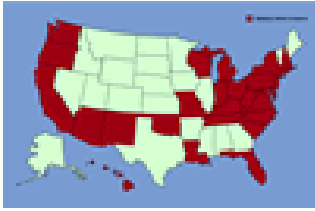
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# This tree grows in Brooklyn

... and in 42 States AND in Central NY

From Plant Conservation Alliance's Alien Working Group



**DISTRIBUTION IN THE UNITED STATES**

Tree-of-heaven is widely distributed across the United States, occurring in forty-two states, from Maine to Florida and west to California.

Yes, it's THAT tree. But the inspiration the tree afforded the story's main character is a nightmare for our cities and natural areas.

**NATIVE RANGE**  
Central China

**DESCRIPTION**  
Tree-of-heaven, also known as ailanthus, Chinese sumac, and stinking sumac, is a rapidly growing, deciduous tree in the mostly tropical quassia family. Mature trees can reach 80 feet or more in height. Ailanthus has smooth stems with pale gray bark, and twigs which are light

chestnut brown, especially in the dormant season. Its large compound leaves, 1-4 feet in length, are composed of 11-25 smaller leaflets and alternate along the stems. In late spring, clusters of small, yellow-green flowers appear near the tips of branches. Seeds are produced on female trees in late summer to early fall, in flat, twisted, papery structures called samaras, which may remain on the trees for long periods of time. The wood of ailanthus is soft, weak, coarse-grained, and creamy white to light brown in color. All parts of the tree, especially the flowers, have a strong, offensive odor, which some have likened to peanuts or cashews.

take over a site and form an impenetrable thicket. Ailanthus trees also produces toxins that prevent the establishment of other plant species. The root system is aggressive enough to cause damage to sewers and foundations.


**HABITAT IN THE US**  
Tree-of-heaven is a common tree in disturbed urban areas, where it sprouts up just about anywhere, including alleys, sidewalks, parking lots, and streets. The book "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" by Betty Smith is based on the ailanthus tree. Away from cities, it is commonly seen in fields, and along roadsides, fencerows, woodland edges and forest openings. Nationally, ailanthus has become an agricultural pest and may occur as seedlings that pop up by the hundreds in recently planted fields, or as persistent thickets in rocky, untillable areas.

**IMPORTANT:**  
Correct identification of ailanthus is essential. *Several native shrubs, like sumacs, and trees, like ash, black walnut and pecan, can be confused with ailanthus.* Staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina*), native to the eastern U.S., is distinguished from ailanthus by its fuzzy, reddish-brown branches and leaf stems, erect, red, fuzzy fruits, and leaflets with toothed margins.

**BACKGROUND**  
Tree-of-heaven was first introduced to America by a gardener in Philadelphia in 1784, and by 1840 was commonly available from nurseries. The species was also brought into California mainly by the Chinese who came to California during the goldrush in the mid-1800s. Today it is frequently found in abandoned mining sites there.

**ECOLOGICAL THREAT**  
Tree-of-heaven is a prolific seed producer, grows rapidly, and can overrun native vegetation. Once established, it can quickly

(Continued on page 3)



## Maple Hill Nursery

**Larry Keassa, CNP**

Perennials	4116 Pompey Center Rd.
Shrubs	Manlius, NY
Landscaping	682-8835
Native plants	Cell Phone: 447-3196

## Tree-of-Heaven (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 2)

### BIOLOGY & SPREAD

Tree-of-heaven reproduces both sexually (seeds) and asexually (vegetative sprouts). Flowering occurs late in the spring (June in the middle Atlantic region of eastern U.S.). The species is dioecious, with male and female flowering on separate trees. Fruits are papery, somewhat twisted, winged structures called samaras that are tan to pink-colored. Samaras occur in large clusters from September to October of the same year, and may persist on the tree through the following winter. One study reports that an individual tree can produce as

many as 325,000 seeds per year. Established trees also produce numerous suckers from the roots and resprout vigorously from cut stumps and root fragments.

### MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

Elimination of *Ailanthus* requires diligence, due to its abundant seed production, high seed germination rate, and vegetative reproduction. Followup monitoring and treatment when needed should be an integral part of any serious *ailanthus* management program. Regardless of method selected, treated areas should be rechecked one

or more times a year and any new suckers or seedlings treated (cut, sprayed or pulled) as soon as possible, especially before they are able to rebuild root reserves. Establishing a thick cover of trees (preferably native, and non-invasive) or grass sod will help shade out and discourage establishment of *ailanthus* seedlings. Targeting large female trees for control will help reduce spread of *ailanthus* by seed.



Botanical drawing of the leaves, flowers and samaras from [Britton](#) and [Brown's](#) 1913 *Illustrated flora of the northern states and Canada*

THIS PLANT IS IN CNY!

If you've spotted one on your property and need specific info on eradicating it, go to [www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/aial1.htm](http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/aial1.htm)



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## Collect seeds now for new plants next spring

*“Dry milkweed down has a buoyancy that would make helium jealous, so if you let the pods dry and split, I recommend you clean them outdoors.”*

~ *William Cullina,*

*New England Wildflower Society*



Budget-conscious gardeners can get more plants per dollar by growing plants from seed. And growing plants from seeds you collect yourself is even cheaper and more satisfying.

**A note of caution:** If you plan to collect seeds on property other than your own—public or private—be sure to have the owner’s permission. Even with permission, collect only a small number from any one site and none at all of threatened or endangered species.

Many of us, though, collect seeds from our own plants in order to increase our supply, select from a particularly nice individual plant, or to share with others.

**Here’s some advice from *Planting Noah’s Garden* by Sara Stein (pp 349-51):**

**Milkweed pods:** Pull pods after they have begun to split but before they open. Once open, they fly off at the slightest stir of air.

**Coneflowers and others with central cones of seed:** Scrape seeds into a packet from the center of the dry flower head with a thumbnail.

**Iris capsules and others with “shaker” fruits such as columbines:** Shake seeds into a packet from the dry, open capsules.

**Grasses, sedges and rushes:** Strip seeds from the stalk between thumb and finger in a “milking” motion into your palm and then into a packet.

**Thimbleweed and other cottony or fluffy types, such as goldenrods and asters:** Snip off the whole dry flower head and put it in a paper bag.

**Lupine pods and those of other legumes:** Shell the seeds into packets from the dry, splitting pods as you would dried beans or peas.

Process the seeds

Seeds that will be planted outdoors when fresh don’t need further treatment.

Seeds that you were able to shake, shell, or strip easily need only a period of drying. Seeds harvested slightly prematurely need to continue ripening on the stalk or in the capsule until they detach easily.

Seeds embedded in fleshy fruit won’t sprout unless cleaned because the flesh contains germination inhibitors (fruit seeds normally would be cleaned as they pass through the gut of the animal that disperses them).

**Ripen immature seed stalks** in open paper bags where air circulates freely.

**Free ripe, dry seeds** from stalks and encasements by hand threshing or extraction. To separate milkweed seeds from their fluff, strip them while the silk lies flat. Grasp the silk firmly with the fingers of one hand, and scrape off the seeds with the other.

**Separate the seeds from the chaff.** Kitchen strainers may work, or sometimes vigorous shaking in a paper bag may pool the seeds.

**Soak fleshy fruits in water** for at least a week. Soft fruits can be mashed first; cut hard fruits open to reveal the flesh. Add detergent to the water of oily seeds. Rinse the soaking fruit daily in a strainer and change the water in the soaking dish. As the flesh softens, free the seeds by rubbing the mush against a strainer set in a bowl of water. Much of the pulp will float and can be skimmed off. Wash seeds well and dry.

**Store clean, hard, ripe seeds** in paper packets at room temperature. If you don’t intend to plant them within three months, store them in the refrigerator.

**Planting Note:** Some seeds may need periods of cold and/or wet to germinate.

Do you want bigger, brighter, healthier plants for your garden or home - naturally?

Worm castings have been proven to decrease fungal disease, increase beneficial bacteria, increase drought resistance which contributes to the healthy growth of your plants.

Try it now and see for yourself! Great for potted plants!

Small tea bag (approx 8oz) \$3.00

Large tea bag (approx 1 lb) \$6.00

Check out Brenda’s book  
“The Dirt  
on Worm Farming”



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Brenda Lotito

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# It's easy to become a member of Wild Ones or to renew!

Fill in the form and mail it with your check to the address below.

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Chapter Preference: Habitat Gardening in Central New York

If this is a gift membership, please enter your name here so we can let the recipient know it's from you. Also include the reason or purpose for the gift (Christmas present, birthday, friendship, new home, etc.).

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_ Reason: \_\_\_\_\_

Circle the level of membership you want:	Wild	Wilder	Wildest
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"Free" Video—For a limited time, when you join or renew your Wild Ones membership at the \$50 level or higher, you will receive, at no extra charge, the highly acclaimed video, *Wild About Wildflowers: How to Choose, Plant, Grow, and Enjoy Native American Wildflowers and Grasses in Your Own Yard*. This item sells for \$30 in the Wild Ones Store, but here's your chance to get it almost for "free." *If you're not interested in the video please let us know.*

Mail membership application and check to:

Wild Ones  
P.O. Box 1274  
Appleton, Wisconsin 54912-1274

*Make checks payable to Wild Ones.*

When you're a member of Wild Ones, you're automatically a member of HGNCY!



## Mission

***Wild Ones: Native Plants, Natural Landscapes promotes environmentally sound landscaping practices to preserve biodiversity through the preservation, restoration and establishment of native plant communities.***

Wild Ones is a not-for-profit environmental education and advocacy organization.

## Help support the educational mission of Habitat Gardening in Central New York!

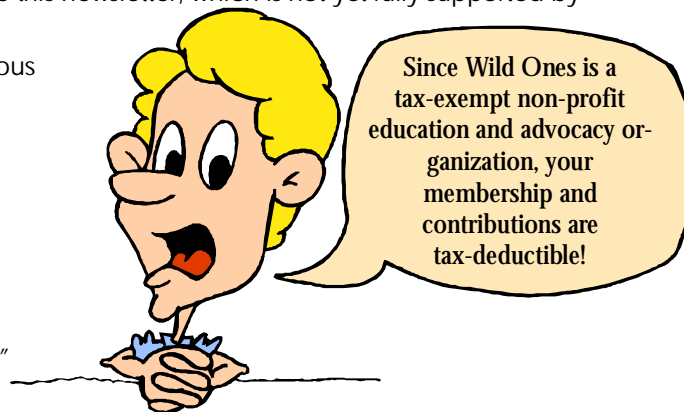
What do we spend our money on?

- We give our speakers a modest honorarium for their great programs
- We publish and distribute this newsletter, which is not yet fully supported by advertising revenue
- Those pesky miscellaneous office expenses

Send donations to:

Michelle Welcher, Treasurer  
4294 Carmel Dr.  
Liverpool, NY 13090

*Make checks payable to HGNCY and write "Donation"*



## Words of Wisdom



***“Merely ornamental plants merely grow. In time they grow too big or they die; then someone takes them out and redecorates with others. Nothing else happens. There is no evolution.”***

~ Sara Stein

Each region has suites of vegetation that can tolerate the most difficult conditions: drought flood, sand, clay, sun, wind, sterility. Roots penetrate the ground, improving the drainage where the soil is waterlogged, increasing water retention where the soil dries too quickly. Leaves convert soil minerals to organic matter—compost the ground, make it looser, richer, moister. Ultimately species that could have thrived in the original harsh conditions begin to grow in the protective shade of this nursery, and gradually a more permanent community replaces the pioneers. ...

The land will mature, become more productive and rich in its diversity.

This is not true of unnatural plantings. Merely decorative plants merely grow. In time they grow too big, or they die; then someone takes them out and redecorates with others. Nothing else happens. There is no evolution. There is no profit set aside for the future because, for all the money spent, there has been no investment in the land.

When our concept of land ownership was generational, it must have seemed ordinary to plant a line of sapling sugar maples that someday one's grandchildren would

tap for maple syrup. Sugar maples planted along New England roads are well over a century old, some close to twice that age, but hardly anyone is planting young ones. I think this is deeply wrong, or at least inordinately selfish. I know my land will pass into the hands of strangers; even so, I own them its future. In our present and difficult transition to a wiser suburban landscape, we are all pioneers, preparing the ground for its future occupancy.

~ Sara Stein, pp 58-59, *Planting Noah's Garden*

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Visit our innovative website [www.plantsmen.com](http://www.plantsmen.com) loaded with all-original photos and articles, plus uniquely articulate native plant profiles. Also note our “Events and Talks” section, so you can attend photo-lectures in CNY aimed at inspiring gardeners to look differently at native plants, and to use them with confidence in their landscapes.

Check our website for directions  
from all parts of NY State

## Take a Child Outside Week

**September 24-30 is *Take A Child Outside Week*.** It's an international program designed to help break down obstacles that keep children from discovering the natural world.

By arming parents, teachers and other caregivers with resources on outdoor activities, the program's goal is to help children across the country develop a better understanding and appreciation of the environment in which they live, and a burgeoning enthusiasm for its exploration.

Going outside:

- connects children to the natural world

- helps kids focus in school
- reduces chances of obesity

So take a child outside!

Explore our CNY resources such as the Center for Nature Education at Baltimore Woods and Beaver Lake Nature Center.

And your habitat garden can be explored every day. In your own mini ecosystem you can watch the behavior of birds, butterflies, and bees, toads and frogs, and other creatures; observe how your gardening practices change its functioning. And most important, develop an appreciation for and enjoyment of all the parts and how they work together in a living system.

## Reflection by David Suzuki

**R**econnecting our children with nature in their everyday lives is the first step in an environmental education. That means getting children outside into the world to



experience it first-hand, rather than through TVs, computers or on YouTube. I'm not saying that there isn't a place for technology to help us understand the world. ...But as fascinating as it is, nothing can replace the real experiences we have outdoors, peering through a telescope into the night sky. Or digging in a garden. Or exploring a swamp, a forest or a tide pool. ... We have to get our kids outside more to play and explore the wonders of nature, so that they will come to understand it better. This isn't just up to kids or teachers. It's up to parents. It's up to school boards. It's up to all of us to ensure that we're not telling our children one thing and doing another. Anything else and we're not just lying to them. We're lying to ourselves.

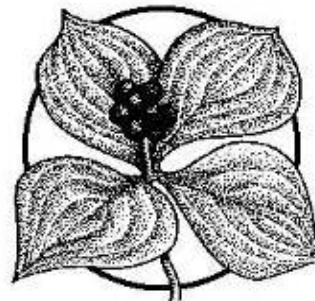


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## Fall Garden Tip: Label NOW before you forget!

You've enjoyed that new plant all season—its foliage, flowers, and growth habit. Or maybe you just planted a new seedling or division from a friend ... or even from the HGCNY plant sale. You can't wait to see it come to life again next year.

If you value that plant, label or mark it in some way NOW when you still know what it is and where it's growing.

It may seem impossible that you'd ever forget where it is and certainly not its name. After all, you've admired and talked about it all year.

But stranger things have happened! After six months of winter, one's memory for the location of any particular plant

fades—the garden looks very different in the spring.

Even worse than not knowing the name or location of a plant, though, is forgetting that the plant exists at all—especially if it's one (like milkweed) that may look like it has disappeared or died over the winter.

With a little work now—*now* when you remember what and where your plants are—you can avoid these problems.

### Some suggestions

#### **Digital photo maps**

Take a photo of each section of your garden and label the location of each plant. A digital photo printed in grayscale on regular paper is the easiest to write on. In fact, taking photos next spring before plants come up will make it even easier next year since the photo will show just the plants while still small.

#### **Plant markers**

The traditional plastic marker is always an option, but they often heave out of the ground, leaving you wondering where the actual plant is, or the writing fades so much you can't read it. Here are some alternatives.

**Vinyl shades:** The slats from an old vinyl mini-blind or the extra slats removed to shorten one can make better plant markers. They're also free and put a waste product to good use.

(Vinyl, however, isn't an eco-friendly material, so consider a different type of blind next time.) Cut these into lengths longer than the typical plant label so they go further into the ground and write with a thick permanent marker.

**Metal engraver:** Probably the most attractive, longest lasting but also the most time-consuming and expensive (unless you count the cost of replacing lost plants.)

#### **Wire or plastic cages:**

For new, small plants you want to make sure you can find again, take a small strip of metal or plastic fencing and make a little cage around the plant. Anchor with a few sticks.

**Tagging tape:** If you might mistake your plant for a weed, tie fluorescent tagging tape to the stalk and write the plant's name with a marker. Ugly, but effective. If you tie it to the base of the plant it will be less visible—especially after it snows.

**Leave stalk:** By far the easiest and most effective way to find the plant next spring is to simply leave it in the ground. This is especially effective for plants, such as milkweed, that emerge very late; the stalk shows exactly where the plant should emerge.

**Sticks:** At the very least mark it with a stick! You'll know *something* important was there.



# Growing Wild

## Joan Livingston

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Perennials  
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# Thank You

To **Randi Starmer** and **John Allen** for planning our very successful (and fun) native plant sale in September.

To **all who donated plants** for our plant sale. You helped make our plant sale a huge success. And so did all the **people who bought them**, some of whom chose to add a donation beyond the cost of the plants.

To **Estelle Hahn** completing the BIG job of planning programs for the 2007-2008.

To **Randi Starmer** who is publicizing our meetings.

To all those who are official **Wild Ones/HGCNY members**. This is our most reliable source of support.

And to our **HGCNY officers and Board Members** for all their good work and thoughtful contributions.

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*Thank you in advance*

To all those who decide to become a **member** and to **current members** who renew their membership.

## Monarch Facts



Migratory monarchs live up to 8 months

Female monarchs can lay more than 400 eggs

Together, 4 monarchs weigh less than a dime

The fall migration advances an average of 25 miles a day

Monarch larvae eat only milkweed

From egg to last stage larva, a monarch increases in mass 4,000 times

Adult monarchs taste with their feet

*From Monarch Watch at [www.monarchwatch.org](http://www.monarchwatch.org)*

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*We're on the web at*  
[www.hgcny.org](http://www.hgcny.org)

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## Mark Your Calendar

All meetings are at LeMoyne College's Falcone Library at 2:00 pm the last Sunday of the month unless otherwise noted. (See our website for directions and updates.)



**September 30** Debbie Brock, Cornell Cooperative Extension **Topic:** Soils: The foundation of the habitat garden.

**October 28** Steve Harris **Topic:** Care of trees on our property. He will also describe the new method that he uses for fast-starting trees.

**November 25 Panel discussion:** Dan Carroll, Janet Allen, Michelle Welcher

**December Social Gathering** (Date TBA)

**January 27** HGCNY will be participating with Liverpool Library in the national **Focus the Nation** conversation on global warming. Our topic will be reducing "food miles" by growing our own food or buying it

locally. **NOTE: To be held at Liverpool Library.**

**February 24** Maureen Knapp, Cobblestone Valley Farm **Topic:** Alternatives to Pesticides

**March 30** Jim D'Angelo, Sterling Nature Center **Topic:** Continuing his popular series on creatures in our habitat gardens.

**April 27** Carol Bradford **Topic:** Beyond natives - Learning about cultivars, provenance, and more

**May/early June Field trip** (TBA)



## Snow / Weather Cancellations

If weather could affect our meeting, check your e-mail, our website, or as a last resort, call 487-5742.



Our meetings are now on the **LAST SUNDAY** of each month, not the fourth Sunday.

Check our website  
[www.hgcny.org](http://www.hgcny.org)  
for updates