



Perennial Pages

Gardens for Clean Water: A Seasonal
Newsletter for Habitat Owners & Caretakers



Partnership for the
**DELAWARE
ESTUARY**

Connecting people, science, and nature for a healthy Delaware River and Bay



Swamp sunflower (*Helianthus angustifolius*) blooming in October 2021, Newark, Delaware (Photo: Sarah Bouboulis)

Fall Cool Down

Fall is a crucial time for insects and other wildlife in our gardens. Many creatures need to prepare before they enter winter [hibernation](#), or [diapause](#). Some insects may also work hard to provide for the next generation by gathering resources for eggs or larvae that overwinter. Either way, your fall garden isn't finished yet! With some extra considerations, your garden can provide benefits all year long. The nectar/pollen of fall blooming plants, (asters, sunflowers, black-

eyed Susan, etc.), as well as the seeds/fruits of others (coneflowers, persimmon, etc.) provide important nutrients to wildlife. They also, of course, are ensuring the future of the next generation of plants! And stems of already spent flowers provide habitat for many insects to shelter over the winter. The work of nature never ends.

Read on to discover more ways to garden in an eco-friendly fashion this fall and support your backyard habitat. This issue of Perennial Pages features some great tips for keeping your garden up to par for the creatures it's benefiting and its human caretakers. We'll also spotlight a fall favorite in the "What's up?" section. Welcome, fall!





Blue wood aster (*Symphyotrichum cordifolium*) and Brown-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia triloba*) a pretty pair in the fall, Newark, DE. (Photo: Sarah Bouboulis)

Time for Action: Fall 2021

Here are some of the top reminders for maintaining your fall garden.

- Although it can be plant specific, take a moment to see what bushes or trees may need pruning and then research if it's a good time to do so. For many, fall is a good time for a haircut. Try saving the stems in a brush pile for wildlife.
- Fall is a great time to plant new plants as well as divide others that are getting a little crowded. Many perennials can be split to form new plants that you can put in new locations (or share with friends!). It is easiest to do this after rain when the ground is soft for digging.
- Try not to clean-up your gardens, and remember to leave the leaves! Plant material that is dying back is very important for overwintering insects and other creatures. If you **MUST** remove something, do not compost or trash all the material. You can keep the sticks and leaves in a more hidden area of your yard to limit disturbance to any tiny creatures.
- Aim to find beauty in the seasonal fading of the world around you. Although it seems like it lasts forever, the brown and gray of winter is just another season we get the opportunity to enjoy!

Check out past fall issues of [Perennial Pages](#) for more garden tips and tricks.





A primarily native meadow, including several native grasses, looking well-kept even as it enters the fall/winter season, Lewes, Delaware, (Photo: Sarah Bouboulis)

Keeping a Beautiful Fall Garden

When many people first consider native gardening, one of the first reasons they find to oppose the practice is aesthetics. And while aesthetics may not be the main reason to start a native plant garden, it certainly shouldn't be overlooked, as a beautiful native garden will encourage others to join the movement! Native gardens don't have to look "frumpy," it just takes a little more practice to keep them looking their best all season long. Here are some useful tips in achieving a beautiful garden that also benefits our fellow inhabitants like birds and insects.

As day lengths shorten, summer plants start to die back, so make sure you stock your garden full of fall bloomers to blend in with the plants that are fading. Asters are a top choice.

If possible, plant short fall blooming or evergreen plants in front of tall summer bloomers to help mask dried up leaves and stalks. For example wood asters in front of coneflowers and beebalm.

Use evergreen ground covers and shrubs to keep interest throughout the year, even strategically planting around perennials that you know won't look their best by fall. This can include grasses. Grasses, particularly *Carex* species, are some of most underutilized plantings in native plant gardens. (Also try panicgrasses (*Panicum* spp.) and little blue stem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*)). They aren't showy, but they are predictable and maintain their form consistently.

Buttress tall plants with short ones to prevent floppiness. For example, try little blue stem grass (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) around purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) or black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia* spp.) to gain some support.

Where there is room, use shrubs. They can provide early and late season interest and provide structure throughout the year.

Celebrate and embrace the new aesthetic. Native gardens are more than just pretty flowers, they are habitats. Keep that in mind and spread the word, you may begin to change hearts and minds.

What's "up"?

Seasonal Plant Identification

Space Invaders

Invasive Species Spotlight



Smooth aster (*Symphyotrichum laeve*) Newark, Delaware (Photo: Sarah Bouboulis)

Smooth aster (*Symphyotrichum laeve*) is a fabulous fall blooming flower. Its beautiful purple blooms come on strong at a time when a lot of other plants are fading. It can also be a great native plant replacement for the typical fall mum. It provides lots of blooms and a stunning color, although it can get rather leggy and tall. For asters in general, including smooth aster, the rule of thumb is to cut them back hard by the beginning of July to get more blooms and a shorter plant. Smooth asters prefer full sun, and dry to medium soil. They will survive, but not quite as robustly, under other conditions. It is also LOVED by bees and butterflies. For more information check out the Illinois Wildflower link below.

[Read More](#)



Japanese Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*), Newark, Delaware (Photo: Sarah Bouboulis)

Japanese Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*) is popular among home gardeners due to its compact size and fall color. However, this shrub is causing havoc in our natural areas. The berries on this plant are a favorite of birds, and they will transfer the seeds everywhere! Barberry plants can be found deep within naturally forested areas. They bear lots of fruits/seeds and those seeds have high viability under a large range of soil conditions, making it nearly impossible to keep in check. Luckily, as a rather compact shrub, it can be fairly easily removed from most home gardens by digging it up. And then we just need to convince our neighbors to do the same! Native alternatives to barberry are Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica*), winterberry holly (*Ilex verticillata*), and New Jersey tea (*Ceanothus americanus*). For more information, check out the Ecological Landscape Alliance link below.

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Feel free to send any of your gardening questions or topic ideas to Perennial Pages editor, Sarah Bouboulis; sbouboulis@delawareestuary.org

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