

Old Saybrook Conservation Circular

Vol. 1 / Summer 2015

Inaugural Newsletter

Welcome to the first issue of the Old Saybrook Conservation Commission's newsletter, the Conservation Circular. This issue begins a series of publications dealing with conservation issues of importance to the town. The intention is to provide in-depth information along with news and announcements. Future issues will discuss sea level rise, eco-tourism, and other such topics. If you would like to receive this Circular as email, see the subscribing information below; you can also read it on the Old Saybrook Conservation Commission website:

http://www.oldsaybrookct.org/Pages/OldSaybrookCT_CC/index

Plants for the Long Haul: Coastal Landscaping post Superstorm Sandy

Where I live in Old Saybrook is typical of many coastal Connecticut neighborhoods built in the 1950's.

Over the years I have seen an increase in the amount of water that floods the back portion of my yard. But Superstorm Sandy changed everything. Which of my garden and landscape plants are going to stick it out for the long haul in coastal Connecticut?

This is an issue of adaptation. It's not just the adaptation of plants to rising salt waters, but also of wildlife to changing habitats such as the decoupling of insects emerging when migrating birds need them, and the availability of specialized pollinators when flowers need them.

Our mean annual temperature in southern Connecticut is rising at the rate of 3.5 degrees every 100 years. In addition to rising waters, we would do well to add warmer weather to our list of needed adaptations.

An interesting study by Richard Primack, a professor of biology at Boston University, looked at 32 spring flowering native plants that Henry David Thoreau noted in his journals written at Walden Pond outside Boston. For every degree increase in temperature, plants in Walden Pond's town of Concord are flowering roughly two days earlier. Highbush blueberry, for example, today flowers a full two weeks before it did in Thoreau's day.

This suggests that rising temperatures are likely to present more than the loss of our native flora; it may well give even more of an advantage to the spread of problematic invasive plant species, which have the capability to make rapid shifts in their range. At the recent New Directions in American Landscape conference held at Connecticut College the horticultural Director of Brooklyn Bridge Park in New York unveiled an initiative designed to learn what could be gleaned from the impacts of Superstorm Sandy on so many coastal parks and public properties: what plants survived. Among the preliminary findings: trees and shrubs that thrived included Honey Locust, Catalpa, Ginko, Hawthorn, eight different species of Oak, particularly the Pin Oak, all the Sumacs, Bayberry, Eastern False Willow, Red-Osier Dogwood, Serviceberry, Black Choke-berry, Ninebark, Northern Spicebush, Common Winterberry, Elderberry, Smooth Rose, Virginia Rose, Swamp Rose, and Coastal Sweet-pepperbush. Those that failed or had mixed success include London Plane tree (Sycamore), Sweetgum, Smooth Arrowwood and Inkberry.

continued...



Photo by: Judy Preston

In addition to being one of our most durable coastal plants, Bayberry also provides high-energy berries that are an important food for migratory and resident songbirds.

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE:

To receive each issue of the Circular as email, go to <http://tinyurl.com/OSCCNews> and sign up.

Tip

Did you know that Connecticut is experiencing a long and ongoing drought? We can all conserve water! Take short showers instead of baths. Reuse water in which you cook vegetables or pasta to water plants. Don't run water when brushing teeth or shaving. Install a rain barrel to collect water for your garden, containers, or houseplants. Create a rain garden by following this link: <http://nemo.uconn.edu/raingardens>. The Nature Conservancy has a list of five simple things everyone can do to save water: <http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/habitats/riverslakes/help/index.htm?src=e.nature&lu=2886226&autologin=true?b1>

News & Announcements

The Conservation Commission will hold a Symposium on *The Nature of Old Saybrook* on Sunday September 13th in the Parks and Recreation Building, featuring talks and workshops, displays by local vendors, tables for local organizations and businesses, children's activities, and more. Mark your calendars!

The thousand-acre tract of land known as The Preserve has been permanently protected for the public. It is owned by the towns of Old Saybrook and Westbrook and by the State of Connecticut. The Old Saybrook Board of Selectmen has convened an *ad hoc* committee to make recommendations to the selectmen on managing The Preserve. The committee includes representatives from the town commissions on Conservation, Parks and Recreation, Economic Development, and Inland Wetlands, as well as members of the Old Saybrook, Westbrook, and Essex Land Trusts and citizens of Old Saybrook.

Conservation Commission Members

Walter Smith, Chair
Richard Esty, Vice-Chair
Nina Garrett, Secretary
Jerry Brophy
Bob Fish
Emily Grochowski
Pat Ingellis

Plants for the Long Haul continued...

The perennials that succeeded include Asters, Boneset, Joe Pye Weed, Wild Indigo, Butterfly Milkweed, Eryngo, Turtlehead, Swamp Aster and Swamp Milkweed, Blazing Star, and Sedges, namely Pennsylvania Sedge and Fox Sedge.

It's important to note that this list represents many varying conditions associated with the storm, and ranges in plant establishment, maturity, and growing conditions. I would also argue in favor of emulating the success of the native species listed, for their dual role providing wildlife resources and habitat.

Lessons from my own backyard, and the observations that I've made at coastal reserves such as Hammonasset State Park in Madison and Barn Island Wildlife Management Area in

Native sumacs were among the "winners" that fared well after the recent large storm events that struck the Connecticut coast.

Stonington, suggest that the following plants are stalwarts in Connecticut's changing coastal arena: Eastern Red Cedar, Bayberry, Sassafras, Staghorn Sumac, Oak, Goldenrod (particularly Seaside Goldenrod, Aster(s), and Switchgrass. Clearly, conditions vary. While my backyard was flooded with salt water, it wasn't exposed to the direct sandblasting affects of high winds.

Regardless of how we regard the challenge of our changing coastal landscape, it is clear that the status quo is anything but static. It is not just nature that needs to be resilient; coastal residents need to consider their role in anticipating and accommodating the landscapes of the future



Photo by: Judy Preston

Many of our native plants provide multiple services - habitat and food for wildlife, including pollinators, the ability to flourish without inputs of environmentally costly nutrients, resistance to variable weather conditions, and especially, beauty.

Editor's Note: Judy Preston, an Old Saybrook resident, graciously offered the Conservation Commission this article. Judy is the Long Island Sound Study Connecticut Outreach Program Coordinator, and runs the Advanced Master Gardener Coastal Certificate Program.

Useful information

Yale University has released an app helping users to identify and learn more about what species of plants and animals they see in their local environment. It also helps users create personal lists of observations and contribute them to research and conservation efforts. The app builds on Yale's global database called Map of Life. Check out <http://www.infodocket.com/2015/05/12/science-reference-yale-university-releases-map-of-life-app-for-android-and-ios/>.

Yankee Magazine has published a list of New England's best nurseries: http://www.yankeemagazine.com/best-of-new-england/best-nurseries?trk_msg=S2R058EIQPI-4VAE8J5SFPSBA04&trk_contact=IL2MC3TPASBDGPGRCPVLATSSH8&utm_source=Lis-trak&utm_medium=Email&utm_term=http%3a%2f%2fwww.yankeemagazine.com%2fbest-of-new-england%2fbest-nurseries&utm_campaign=New+England+Minute&utm_content=04-25-2015

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