May Newsletter

The Floating Gardener

A Publication Provided by The Magothy River Association

It's May, it's May, the lusty month of May!

This time of year, our Chesapeake Bay watershed resembles Camelot in its perfection. Redbuds, dogwoods and azaleas are blooming up and down the riverbanks, chill weather is finally behind us and the color green is on display in every shade imaginable! If you are already a floating gardener, you may have noticed your emergent plants coming back to life. If you're new to the program, you'll soon be launching your own floating garden with its unique set of native plants from your pier or shoreline.

Welcome to the first issue of The Floating Gardener. This newsletter is designed to enhance your experience as a 'floating gardener' and also provide a forum for your feedback. It's a place to ask questions, share your observations, vent any frustrations and, last but not least, help to advance the knowledge about how floating gardens work. This is especially important, because these floating gardens are part of a research project to assess the impact of native emergent plants on water quality, the result of a collaboration between the Magothy River Association (MRA) and Anne Arundel Community College (AACC). Along with the benefits floating gardens provide, such as adding oxygen to the water, creating a habitat for local wildlife, and shoreline beautification, the information collected as these gardens grow will be used to understand how the introduction of emergent plants affects water quality & biodiversity in our local waterways at various salinities.

Your floating garden will consist of one or more varieties of ten possible native emergent plants especially selected for this project. An emergent plant is one which grows in water, but a large portion of their shoots, leaves or flowering structures grow above the water. As the natural shoreline in our area has been replaced by bulkheads and rip-rap, places in which emergent plants naturally grew are now scarce and their important contributions to the health of our rivers have disappeared along with them.

Your participation in the floating garden project helps to ensure that the rivers we cherish will persist, not for one "brief and shining moment", like Camelot, but continue to be special places to live and enjoy for generations to come. The following links you to the film, Floating Gardens of the Magothy: www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQMOzKG2LZI

Upcoming Events

May 10 - 16

Float & plant pick-up

The Providence Center, Arnold

June 13

Magothy River Day

Deep Creek Restaurant

10AM – 4PM

June 14

Red, White, Blue & Yellow Too!

Walk for Yellow Perch habitat conservation

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Emergent Botany 101

Michael Norman is coordinating plant selection and data collection at AACC and will highlight two plant varieties in each newsletter. If the plants in your set aren't covered in this issue, fear not! all ten varieties will be highlighted at some point throughout the summer. Meantime, if you want to investigate on your own, check out the following sites that were used as a references for this month's plant profiles.

http://plants.usda.gov/java/ & http://www.wildflower.org/explore

1. photo by Michael Norman

Scientific name: *Hibiscus moscheutos*

Common names: Marsh Mallow, Crimsoned eyed Rose Mallow, Marsh Hibiscus

Marsh hibiscus is an obligate wetland plant that grows in areas of regular inundation or along waterways at or near the high tide mark. It prefers full sun and can tolerate a wide range of salinities from 0 – 15 ppt. These herbaceous perennial plants can grow 4 -7 feet in height with numerous semi-woody stems arising from a central base. Although white with a crimson center is the most common color of the flower it also blooms in varying shades of pink and red. The flowers, highly sought after by the ruby throated humming bird, are very showy with a beautiful dark center, interesting reproductive parts and a wide 4 – 10" bloom. Bloom time for marsh hibiscus is late summer; although a bloom only lasts one day the plant is putting on a nice display all the way until fall. Flowers are replaced by large loculicidal capsules that contain numerous seed and are persistent on the plant throughout the winter giving this plant an interesting winter form. Once the capsules dry, they open up to provide seeds for songbirds throughout the fall and winter months.

2. Photo by Michael Norman

Scientific name: *Iris versicolor*

Common Names: Blue-water iris, blue flag, northern blue flag.

The blue water Iris is a northeastern native with graceful sword-like leaves that grow 2 – 3 feet from a basal rhizome. It prefers sun to part shade and grows best in moist to wet rich soils. However, Blue water iris is highly adaptable and can be easily established in moist garden soils. Found mostly in freshwater systems like swamps and tidal headwater areas this plant can tolerate inundation and some salinity infrequently throughout the season. The bloom time for Iris is in early May and can last as late as July. Beautiful blue violet flowers with yellow streaked sepals arise from sturdy stalks for a showy display in the spring. This plant produces a 2 – 3" capsule and will self-seed and spread by rhizome. The rhizome and rootstock of blue water iris is considered poisonous, however early colonists learned to use the plant for medicinal purposes.

Coming Next Month:

Project History and SAV's (submerged aquatic vegetation)
Emergent Botany (continued)
Gardener's Forum