



Embracing Chaos

By Rebecca Cannaday, Certified Pollinator Steward and Bee Friendly Gardening Ambassador



Like many people, I started my pollinator gardening journey with first focusing on nectar plants, then moving on to natives, and now planting a variety of host plants. I'm also working to remove the invasive plants in the wooded area on my property. As you can guess, it's been a journey of growing and learning. As of right now, I have four different areas on my property where I'm planting for pollinators.

I started my first garden by planning out plants that bloom in different seasons: ninebark, golden alexander, red beebalm, wild bergamot, blue-stemmed goldenrod, and a variety of

asters. Little did I know about how these different aggressive plants would play out. My asters have happily seeded my yard, I have bergamot growing in places I didn't plant it, and the golden alexanders are definitely spreading. I've decided to see how it plays out.

My next project is definitely still in progress. I'm working to rewild the hillside near the front of our property. I started with some milkweed and goldenrod, and it's grown into a full project with different host and nectar plants, as well as shrubberies and grasses. I want the plants to spread in this area, so I have deliberately chosen some aggressive plants here. We do have clay soil and heavy deer pressure, so I choose my plants based on these factors. I've used different methods to kill the grass, from cardboard mulching to killing an area with plastic. For this sunny area, killing the yard with plastic has been the most effective.



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I decided to try to create planned and organized beds with my third project on the side of the house. This time, I used heuchera, wild blue phlox, wild ginger, Appalachian sedge and Pennsylvania sedge, and Virginia bluebells. Everything is spreading a bit, but the heuchera border makes it seem a bit more planned. I wanted this as a show bed so people visiting my house could see that native beds do not have to be completely wild places.

My newest project is creating wildlife ponds. While I had bird baths and bee waterers, I wanted to create a place for the frogs in my yard. I started with a smaller pond where you can find blue flag irises, arrowhead, and blue pickerel weed, as well as some water lilies. We just dug out our newest pond, and I've got water lilies, blue flag irises, cardinal flowers, and much more on order. This is definitely a learning process, as I see what grows well, what struggles, and how I can avoid the deer from eating the pond plants. The book *Building Natural Ponds* by John Wilder has been immensely helpful.

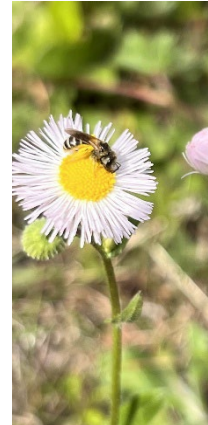


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Lastly, we are working hard to remove the invasive plants from our property. We are working with our neighbors to kill the trees of heaven, which we treat via the hack and squirt method each fall. It is always exciting to see more of those trees dead. We are also dealing with privet, wild berry, and Japanese honeysuckle. We are killing areas slowly by first cutting them back and then mowing them down and carefully treating them with herbicide, as we don't want to kill the numerous black cherries, oaks, and inkberries in the wooded area. I've also convinced my husband to allow the fleabanes to grow in the yard, which are fun native volunteers. I am lucky to have someone that supports me in this process of rewilding our yard, though we have had to compromise and leave some yard so we have a place to play outdoor games.



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