

GARDEN CLUB ENCOURAGES NATIVES IN THE GARDEN RECOMMENDS TWO BOOKS

“Wildness...refers to the freedom of living things to exist and evolve without our complete control. Just as we cherish our own autonomy, celebrating autonomy in the life of our gardens is a responsible step toward integrating the human community into an enlightened environmental model. We can begin simply, by allowing a seed to germinate.”

Rick Darke, in “What is Wild”, The American Gardener, January/February 2010.

The Sebascodegan Garden Club encourages use of native plants in Harpswell gardens. What are these “native” plants that arrive unbidden in our gardens and thrive in Maine landscapes? Actually they are NOT “newcomers”, but evolved here over thousands of years in the many natural communities of Maine. Only in the past few hundred years have settlers brought plants from their homes overseas. Some of these have become “naturalized” here where they have little to keep them in check – like the purple loosestrife that is a serious threat to marsh ecosystems. Such a plant is then labeled “invasive” and are definitely not encouraged. So your local natives are not the ones that came over on the Mayflower and settled in Maine. They are the plants that for centuries evolved with the landscape of receding glaciers. They developed defenses against marauding insects (thus do not require damaging pesticides to protect them). The natural communities they formed harbored wildlife in balanced ecosystems. They fed and clothed the native human populations. At the edges they formed estuaries that were and still are the nurseries of the sea.

Two books were published this year just in time for planning a native plant garden. *“Natural Landscapes of Maine, a Guide to Natural Communities and Ecosystems”* by Susan Gawler and Andrew Cutko, (2010, Maine Natural Areas Program, 93 State House Station, Augusta, Maine 04333.) will enable a landowner to determine which of the 104 natural communities of Maine are present on his/her acreage. The book will guide you through a easily read keys and charts. Using the latest data from field work and past surveys, it is the most comprehensive tool for preserving Maine’s native landscapes. This is a book for people whose curiosity leads them to ask further questions about the nature of the piece of Maine they call their yard. In it they can find listed the typical plants for their area. These are the plants adapted through millennia to this kind of community. And these are the

plants that will thrive in the same communities of your yard. A page is devoted to each one of the 104 communities found in Maine. Included are location maps, descriptions, soil and site characteristics, conservation considerations, characteristic plants, and examples you can visit. One can only be enormously impressed with the variety of Maine's natural landscapes and, hopefully, will want to echo their beauty appropriately in their own gardens.

A practical guide for gardeners in choosing native plants is found in Maureen Heffernan's book, "Native Plants for your Maine Garden" (Downeast Books, 2010). The introductory section covers selection, planning, planting, and maintenance. Richly illustrated with excellent photographs, the next section covers native plants by type: groundcovers, perennials, vines, grasses, etc. Especially helpful are the lists of plants for special uses such as shade gardens, wetlands, attracting butterflies, repelling deer, etc. Heffernan is executive director of the Coastal Maine Botanical Garden where emphasis is on the use of native plants. Whether you are a botanist or a new gardener, you will enjoy using this book. For more information about the Sebascodogan Garden Club, call 729-9755 or 725-5083 or 725-4242.