

## Garden Wisdom for the New Year



Over the past year, our staff of writers has endeavored to enlighten readers on the issues that impact our environment. We have also offered many suggestions on how to enhance our landscapes to better meet the needs of essential pollinators, birds and other wildlife. We hope you have enjoyed reading about some of the wonderful plants that grow naturally in our area and that connect us to our region and its uniqueness.

Last March, we wrote about how and where beneficial insects spend the winter. From butterflies to bees, each species has unique physiology and strategies to help it cope with freezing temperatures. In April, we introduced readers to our wonderful spring ephemerals, plants whose flowers provide for our earliest pollinators. Ephemerals grow from perennial roots and remarkably, they flower and set seed all before our trees leaf out to shade the understory.

Our May column introduced us to the St Beetle, a beneficial insect with a voracious appetite for the Hemlock woolly adelgid, a pest that attacks Eastern Hemlock. This native evergreen has ecological value for cooling streams and providing habitat for many species. Without intervention, the woolly adelgid can kill great numbers of these valuable trees. The St Beetle is a natural and sustainable control method and a welcome alternative to spraying pesticides.

As temperatures announced the arrival of summer, our thoughts turned to the idea of creating a rain garden, the perfect solution for seasonally wet areas and ideal for capturing rain water to prevent runoff. Functional and aesthetically pleasing, many native species are adaptable to both wet and dry conditions. One such plant is Cardinal Flower, a gorgeous perennial favored by hummingbirds. By mid-summer, it was time to savor the abundance of fragrant blooms and the variety of species attracted to our pollinator gardens. Busy bees, butterflies, and dragonflies make our gardens come alive with activity.

The beauty of fall foliage brought to mind the critical importance of healthy forests, especially in the face of a changing climate. One serious threat to our trees are invasive vines and shrubs that have invaded our landscapes and forested areas. These thugs, without the natural controls present in their native lands, continue to displace the native trees and plants that are so essential to the forest ecosystem.

We wrapped up the year by dispelling some common garden myths. One such long-held belief is that goldenrod causes hay fever. Goldenrod pollen grains are large and cannot blow in the wind. Pollen is moved from flower to flower by bees and other pollinators. Another misconception is that all pesticides labelled as organic are safe. Pyrethrum, for example, while organic is very toxic to bees and other insects. All pesticides have risks so it is important to always read labels. And for accurate, science-based information, always seek out reputable sources. All these articles and more are posted on our website along with information on how to garden for wildlife.

In the coming year, we hope our readers will consider what is required of every landscape. First, a yard must help to **sequester carbon to curtail the effects of climate change**. That means reducing lawns, planting natives and preserving trees and forested areas. We must help to **manage our watershed**. All of us live on a watershed and it is incumbent upon us to protect it. Pesticides find their way into our water supply and should never be applied routinely where no problem exists or for aesthetic purposes. A yard must also **support the food web**. No longer is it enough for a plant to just look pretty. Plants must **function to support birds and other wildlife**. Finally, we have to **support our native pollinators** because animal pollination is crucial for the reproduction of most terrestrial plants including crops we value for food. (Cardinal Flower – Photo by Holly Kocet)