



Sweeps of broomstraw color some of the fields at Mason Farm.

PHOTO BY KEN MOORE

FLORA  
FROM PAGE 1

The one I believe is most commonly used for broom-making is old-field broomstraw, or broomsedge, *Andropogon virginicus*. We walked out into Wayne's front yard and discovered he had two different species right there. Wayne was disparaging of his front-yard broom because it wasn't as tall as what was growing in an adjacent field. I guessed that he had mowed his yard midway during the summer; which he acknowledged, and that accounted for his native broom grass being shorter than the unmowed near-field.

Broomstraw is a native grass, and native grasses generally grow actively during the warm months of the year. It is in sharp contrast to the popular lawn-turf exotic fescue, a cool-season grass, which prefers cooler growing conditions. Broomstraw begins to really express itself in the mid-summer and doesn't become noticeable until it begins to shoot up in August and September and sports those delicate plume-like seeds in October and November. If mowed in late summer; it never quite catches up with its unmowed neighbor. It is one of the pioneer native species to appear in an abandoned field and it can hold on for several

years before other perennials and shrubs and trees begin to move in, the classic "old-field succession" of ecology texts. Beginning in October and continuing well into the following springtime, broad sweeps of copper-reddish broomstraw across the native landscape are a beautiful sight to behold. Next time you are out walking, pause from time to time to discover subtle differences and be appreciative of the old-timers who utilized those wild grasses to keep clean their hearths and yards. I'm very proud of the broom I made under Wayne's tutelage, and I have it proudly displayed next to my back door.



From the mouths of babes, 1977

Dear reader, permit me the indulgence of sharing an old image from the Lauterer family album that speaks to our times. In this new year and new decade, who better than a wise 8-year-old to offer advice for the future? Back in 1977, I had just taught Selena how to ride her bike, a process with many ups and downs. As the little girl, scraped but happy, snuggled into bed with Max the Cat, she concluded drowsily, "Sometimes life is like learning to ride a bike — you just gotta keep pedaling — no matter what!" So Happy New Year, y'all — and keep on pedaling.



A THOUSAND WORDS  
BY JOCK LAUTERER

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