

Roadside Attractions Redux

JOHNNY RANDALL, NORTH CAROLINA BOTANICAL GARDEN

As the season wanes, many roadsides are becoming embroidered with our late-summer and fall wildflowers and native grass plumes. I am not speaking of scarlet California poppies, lavender Asian lespedeza and pompous pampas grass, but rather the vast group of native plants that remain from our once extensive Piedmont prairies, savannas and open woodlands. Our highways, and other managed rights-of-way, provided a fortuitous refugium for a suite of shade-intolerant herbaceous plants originally adapted to fire and grazing, where the bush-hog now serves as a barely adequate substitute.

Prior to European settlement, fire from lightning strikes, Native American burning practices and buffalo grazing shaped much of the Piedmont landscape. Evidence for this view of the Piedmont comes from the maps and writings of early explorers (and modern interpretation by insightful botanists). French cartographer Guillaume DeLisle, in his 1718 map, labeled much of the North Carolina Piedmont as “Grande Savane,” outlining a vast expanse of open grazing land. Naturalist and surveyor-general of North Carolina John Lawson wrote in his 1709 *A New Voyage to Carolina* that, “In February and March the inhabitants have a custom of burning the woods ... an annual custom of the Indians in their huntings, of setting the woods on fire many miles in extent.”



A soldier beetle flies among the bidens.

PHOTO BY KIRK ROSS



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A protected strip along Orange Grove Road

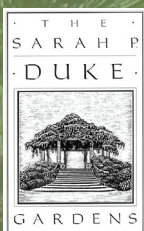
In approximately 1763, naturalist Mark Catesby noted in his journal that, “There are many spacious tracts of meadow-land ... burdened with grass six feet high,” and that, “The buffaloes ranged in droves feeding upon the open savannas morning and night.”

These early writings describe a Piedmont landscape completely different from the picture many of us have been given, of a continuous forest from the coast to the mountains.

In addition to admiring the striking assemblage of plants on prairie-like roadsides, we can actually create or encourage this landscape community on our own property. All you need do is locate a sunny area with generally harsh conditions! And fall is the best time to plant these beauties so that they can become established before they face their first sizzling and unpredictable summer. After establishment, these drought-adapted plants should not require watering.

Duke Gardens Fall Plant & Craft Sale

Saturday, Sept. 27
9am-2pm



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Asclepias tuberosa

PHOTO BY JOHNNY RANDALL

You may actually already have on your property a Piedmont prairie refugium in an open area that you've cared for with benign neglect. To encourage your Piedmont prairie-like vegetation, mow these sites annually, but do so before May 1 or after Aug. 1 in order to allow ground-nesting birds to complete their breeding cycle. You must also control for invasive exotic plants such as Asian lespedeza, tall fescue, Johnson grass and others.

To get a feel for the species mix and the required site conditions (aka, design guidelines), simply find a nice stretch of rural Piedmont roadside to admire or visit a local natural area that contains a regularly mown or grazed open meadow (not infested with fescue). Two local natural areas with prairie-like zones overseen by the Botanical Garden are the Mason Farm Biological Reserve and the Penny's Bend Nature Preserve, both open to the public. Check the Bo-

tanical Garden's webpage to determine when the next hike is scheduled and for general access information, or call the Totten Center reception desk.

Included in the list here are some typical species of the Piedmont prairie-like community that are available from many native plant nurseries. Please visit the Botanical Garden's webpage for our Recommended Plant Sources for Native Plants. Many of these plants are now available at our daily plant sale and even more will be offered at the Botanical Garden Annual Fall Plant Sale on Sept. 30.

Celebrate our past by imagining a buffalo herd thundering through a waist-high grass sward interwoven with asters, sunflowers, goldenrods and blazing stars. And let our natural history guide your fall plantings and the way you regard that patch of weeds within which resides the remains of our Piedmont prairies and savannas.



PHOTO BY JOHNNY RANDALL

Buckhorn Buttons

WILDFLOWERS

ASTERS (*Aster/Sympyotrichum grandiflorum*, *S. concolor* and *S. pilosum*)

BARBARA'S BUTTONS (*Marshallia obovata*)

BLACK-EYED SUSANS (*Rudbeckia fulgida* and *R. hirta*)

BLAZING STAR (*Liatris spicata*, *L. squarrosa*, and *L. pilosa*)

COLIC ROOT (*Aletris farinosa*)

CURLYHEADS (*Clematis ochroleulca*)

GOLDENRODS (*Solidago erecta*, *S. rugosa*, *S. pinetorum* and *S. odora*)

EASTERN INDIAN PAINTBRUSH (*Castilleja coccinea*)

LOBED COREOPSIS (*Coreopsis auriculata*)

MARYLAND GOLDEN-ASTER (*Chrysopsis mariana*)

MILKWEEDS (*Asclepias tuberosa* and *A. verticillata*)

PINK MILKWORT (*Polygala incarnata*)

ROSINWEED (*Silphium compositum*)

SUNFLOWER (*Helianthus atrorubens*)

THOROUGHWORTS (*Eupatorium rotundifolium* and *E. hyssopifolium*)

WILD QUININE (*Parthenium integrifolium*)

YELLOW-FRINGED ORCHID (*Platanthera ciliaris*)

YELLOW WILD INDIGO (*Baptisia tinctoria*)

GRASSES

BROOMSEGE (*Andropogon virginicus*)

GIANT PLUME GRASS (*Saccharum giganteum*)

INDIAN GRASS (*Sorghastrum nutans*)

LITTLE BLUESTEM (*Schizachyrium scoparium*)

SPLITBEARD BLUESTEM (*Andropogon ternarius*)

BIG BLUESTEM (*Andropogon gerardii*)



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