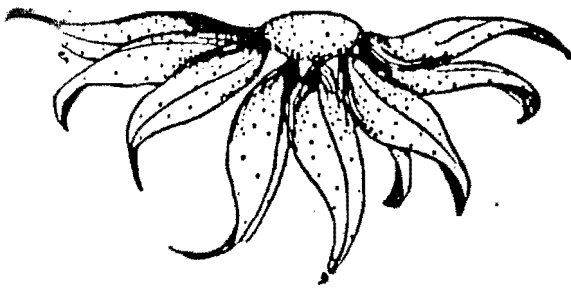


the wild ones



The Outside Story

"newsletter for natural landscapers

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Bayside, Wisconsin

Hi! Our second newsletter is coming out sooner than we expected. In it you will find the program calendar for now through February. Remember to clip and save--no postcards will be sent as reminders.

A special thanks to Liz Warner for the clever idea for our newsletter name and banner head.

This year's hot, dry summer is causing all of us much concern about providing enough water for our plants. How do we care for our wildlife gardens when we go on vacation?

Fortunately, nature has a solution to these problems. In the woodland environment, a layer of mulch provides a way of recycling nutrients conserving moisture, protecting roots from extremes in temperature. Before you go on vacation, put additional mulch on plants--often as much as four inches is required. Leaves and grass clipping are then enriching the soil, cutting down on garbage disposal problems and saving precious water.

Electric "bug-zappers" kill many beneficial insects, but don't bother mosquitoes which aren't attracted to light.

Habitat requirements for fireflies include tall grass, making the "no mow" section of your yard an ideal site for viewing these insects.

It's not too late to sign up for the Schlitz Audubon Center's 11th Annual Naturalized yard tour this Saturday, August 6, at 9:00 a.m. Lorrie Otto leads this bus tour to restored native yards in the area. Call 352-2885 to make a reservation.

A Wild Ones member, Ruth Grotenrath, passed away earlier this year. A memorial retrospective of her wonderful artwork is now on display at the Cudahy Gallery, Milwaukee Art Museum, 750 N. Lincoln Memorial Drive, through August 21.

Home on the Range Still Holds

My vote for Couple of the Season—and maybe for the whole year—goes to Walter and Nancy Stewart, the Potomac homeowners who are engaging in the practice of “meadow gardening” and driving their neighbors bonkers. Individualism isn’t dead after all.

According to the story in yesterday’s Washington Post by reporter Jo-Ann Armao, the Stewarts bought their home in Potomac three years ago for \$440,000. Walter Stewart is a research scientist at the National Institutes of Health who has made news in the past for his efforts to fight misconduct in science. Nancy Stewart is a lawyer with the U.S. Justice Department. One of the delightful aspects of this story was the discovery that you don’t have to be a starving college student anymore to be a nonconformist. Here are two people who haven’t been co-opted entirely and who’ve made a decent living. It’s nice to know that’s possible.

You’d think that an NIH scientist and a government lawyer would fit perfectly into a swank Potomac subdivision, but underneath their yuppie credentials beat the hearts of rebels. And the Stewarts have committed the one act of rebellion that residents of the suburbs cannot stand: They don’t cut their lawn.

Folks in the suburbs will forgive a lot in their neighbors—loutish behavior toward children, unleashed dogs, motorcycles, loud disputes in driveways and terrible taste in landscaping schemes—but lawns are an entirely different matter. Lawns simply must be mowed. And there is a very good reason for this: Lawns show. And therefore, unlike bloody indoor battles between spouses, the state of neighbors’ lawns affects everyone else’s visual pleasure.

To put it more bluntly, they affect everyone else’s fortunes, because lawns affect property values. When property values are at stake, neighbors think nothing of trying to impose their upscale notions of suburban standards on those few folks out there who are brave enough to try to liberate themselves from the tyranny of suburban chores. And as property values continue to go through the roof around here, we are going to be hearing more and more stories about property values vs. property rights.

The Stewarts traded in lawn mowing for the more natural approach of land management called meadow gardening. That’s a nice way of saying that they

turned their lawn into a meadow, full of wildflowers and tall grasses and weeds and everything else that can take root in nature’s landscaping plans. And of course, meadows make wonderful hiding and nesting places for snakes and field mice and lots of other small animals that have been driven into ecological exile by the construction boom that has ravaged the countryside.

Meadow gardening is nothing new. Thalassa Cruso, an Englishwoman who has become one of America’s most celebrated gardeners, wrote glowingly of one of her own country lawns that she converted into a meadow. “I let this grass grow high and tall and full of the wildflowers of the hedgerows, and it looks like a fine sweep of herbaceous wild plants The seeded grasses and the tall ox-eye daisies nodding in the wind are restful and a pleasure to the eye.”

In Potomac, however, a meadow is not considered a pleasure to the eye, it is considered an eyesore. The Stewarts got their first taste of Suburban Standards two years ago when they arrived home with their children and found a snooty note in their mailbox that said: “Please, cut your lawn. It’s a disgrace to the entire neighborhood.” Whoever wrote it didn’t have the guts to sign it or to approach the couple in a neighborly manner to discuss the problem. This is the way guerrilla warfare is conducted in the suburbs: Stuffing anonymous notes in mailboxes.

The Stewarts responded with a five-page environmental-impact statement to their neighbors that said, in effect, their meadow was a lot healthier way to go than the chemically soaked lawns all around them. Somebody apparently complained to the county, which ordered the Stewarts to mow the lawn and cited a weed law of dubious legal standing, which the Stewarts have vowed to challenge. They say the weeds pose no danger to anyone and that Montgomery County can’t tell them what their property ought to look like.

Thus, the classic battle lines have been drawn between government and the individual, and so far, the individuals are winning. In a display of real statesmanship, the county has delayed taking the case to trial, and the County Council is going to look at some amendments that might allow alternative life styles in suburban laws.

The Stewarts are standing up for the meadow garden, and in so doing they are protecting a lot of their right to enjoy wildflowers growing in the wind.

Washington Post
6/17/88

WEED ALL ABOUT IT! NEIGHBORS VOW LAWN WAR AFTER A SUBURBAN COUPLE SAYS, 'HELL NO, WE WON'T MOW'



"There's beauty to a lawn," says Walter Stewart (with wife Nancy), "but there are aesthetic values on the other side too."

Walter and Nancy Stewart call the seven acres of grass, weeds and wildflowers surrounding their redbrick colonial home in Potomac, Md., a "meadow garden." Their neighbors in the upscale Washington suburb, however, say it's a jungle out there, and they want the Stewarts to cut it.

When the Stewarts—he's a research scientist, she's a Justice Department lawyer—bought their \$440,000 home three years ago, they were all for lawn order and had no intention of becoming grass-roots rebels. But their mower kept breaking down. So, abandoning their seedling rivalry and deciding that mower is less, they let the lawn revert to a natural state.

As the grass began to grow, the neighbors began to crab. Some lawn

ranger slipped an anonymous note in the Stewarts' mailbox: "Please cut your lawn. It's a disgrace to the entire neighborhood." The Stewarts responded by circulating a five-page reply on the environmental benefits of their meadow, which requires no weed killers or insecticides.

Unimpressed, the neighbors complained to local officials. In May of 1987, Montgomery County cited the Stewarts for violating an ordinance prohibiting home owners from allowing grass and weeds to grow more than 12 inches high. The Stewarts sent around another letter, warning that if forced to destroy the meadow, they would consider other uses for the land, such as turning it into an enormous pumpkin patch.

For now, the case is lying fallow while the county reviews its regulations. The Stewarts, meanwhile, enjoy walking through the meadow with their children, Andrea, 6, Adam, 3, and Kirsten, 2. "When you mow, you deprive a whole bunch of birds and small wildlife of places to live and eat," says Walter. Adds Nancy: "Andrea said she realized why we had bunny rabbits on our property and her friends didn't—the bunnies have a place to live here."

Neighbor Robert Droege demurs. "It's not just a question of the environment," he says. "It reflects on the person in the house. It's like a matter of personal hygiene." Clearly, the seeds of discord have taken root in Potomac, though the courts may yet decide that it's all mulch ado about nothing. □



The Wild One's Calendar

All meetings are held on the second Saturday of each month at 9:30 a.m. at the Schlitz Audubon Center. (352-2885)

- August 13 - Help Me Day. We'll choose several homes to visit from members present at meeting. Get practical suggestions for your yard.
- September 10 - Schomer Lichtner's Yard. Lorrie Otto will be our guide to show us the special garden she designed this year.
- October 8 - Seed Gathering. Hopefully, we'll car pool to Wehr Nature Center's prairie. The drought has taken a toll on seed production. Members only.
- November 12 - Surprise Natural Landscaping Lecture. Come and hear our to-be-announced speaker.
- December 10 - Holiday Gathering. We'll see Nan Cheney's Madison yard which we visited on our July tour, on a cable videotape from the program Earthcare. Come directly to Rae Sweet's home at 8635 N. Fielding Road, Bayside. Members only.
- January 14 - An Award-winning Designer. Hear Judy Stark tell about how she uses native plants in her professional landscaping work.
- February 13 - Natural Landscaping Seminar. This workshop will begin on Friday night (the 12th). More information.

An excellent two-day workshop will be held September 17 and 18 at Riveredge Nature Center, Newburg, Wisconsin. A varied program emphasizing outdoor experiences and participatory learning is planned. To attend one or two days, call or write: Riveredge Nature Center, P.O. Box 26, Newburg, 53060 (414) 931-8095.

Watch Earthcare on Monday evenings at 7:30 on Viacom Cable 9B. The same program repeats for an entire month.