



# Kansas Native Plant Society

## Winter Newsletter



Volume 31 Number 1  
January 2009

### Plan to Grow Prairie Larkspur, Kansas Wildflower of the Year

by Ken O'Dell

In June of 2008, the Virginia Native Plant Society visited the Overland Park Arboretum and Botanical Garden in Johnson County on their trip West. At that time, we still had some Prairie Larkspur (*Delphinium carolinianum* ssp. *virescens*), which also has the common name of Plains Larkspur, blooming at the Arboretum, with nice, clean, attractive flowers. The visiting group was thrilled to see them growing in and around a cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) glade on rather rocky and quite poor soil. Sharing the Prairie Larkspur with our Virginia visitors was especially appropriate since this species has been named Wildflower of the Year for 2009 by the Kansas Associated Garden Clubs and Kansas Native Plant Society. At the Overland Park Arboretum in northeast Kansas, the majority of the Prairie Larkspur are growing in more dappled shade than sun. Prairie Larkspur is a native perennial that can be found in most counties in Kansas.



Prairie Larkspur  
*Delphinium carolinianum*  
photo by Mike Haddock

In Miami County where I live, we find Prairie Larkspur along some unmowed roadsides of gravel roads. These plants send up spikes bearing anywhere from a few to as many as 40 or 50 beautiful white to off-white flowers in late May and June. The off-white color may be because the individual flower has been open a while. The flower spikes are on top of 18 inch to 30 inch tall stems. You will probably see a small brown spot on the white flower petals. I have been studying native orchids the past few years, and looking at one flower at a time on the flowering spikes of the Prairie Larkspur, reminds me of orchid flowers. The Prairie Larkspur even has the traditional orchid lip. The leaves are medium green in color and of a thin lacy shape. The leaves alone are reason enough to grow this

plant in your garden.

Larkspur can be started either from seed or cuttings. *Delphinium* seed is easy to collect and easy to grow. If you have a place where you have permission to collect seed, watch carefully and when the seed heads start to turn to a darker color, pick off a few seed from several plants scattered out over a large area. The seed are usually ripe the end of June or in July. I remove any dried flower parts, shake the seed

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The Kansas Native Plant Society Newsletter is printed four times a year: Winter (January), Spring (April), Summer (July), Fall (October). The deadline for submitted material is the 5th of December, March, June and September.



The mission of the Kansas Native Plant Society is to encourage

awareness and appreciation of the native plants of Kansas in their habitats and in our landscapes by promoting education, stewardship, and scientific knowledge.

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## KNPS President's Message

by Michael Heffron

“Where, oh where, have the wildflowers gone?” What does a wildflower enthusiast do when nature has temporarily hidden her precious botanical creatures? That is quite a dilemma for those of us who are captivated by the native plants of Kansas and want to continue going outside and enjoying their blooming-beauty year around. Unfortunately, nature’s seasonal cycles will not allow us to do that. However, all is not lost! There are several ways throughout “the winter” that you can continue enjoying your floral friends at home until they begin showing their green foliage and colorful flowers again in the spring.

Here are some suggestions: Winter is a great time to curl up in a cozy chair with your favorite wildflower field guides. Enjoy the beautiful photos that other devoted wildflower lovers have taken throughout the state over the years. Learn as much as you can about your favorite plants. Learn their scientific names, their families, their habitats, their nutritional needs, etc. The more that you know about each plant, the more you will enjoy it, and the more you can help others enjoy it.

You can also prepare for the upcoming spring wildflower season by placing the wildflower tours that you plan on attending on your 2009 calendar. That way you won’t forget to attend them because

they snuck up on you and were over before you realized it. The list of 2009 events in this newsletter and in your 2008 KNPS Newsletters will help you with your tour schedule. And while you have your newsletters out, you can read them again and revisit all of the fun that you experienced during the 2008 wildflower season. This may also have the added benefit of getting you even more excited about the spring floral excitement that will be here before you know it. What a multiple blessing!

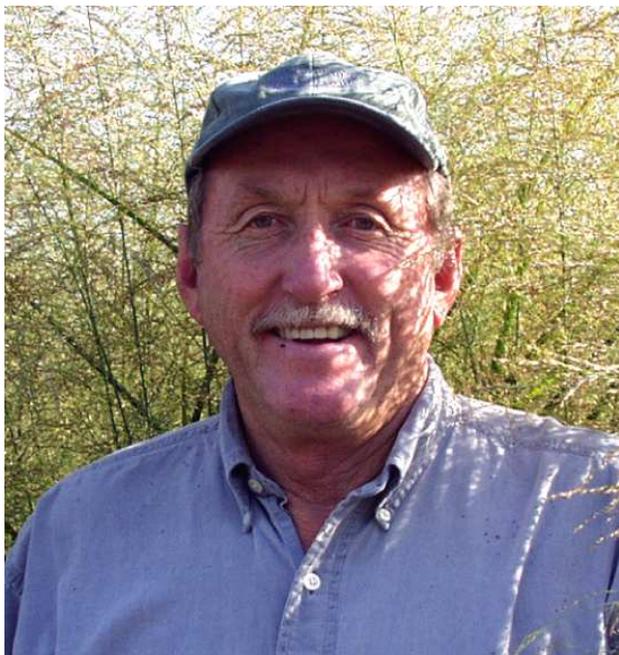
Although the official holiday season has passed, January is still a great time to give a KNPS membership to an interested friend or loved one. That may be the only impetus they need to get involved in our organization and begin enjoying and contributing to our society’s mission. Also, don’t forget to bring them with you to the wildflower tours you have scheduled on your calendar!

As I finish this message I can’t help but visualize my first glimpse of that first blooming wildflower on that first day of my personal spring wildflower season. I never know exactly when that moment will be, but I do know that it will make me feel very warm and back at home. I am looking forward to also seeing you in the spring. And remember, be prepared for that special moment when your personal spring wildflower season unexpectedly begins.



## Meet the Board

Interview with Ken O'Dell



Ken O'Dell

**1. Where are you from, where do you live, what do you do for a living?** I was born in Alberta, Canada. My Great-grandfather came to the state of Kansas in 1861, and thru other circumstances I ended up at the age of 13 starting high school in the state of Missouri. For many years, I owned a wholesale nursery where I grew outdoor trees, shrubs, perennials and native plants. I am now retired.

**2. How did you become interested in wildflowers and other native plants?** I was fortunate as a youngster to have a mentor in high school that I worked for who was an outdoor person, and he taught me about native plants, wild animals, and conservation in general.

**3. What are some of your favorite native plants and why?** That would depend on the time of the year. I spend many hours walking through the prairie, hay fields and wooded areas. In October, it might be a Gentian blooming with coppery-blue flowers. In May, it might be a Birdsfoot Violet. In June, it would be a Yellow Star Grass and twenty feet past that, it would be a Prairie Phlox. I enjoy the large number of

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## Meet the Board

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perennial sunflowers in August and September, and I like to look at the Goldenrods standing tall and just as proud. I like to walk through the fields in winter and see what the plants look like. The woodland wildflowers we have in Eastern Kansas are the same as the ones I knew in Missouri, and I get the same thrill when I see them in late April and May. Native plants are my favorite plants.

**4. What is your favorite natural area in the state and why?** It is the Overland Park Arboretum and the 600 acres associated with the Arboretum. Most of the wooded area has been left natural. I have been a long time volunteer at the arboretum and I feel fortunate that I have that area to explore and study native plants. The Baker Wetlands just south of Lawrence are also very intriguing and a close enough one hour drive for me. I want to

study wetlands and learn more about the natives that grow in them.

**5. What do you like best about the organization?** The possibilities that exist to encourage others to look at native plants and for me to learn more about natives. There are thousands of native plants that I will never know about. The KNPS gets me interested in certain species, and I dig into the books and read about them. We have hoary puccoon *Lithospermum canescens* growing native on our farm, and I have studied this species for years. When fringed puccoon (aka fringed gromwell) *Lithospermum incisum* was featured in our KNPS newsletter, I started reading about it and I got a few plants from another member, Jeff Hansen, and I planted them in pots and will start growing them around our farm in Miami County and this will afford the possibility of studying this species of plants. I want to learn about their propagation habits and their root systems and why they are so resigned to their position as natives.

### Interview with Susan Reimer



Susan Reimer

**1. Where are you from, where do you live, what do you do for a living?** I am a native Kansan who grew up on a farm south of McPherson. I met and married my late husband, Keith, while we were both students at Bethel College in North Newton, KS. We lived in the Chicago area eight years while Keith was getting his MD-PhD and then doing a residency in Pathology at Northwestern Medical Center. While he was in school, I worked as a research technician in a laboratory at Northwestern. After we adopted our son, I stopped working and didn't resume until Kerry was older and we had moved to North Carolina where Keith was a cardiac pathologist and heart researcher at Duke University Medical Center. I was a research technician in the Melanoma Lab at Duke, and

stopped working when our hobby of raising birds became too time consuming. We lived in the woods on 7 acres in NC for twenty-seven years before Keith became ill and died. After his death six years ago, I moved back to Kansas with Solomon, my African Grey parrot, to the same farmhouse that my grandparents had built.

**2. How did you become interested in wildflowers and other native plants?** When I returned to Kansas, my goal was to see as much of Kansas as I could. Because I have always loved the outdoors, I went to Maxwell Wildlife Refuge, Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, Chase-Butler Co. Wildflower Tour, Konza Prairie Wildflower Tour, and more. In late June of my first year back, I saw an ad for 160 acres of native prairie bordering Maxwell Wildlife Refuge for sale. My two brothers and I went to look at it for fun. It was hilly, green, and beautiful with a stream and a spring. I said to my brothers "If only we could see the buffalo".... and here they came over the hill! Because Keith and I had always supported land and wildlife conservation and I love prairie, I bought "Buffalo Hill" with the specific goal of preserving it. I invited Dwight Platt, my former biology professor from Bethel, to come see my prairie. He brought Brad Guhr and Lorna Harder with him, and that was when I decided to learn to identify my wildflowers and when "Buffalo Hill" became part of Dyck Arboretum's Prairie Window Project. Since then I have collected and cleaned seed from Buffalo Hill and other surrounding prairies for Dyck Arboretum's prairie restoration.

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## Meet the Board

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**3. What are some of your favorite native plants and why?** It is difficult to choose a favorite native plant, but the milkweeds rank high on my list. It started the first summer I collected seed at Buffalo Hill when Brad showed me a clasping milkweed *Asclepias amplexicaulis* with young pods and asked me to collect the seed. Buffalo Hill is 25 miles from my home, and I was going there several times a week, not knowing when they would be ready. I finally made nylon net bags to put over the pods that seemed to take forever to ripen. I've identified nine species of *Asclepias* at Buffalo Hill and am always trying to find more.

**4. What is your favorite natural area in the state and why?** I go shark tooth hunting, especially in western Kansas, and enjoy Monument Rocks where I saw Prince's plume blooming. But my favorite places are Maxwell Wildlife Refuge with the bison tours on the prairie and hiking at the Konza Prairie.

**5. What do you like best about the organization?** I joined KNPS soon after I became involved with Dyck Arboretum and found the newsletter to be great in giving information on the various wildflower tours around the state. Wildflower tours were the only thing I attended until the 2007 fall Wildflower Weekend in Hutchinson where the group of people and the outings made me want to take a more active part.



## Prairie Landscaping

by Jeff Hansen

**Landscaping with Chokecherry.** Here it is the middle of winter, and landscaping is probably not on anyone's mind. But now is the time when I appreciate our trees and shrubs the most. I love their winter form. One of the shrubs I love most is the chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*). In the wild, they are often found growing as an understory shrub in woods, at woodland edges, or found growing in fence lines. They are found across the entire state, proving that they can withstand a variety of conditions.

The plants reproduce by seed and vegetatively by suckering. Suckering plants basically spread by underground stems known as rhizomes. By suckering, one plant can grow into an extensive thicket. Their branches are a purplish-gray and are covered with conspicuous lenticels. By definition, a lenticel is a corky pore or narrow line found on the surface of the stems of woody plants that allow the interchange of gases between the interior tissue and the surrounding air. The color of the bark along with the texture and color of the lenticels makes for an interesting winter pattern.

The foliage is glossy and attractive. It turns a nice orange-red in the fall. Early in the spring, the plants are covered with clusters of white flowers. They attract tons of pollinators. If they are growing in full sun, they tend to produce bumper crops of purplish-black fruit. The fruit is very popular with the birds. If you want to plant a native shrub to feed the birds, chokecherry would be my first choice. I think it's a great alternative to the invasive Amur honeysuckle (*Lonicera mackii*).



Choke Cherry Blossoms

Sheri Hagwood @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database



Choke Cherry Branch showing lenticels  
photo by Jeff Hansen

Another benefit is the plant's fruit that is edible to humans. Now you are thinking, with the word "choke" as part of the name, it can't be too palatable. The "choke" prefix comes from the fact that the fruits make your mouth pucker. But once you've eaten a few and your palate is acclimated, they are quite juicy and tasty. The flavor though really comes out when you cook them and extract the juice. The juice can be used for making jams and jellies.

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## Prairie Landscaping

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This past spring I extracted juice from some of my fruits and added sugar to make a most delicious syrup. I added it to plain yogurt and ate it on waffles. It has the most distinct flavor and is incredibly delicious. If you are feeling industrious, you can even make wine from them. My mom, who lives in SD, picks chokecherries every year for wine making and jelly making.

Picking chokecherries is not labor intensive. Because the fruits grow in clusters, they can be stripped off quickly. The biggest problem with picking them is getting them before the birds eat them.

I planted a living fence of chokecherries in my yard. I started by cutting small suckers from wild shrubs and planting them in the fall/winter. Within three year I had a nice thicket of chokecherries. They can also be obtained from the Kansas Forest Service.

You may also want to check with your local nursery. Be sure to mention you want

**chokecherry** (*Prunus virginia*) and **not chokeberry** (*Aronia genus*).

From my experience, chokecherry is the perfect shrub for the home landscape. It's

attractive year round; it's good for wildlife; and it produces edible fruit. What more could you want? It will produce fruit within three years of planting. The secret to good fruit production is to plant it where it will get full sun.



Choke Cherry  
c/o Tim Dring, USDA NRCS



## Book Review

by Nancy Coombs

### ***Bringing Nature Home: How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens*** by Douglas W. Tallamy (Timber Press, 2007; 288 pages)

Douglas Tallamy is professor and chair of the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware. *Bringing Nature Home* is a book to study, full of fascinating native plant information with excellent photos of various native creatures supported by those plants.

This book, now in its second printing, presents a deceptively simple thesis: habitat specific co-evolution of plants and pollinators is the basis of regional biodiversity. His research shows how native insects and native plants are interdependent, and how native animal populations are only as diverse as the native plants that sustain them. (think tropics, for example). This concept seems so simple, so obvious. Yet, from most commercial garden centers, imported plants (with accompanying alien insects or diseases) are promoted and sold without consideration for our native insects, birds, or larger animals. Indeed, a variety of commercial interests offer pesticides and herbicides to "control" pesky creatures. Such practices raise the question of how expansive lawns needing mowing, spraying, and watering came to dominate garden culture in the first place.

What is missing in the popular mind is the

understanding that native flora and fauna have evolved together over eons and are therefore dependent upon each other for survival. It is true that some alien plants are used by some native fauna, but Tallamy's research shows that such use is not only minimal but can also be harmful. Most of those plants do not support native fauna, and they often escape into the countryside as do the exotic fauna that arrive with them. Witness our own problems with garlic mustard, honeysuckle, multi-flora rose, and Japanese beetles, to mention only a few.

In much of our country, areas of natural habitat are in decline. A central focus of the book is to impress upon suburban gardeners how they may help reverse this trend. To this end, the 14 chapters offer practical research-based topics such as: "Why Can't Insects Eat Alien Plants?" "What is Native and What Is Not?" and "Creating Balanced Communities." Of special interest to me is the chapter "What Does Bird Food Look Like?" which is replete with basic information and splendid photographs of specific arthropods (both herbivores and predators) and the native plants they must have to exist.

Finally, the book includes three useful appendices with information on desirable native plants for wildlife, charts of host plants for Lepidoptera, and graphs of experimental evidence comparing use of native and alien plants by insects. For me, reading this book was more like having a personal, informative conversation with the author. It is a conversation that will continue.

## **Kansas Area Native Plant Wildflower Events**

Information provided by [Kansas Native Plant Society](http://www.kansasnativeplantsociety.org). Email: [email@KSNPS.org]. Website: [www.kansasnativeplantsociety.org](http://www.kansasnativeplantsociety.org). Visit our website for more events. Please share this information and contact us about additional events to note. **Sturdy shoes, long pants, insect repellent, sunscreen, hat and water** recommended for outdoor events.

### ***2008 Events - Mark your calendar now and plan to attend these fabulous happenings!***

 **January 17:** [Kansas Native Plant Society](http://www.kansasnativeplantsociety.org) Winter Board Meeting in Abilene, KS. Meet at the Kirby House Restaurant at 11am to eat; we're ordering from the menu. The meeting begins at noon. Our snow date is January 24. [email@KSNPS.org] (785) 864-3453

**January 17:** Volunteers are needed for prairie maintenance and preservation projects. The Grassland Heritage Foundation Groundhogs meet on the third Saturday of every month except December. [www.grasslandheritage.org]. Wear appropriate clothing. No special skills or tools needed. For details, please contact Frank Norman, [Kansas Native Plant Society](http://www.kansasnativeplantsociety.org) Board Member [fjnorman@sunflower.com] (785) 887-6775 (home) or (785) 691-9748 (cell).

**January 25:** Kaw Valley Eagles Day in Lawrence, KS. Celebrate the return of the eagles and learn about the environment, 10am-4pm. Programs on area Bald eagles and other wildlife. Exhibitors will offer educational resources related to nature, sponsored by the Jayhawk Audubon Society. Location: Free State High School, 1 block north of 6th & Wakarusa. [eishaw@ku.edu] (785) 842-0475

**February 17:** 7:30pm Program at the Great Plains Nature Center in Wichita, KS: The Natural History of the Lewis and Clark Expedition by Phil Thomas, Professor of History, WSU (316) 683-5499

**March 14:** Oak Park Cleanup, 9am; help keep this priceless Wichita, KS birding spot litter-free. Meet by the north pond, and bring gloves. Trash bags and other equipment will be provided. Leader: Rosa McHenry [mchenryphoto@sbcglobal.net] (316) 263-4042

**April 4:** Spring Cleanup at Chaplin Nature Center near Arkansas City, KS, 10am-3pm; volunteer to help get CNC in shape with building cleanup or trail maintenance. Choose either light or heavy workloads. Leader: Shawn Silliman [cnc@wichitaudubon.org] (620) 442-4133

**April 12:** Green Landscape Techniques for the Homeowner Class at Prairie Park Nature Center in Lawrence, KS, 2-3pm. Learn to use safer, healthier techniques for creating a great landscape in your yard. Selecting appropriate plants and using safer chemicals for controlling herbicides and pesticides will be the focus of this class. Class is open to ages: 18 and older, fee: \$3. Registration is limited to 40 attendees. (785) 832-7980

**April 18th & 25th:** Missouri Prairie Foundation Spring Plant Sales 7am - noon. Location: City Market, 5th & Walnut, Kansas City, MO. [http://www.moprairie.org] (888) 843-6739

 **April 18:** [Kansas Native Plant Society](http://www.kansasnativeplantsociety.org) Spring Board Meeting and Outing at the Overland Park Arboretum. Our meeting will be in the classroom, 10am to 1pm. We plan to eat while we are wrapping up our business; bring your own lunch. We will tour the diverse grounds with Ken O'Dell and Lynda Ochs of the Arboretum, 1:30-4:30pm. We will hear about the prairie restoration project and other ongoing work. The Arboretum address is 8909 W. 179th St., Overland Park, KS. [email@KSNPS.org] (785) 864-3453

**April 24-26:** Wings N Wetlands Weekend in Great Bend, KS. Wildlife extravaganza at Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge; explore birds, reptiles, mammals & wildflowers! Registration fees will be announced soon. Reservations are strongly recommended; please contact The Nature Conservancy Kansas Chapter for more information [kansas@tnc.org] (785) 233-4400.

**April 26:** Gardening for Wildlife Class at Prairie Park Nature Center in Lawrence, KS, 2-3pm. Create a mini-wildlife sanctuary in your own yard using plants designed to provide food and cover for wildlife. Learn about including the right food plants, nesting structures and hiding places. Class is open to ages: 18 and older, fee: \$3. Registration is limited to 40 attendees. (785) 832-7980

**May 3:** Gardening for Kids: Attracting Butterflies and Little Pollinators Class at Prairie Park Nature Center in Lawrence, KS, 2-3pm. Kids can enjoy getting their hands in the dirt and creating a wildlife garden. Class includes instruction on preparing the soil, garden plans and an assortment of seeds and live plants to start a butterfly garden. Class is open to ages: 7 to 14, fee: \$10. Registration is limited to 25 attendees. (785) 832-7980

**May 3-4:** Annual Powell Gardens Spring Plant Sale. Unique selection of annuals, perennials, trees and shrubs – including great native plants and specialties grown only in the beautiful setting of Powell Gardens. Friday Member Preview, 5-7 pm. Becky Homan, retired garden editor of the St. Louis Post Dispatch, will sign her new book, "The Missouri Gardener's Companion, An Insider's Guide to Gardening in the Show-Me State." Directions: 30 miles east of Kansas City on Highway 50, Kingsville, Mo. Fee for non-members. [www.powellgardens.org] (816)697-2600

**May 7-11:** Flora Kansas: Great Plains Plant Bazaar at Dyck Arboretum of the Plains, Hesston, KS. This plant sale features hard-to-find native perennials plus classes and tours. Kansas Native Plant Society co-sponsors Dyck Arboretum events. Members only sale dates May 8-9; 10% members discount on all days. Admission charge is by donation. [arboretum@Hesston.edu] (620) 327-8127

 **May 9:** Barber County Wildflower Tour. Meet at the Medicine Lodge High School, 8:30am. Enjoy continental breakfast and slides of flowers we expect to see. Buses will provide transportation. Morning participants will return to the school at noon. Full-day participants will enjoy a delicious lunch and entertainment at a tree-shaded country park. Ride through the beautiful gyp hills to a second site. Refreshments will be served before we return to the school around 3:30pm. Barber Co. Conservation District and Kansas Native Plant Society are co-sponsors. Pre-paid reservations should be sent before May 5th, \$8 half-day, \$15 full-day. Barber Co Conservation, 800 W. 3rd Ave. Medicine Lodge, KS 67104-8002, phone (620) 886-3721, ext. 3

**May 10 & 17:** Wildflower Plant & Seed Sales at Prairie Park Nature Center, Lawrence, KS from 1-4pm. (785) 832-7980

**May 16:** Visit the Overland Park (KS) Arboretum with Topeka Audubon Society. Pack a snack and lunch/beverage. To car pool from Topeka, meet at 7am in the parking lot for the Dillon's store at 29th & California. Contact Dan Gish for additional information [gishbear@cox.net] (785) 232-3731

**May 29-31:** 33rd Annual Loess Hills Prairie Seminar at Sylvan Runkel Preserve near Onawa, IA. This is a great event for prairie-lovers! Contact Dianne Blankenship [bennaid@hotmail.com] (712) 255-3447

 **June 6:** Wilson County Wildflower Tour in southeast Kansas. Gather at Fredonia High School, 916 Robinson St, 8:30am. Enjoy home baked pastries and booths of education and interest. Buses will provide transportation. Join small group tours with professional leaders or opt for self guided experiences. Kansas Native Plant Society members will be playing active roles in this event. Lunch is included with the registration price of \$8, payable by June 2 to Wilson Co Conservation, 930 N 2nd Street, Fredonia, KS 66736. Contact Gina Thompson (620) 378-2866 with questions.

**June 6:** Spring Wildflower Tour at Maxwell Wildlife Refuge, McPherson County, KS. Board the tram for a tour of the prairie with wildflowers and buffalo, 10am. There is also a self-guided walking tour with flowers flagged. The Refuge is located 6 miles north of Canton, KS. [http://www.cyberkraft.com/maxwell/] (620)-628-4455

 **June 14:** Friends of Konza Prairie Annual Wildflower Walk, 7pm. The walk will be co-led by Valerie Wright, Kansas Native Plant Society Board Member, and Konza Docents. There is a charge of \$5 for those who are not Friends of Konza Prairie members. Telephone reservations are due June 3, (785) 587-0441

**June 14:** 4th Annual Symphony in the Flint Hills will be held on a private ranch east of Florence, Kansas, deep in the heart of the hills. Get ready for one of the most beautiful sites on the planet and the adventure of getting there. Enjoy this unique pairing of music and prairie! The vision of this concert is to heighten appreciation and knowledge of the Flint Hills as the last major intact tallgrass prairie on the North American continent and will help focus attention on the Flint Hills of Kansas as a national treasure belonging to all Kansans and as a destination for people beyond our borders. Featured is an outdoor concert performed by the Kansas City Symphony. [www.symphonyintheflinthills.org] (620) 273-8955

**June 20:** Visit the Konza Prairie with Topeka Audubon Society. Pack a snack and lunch/beverage. To car pool from Topeka, meet at 6:30am at the Zoo parking lot. Contact Dan Gish for additional information [gishbear@cox.net] (785) 232-3731

**September 5:** Fall Wildflower Tour at Maxwell Wildlife Refuge, McPherson County, KS. Board the tram for a tour of the prairie with wildflowers and buffalo, 10am. There is also a self-guided walking tour with flowers flagged. The Refuge is located 6 miles north of Canton, KS. [http://www.cyberkraft.com/maxwell/] (620)-628-4455

 **September 12-13:** 3rd Annual Wildflower Weekend at the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in Chase County, KS. Bring the family; the weekend will be educational and enjoyable for all ages, 10am-4pm. Members of the Kansas Native Plant Society will be on hand to lead wildflower hikes. [www.nps.gov/tapr] [tapr\_interpretation@nps.gov] (620) 2738494

 **September 18-20:** Kansas Native Plant Society's 31st Annual Wildflower Weekend 2009 dates are set! Come enjoy native plants in southeast Kansas with us! The weekend is filled with outings, programs, a silent auction, photo contest, dinner, and socializing. Location to be announced soon! Please contact KNPS for more information. [email@KSNPS.org] (785) 864-3453

Information provided by Kansas Native Plant Society. See more events on our website: [www.kansasnativeplantsociety.org](http://www.kansasnativeplantsociety.org)



## Guidelines for Growing Native Plants From Seed

by Ken O'Dell

I have been planting seed for most of my 70 years, and I still get the same thrill each time I see a tiny seedling emerge from the soil. I like to work with seed that is difficult to grow and in some cases difficult, but fun, to locate and collect. Here are two native Kansas plants: one will be easy, and one will be a bit more difficult to grow from seed.

**Tall Vervain** (*Verbena hastata*) is easy to collect the seed and to germinate. The other is **Pawpaw Trees** (*Asimina triloba*) which should be easy to collect as the seed are in big green banana-like fruit, up high in trees. However, you must beat the squirrels to the fruit since they pick it and chew on it before it gets ripe. Most people give up on Pawpaw seed germinating and throw it away. It is not impossible. Just takes time.

To collect seed, I drive all over Miami County and have made notes as to where I have marked seed to be gathered whether it is on a road side, in a ditch near a telephone pole or close to a lake or pond. I gather 50 or 60 varieties of native Kansas wildflower seed each year. We have that many varieties on our farm, and other farmers and ranchers let me get seed from their property. Native seed is sometimes difficult to find. Jeff Hansen of the KNPS offers some native seed on his web site ([www.kansasnativeplants.com](http://www.kansasnativeplants.com)).



Tall Vervain  
*Verbena hastata*  
photo by Mike Haddock

**Tall Vervain** is a native prairie plant growing to 2 feet tall in mixed grasses and forbs in about three-fourths of the Kansas counties. In Miami County and at the Overland Park Arboretum, it grows in disturbed areas and sends up tall flower spikes in mid-summer. The blue colors are strong and striking. Very noticeable. The pink flowering Tall Vervain have weak pink colors and appear to grow on plants that do not have stems as strong as the blue Vervain

does.

Cut off a seed head when it turns dry and brown, which is usually late summer. Each seed head will have hundreds of seed. I take a plastic



Tall Vervain field  
*Verbena hastata*  
photo by Ken O'Dell

bucket and put the seed head in the bucket, and when I get back home, I will shake out the seed and run the seed through a couple of sieves to clean out the chaff and then store the seed in a paper envelope in the fridge, not freezer, until after the first of the year.



Verbena seed  
photo by Ken O'Dell

If you have a greenhouse or a spot in the house to start them, you can plant the seed in early March. I use a cold greenhouse and also have some grow lights hooked up to use for germination. It is not complicated as mother nature wants these seed to grow. Plant them in a well-drained moist, but not wet, soil. I use some seedling mix and also use a much coarser mix that has some ground-up pine bark. When planted the first of March, in a bright location, cover the seed lightly, and they will start sending up tiny leaves in a few days to a couple of weeks, if you keep the temp at about 65 to 70 degrees.

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## Guidelines for Growing Native Plants From Seed

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When the Tall Vervain puts out two or three leaves on top, I dibble them out with the holding end of a small spoon and put the seedlings into a 4 inch pot, fertilize with a timed-release fertilizer and place these in a sunny location. In the spring time, it is hard to give any plant too much sun when it is trying to grow.

The **Pawpaw** seed is more challenging. We have native Pawpaws in the eastern 1/3 of Kansas, and they will grow in Western Kansas, but you will probably have to have water in the summer as we get about 32 inches of rain on the average in Eastern Kansas, and they require that much water or more to survive. The leaves have a wonderful tropical appearance and make a very nice small tree with gorgeous golden yellow autumn leaf colors. The fruit is edible and tastes a bit like custard or bananas. One of the common names is Indiana Banana.



Paw Paw Blossom  
photo by Mike Haddock



Immature paw paw fruit and foliage  
photo by Mike Haddock

I pick the seed when the Pawpaw fruit gets slightly soft. Not too soft since the longer I leave the fruit on the tree, the longer the squirrels have to eat it. My rule of thumb to pick a Pawpaw fruit is— whoever gets to it first. Sorry Squirrels. Pick the fruit, squish the big seed out of it and wash the seed to get rid of the slightly sticky pulpy mess that hangs on to each seed. You can let these dry just a day or two and then put in the fridge in a

paper envelope and plant the following spring.

However, I usually plant my Pawpaw seed immediately. The most important thing to remember about germinating Pawpaw seed is they do not like bright light. They need to be shaded to germinate, and they will come up late. I put one seed about every inch apart on top of 3 inches of soil in a 4 inch deep flat and then cover the seed with 1 inch of potting soil. I have two different locations I use for seeds during their winter dormancy. One, I place the seed tray outside in the cold and let it stay outside all winter and cover this seed flat with hardware cloth to keep out the mice. I set it on the north side of a building and put two or three cedar branches on the seed flat to keep it shaded even more.



Pawpaw Seedlings  
*Asimina triloba*  
photo by Ken O'Dell

The other way I treat the seed after putting it in a flat is to put the flat in my cold greenhouse, which I keep just about freezing in the winter and set this seed flat under a greenhouse bench that has plants on top of the bench, and this keeps the seed flat in deep shade. Both ways are successful, and you should note that the seed will still not come up until mid-June. It is late to emerge. Some seed will still be emerging in mid-July. I let the seedlings get about 3 inches tall and then transplant to a 4 inch square pot. At this point, there is no problem with the seedlings being in the sun. I have read that the first year seedlings do not like the sun, but I have not had any trouble the first year. After one year in a 4 inch pot, I transplant to a 6 inch pot or a 1 gallon size pot for one more year and then plant the two-year seedling outside in full sun.

If you are into butterflies, you will often see a few (very few) “dead” leaves in the summer on

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## Guidelines for Growing Native Plants From Seed

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top of the Pawpaw tree when the tree is 8 or 10 feet tall. This is because the Zebra Swallowtail Butterfly uses the Pawpaw tree for their main larval food source. This should be a blessing because of the beauty of this butterfly. Deer do not eat Pawpaw leaves.

**In search of rare plants and seed.** I have found the seed from some of the plants I call Prairie Orchids or Kansas native orchids to be very difficult to germinate.

I am presently working with Kansas native orchids from seed and will report from time to time on my success and failures of these. If any of you have any native orchids on your property or know of any on other properties and will give me the information, I will contact them and see if we can get seed. I am particularly looking for Great Plains White Fringed Orchid, *Platanthera praeclara*, which usually grows in low areas, wet areas and on occasion the edges of swampy areas. It is noted in six NE Kansas counties and is endangered or threatened in its native existence.



## Rare Waterwort Found

text and photo by Jeff Hansen

While doing seed collecting for the Millennium Seed Project, I am always on the look out for unusual plants. In October of 2008, Iralee Barnard and I took a trip to Harvey County's sand dune area. At the edge of a small pond, we found a super diminutive plant. It was only about 1 centimeter tall and 2 centimeters wide. Looking at it with a hand lense, you could see tiny little fruits on it, about 1 millimeter in diameter. Iralee determined it to be a plant in the genus *Elatine*, specifically *Elatine triandra* (per the *Flora of the Great Plains*). Its common name is "Three stamen waterwort." It turns out to be a bit of a rarity in Kansas, known only from Harvey and Sherman counties.

I took it to the KU Herbarium to have Craig Freeman take a look at it. We looked at some herbarium specimens. One of them had been



Three stamen waterwort  
*Elatine triandra*

collected in South Dakota near the town of Forestburg in 1971, very close to where I grew up. I found it interesting that some botanist was roaming around my home turf when I was just a kid. Next time you're near a pond with a muddy shore, look for the three stamen waterwort.

**NOTE: The newsletter staff would welcome the opportunity to print other rare or unusual plant sightings. E-mail your write-up and pictures to [nag@ksu.edu](mailto:nag@ksu.edu).**



## Prairie Larkspur

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through two wire strainers (one with larger holes and one with smaller) to remove chaff. I then store the seed in a paper envelope in a fridge, not freezer, until I want to plant it in late February. In February or March I start planting some of the seed to seed trays with individual cells. You can buy these trays at most seed stores. If no artificial lights are available, keep the seed tray in a bright window. In early spring time, the sun is probably not bright enough to do any harm if you keep the seed tray in direct sun all day, as long as you do not let it get very dry. You could water the tray from the bottom or by misting from the top. You will soon have a few small plants emerging from

the soil, and I usually leave these as long as possible in the seed tray, often 4 or 5 weeks. Wait until they get just about root bound, or at least with plenty of roots, and then transplant to a 4 inch pot and grow until cool frosty weather is over for the springtime. You are now ready to move the plants outside to where you want them to grow. Seed planted early will often bloom the first year; so you might want to start it even earlier than I do.

Prairie Larkspur is a tough perennial that you can dig up and move from one flower bed to another. It is also possible to grow the plants from soft wood cuttings, taken in mid-June. Cuttings should be about 3 inches to 4 inches long. Strip off the lower leaves and have a small leaf or two at

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## Prairie Larkspur

Continued from page 10

the top. Put this in moist potting soil out of the sun, but in a bright location. Not wet soil, just moist. I would cover this with a clear plastic top so it does not dry out. A clear plastic drinking glass will do. Roots will appear very soon, and you might be able to leave the cutting in the pot until you are ready to transplant it into the permanent spot in the flower beds. Delphiniums

prefer regular garden soil to well drained soil and will grow in partial shade or sun.

If you cannot find seed of this wonderful Kansas native, you might go to Jeff Hansen's web site [www.kansasnativeplants.com](http://www.kansasnativeplants.com) to order Prairie Larkspur seed in small packets. Since Prairie Larkspur is featured as the Wildflower of the Year, this is also an opportunity for you to encourage nurseries around the state to stock and offer bedding plants of this charming native.



## Featured Plant-Midland Fawn Lily

(*Erythronium mesochoreum* Knerr)

text by Lorraine J. Kaufman

photo by Phyllis Scherich

My favorite early spring wildflower is the Midland fawn lily, *Erythronium mesochoreum*, which blooms as early as mid-March in the eastern third of Kansas. We called these single, white, nodding, lily-like flowers "Easter Lilies" when as children we encountered them while walking across the pasture to school.



Midland Fawn Lily  
*Erythronium mesochoreum*

I didn't understand their complicated life cycle then and wondered why I couldn't dig them easily to transplant at home. I observed the flower bud and two leaves wrapped together pushing through the soil at the same time. The white flower opened almost immediately on a very short stem (around 2 inches) which grew to 4 to 6 inches at maturity. In May and June, the weight of the ripened capsule causes the stem to fall away from the

plant, and seeds are dispersed on the ground. The seedling begins as a tiny corm, which produces new roots that eventually take it to a depth of several inches. After the seed is produced, it takes 3 to 4 years to produce a flower.

While I greatly admired these lovely harbingers of spring, I learned they hold a secret that they reveal, especially to children, who stop to gaze at their beauty before anything else is blooming. The slender leaves can be made into a very shrill whistle. It is possible for an adult to acquire this skill, but it takes much patience and determination to accomplish this feat.

To make a whistle, gently tear a leaf diagonally to produce a 1/4 inch membrane. Cut the leaf with membrane into a 1/2 inch piece. Place it behind your front teeth (membrane in front); hold it gently with your tongue and then blow. It will produce a piercing sound and the more you blow, the louder it becomes. One whistle will last for hours or as long as one has the fortitude to blow it. It can become annoying to non-whistlers, however, so use discretion with whom you whistle.

Each spring I still delight in this childish endeavor which I learned so long ago, when a toy could be made with only a little ingenuity. The Midland fawn lily seems to have other attributes that are seldom spoken of. Last spring I passed a meadow that we had burned 10 days previously. I was amazed to see that still-blackened-hillside adorned with myriads of 2 inch blooming Midland fawn lilies as bright as stars in a midnight sky. It was a living resurrection before my very eyes, and I was grateful to the One who ordained such mysteries and miracles.

### Membership News

#### New Members 10/9/08 to 12/2/08

Judy Burris - Augusta  
Nathaniel S. Fuller - Wichita  
Daniel W. Hays - Geneseo  
Cassy Heriford - Wichita

A. Winston Hildreth - Wichita  
Steve & Linda Johnson - Meriden  
Kyle Loss - Wichita  
Carol Morgan - Topeka  
Micah & Heather Nash - Pittsburg  
Robert Pokorney - Holton

Alisha A. Rich - Wichita  
Jay Super - Wichita  
Sonya C. Tucker - Derby  
Tricia Waggoner - Topeka  
Aaron Yoder - Manhattan

Kansas Native Plant Society  
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 2045 Constant Ave.  
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**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION AND RENEWAL GUIDELINES**

Annual dues are for a 12-month period from January 1 through December 31. Dues paid after December 1 are applied to the next year. Note to new members: the first year of annual membership is effective from the date of joining through December 31 of the following calendar year.

Please complete this form or a photocopy. Send the completed form and a check payable to the Kansas Native Plant Society to:

**Kansas Native Plant Society**  
**R. L. McGregor Herbarium**  
**2045 Constant Avenue**  
**Lawrence KS 66047-3729**

A membership in the Kansas Native Plant Society makes a great gift for friends and family members. Recipients of gift memberships will receive notification of your gift membership within two weeks of receipt of your check. The Kansas Native Plant Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Gifts to KNPS are tax deductible to the extent provided by law.

**Membership application/renewal form**

Member Information:

Name:	
Address	
City/State:	
Zipcode:	
Phone:	
Email:	
County (if Kansas):	

Membership Category:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Student	\$5.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	Individual	\$15.00
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Organization	\$30.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	Contributing	\$100.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lifetime	\$500.00