

# In the Mainstream

Newsletter for Members of the Norwalk River Watershed Association [NRWA]  
New Canaan, Norwalk, Redding, Ridgefield, Weston, Wilton, CT, and Lewisboro, NY

[www.norwalkriver.org](http://www.norwalkriver.org)

Fall 2014

## WHAT TO PLANT INSTEAD OF INVASIVES?

By Jackie Algon and Elizabeth Craig

Walking along the roads in the mornings, it's been shocking to see the number of invasive plants that have established themselves in our local environment. Our New England landscape has been transformed by invasive plants or non-native species. We are overrun with them--garlic mustard, oriental bittersweet, barberry, burning bush, wild grape and wild raspberry, common reed in and around our ponds, multiflora and rugosa roses, artemesia (mugwort), stilt grass, mile-a-minute vine, Japanese knotweed, porcelain berry vine, black swallow-wort, and many more. In fact, our Connecticut invasive plant list now has more than 100 entries!

What's the difference, at least they're green, we may think, but there is a big difference. Important native plants are being squeezed out of their natural habitats, replaced by invasive plants that use the limited light, water and nutrients available to reproduce themselves, often at a much faster rate than natives. Invasive plants provide little or nothing for local wildlife to eat, including friendly insects needed for pollination. Trees weighed down with vines are more susceptible to storm damage and more



Photograph courtesy of Louise Washer

*Native red Cardinal Flower and yellow Jewel Weed growing by a stream in Redding.*

likely to fall down in high winds, as the trees lose flexibility while covered with tight and heavy vines. In addition, invasive vines choke out and smother the young trees that would normally grow in as replacements for downed trees, thus affecting forest regeneration. Japanese barberry, a haven for ticks, also inhibits forest regrowth and has replaced many of our native trees and shrubs. Native plants are crucial for native insects, butterflies, moths and other pollinators, also in providing food for birds and small mammals. Non-native plants that do have edible seeds quickly become established when birds scatter the seeds after ingesting them.

Sound overwhelming? Because

*Continued on page 2...*

## NRWA Awarded Grant To Protect Norwalk River Water Quality At Merwin Meadows In Wilton

NRWA has received a grant of \$20,700 from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. NRWA will work with the Norwalk River Watershed Initiative and the town of Wilton to repair riverbank vegetation and install rain gardens and a walkway of pervious paving stones at Merwin Meadows Park in Wilton. The work will mitigate the effects of polluted rainwater runoff from the parking lot and Lover's Lane.

## WILTON DAISY TROOP SPRUCES UP RAIN GARDEN

By Elizabeth Craig

Thanks to Wilton Daisy Troop 50229 members Grace Couch, Mackenzie Northway and Emma-Hayes Setterlund for their good work planting native plants at the Wilton Playshop Rain Garden, designed and installed by Michael Dietz of UConn's NEMO Program. The Scouts added red Cardinal Flowers, Joe Pyeweed and ferns.



Photograph courtesy of Julie Setterlund

*Wilton Daisy Troop members work with NRWA's Elizabeth Craig to spruce up the Wilton Playshop rain garden.*

You can make a difference every time it rains at your house, too. Non-point source pollution (run-off from impervious surfaces such as roofs, driveways, roads and parking lots) has been cited by the US EPA as a major source of pollution for our waterways. Rain gardens catch runoff, filtering it before it reaches rivers and streams. For more information visit [nemo.uconn.edu/raingardens](http://nemo.uconn.edu/raingardens).

it's a massive problem, it's best to take it one step at a time. Consider which plants are easy to eradicate by hand-pulling before they flower and go to seed, or by cutting near to the ground to deplete the seed bank and weaken the root structure over a period of several growing seasons. Mowing or pulling stilt grass, an annual, before it goes to seed can help stop this new invasive; cutting-back oriental bittersweet, and continuing eradication efforts over a period of three to five years may successfully remove established invasives.

While removing or containing non-natives should give the over-shadowed natives a chance to re-establish over a period of years, it is also desirable to plant some native replacements (see box on right.) Remember that any soil disturbance may allow invasives to move in, so try to minimize unnecessary disturbance during invasive removal.

Implementing a plan to not introduce and to eradicate existing invasives *on your own property* is the best way to help – it will make your environment healthier and more natural for your family and for the wildlife your landscape supports, attracting pollinators such as butterflies, bees and hummingbirds. As lovely as some invasive species may seem, they are detrimental to the ecologic balance long-term, even in your own garden.

## INVASIVES AND NATIVE ALTERNATIVES

### **Invasive: Japanese Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*)**

Dark red leaves often preferred to native variety *B. canadensis*, or common cousin, *B. vulgaris*. Dense, deciduous, spiny shrub grows 2'-8'; pale yellow flowers, bright red berries. Found to harbor deer ticks. Control: manual removal, torching or chemical.

### **Replacement Alternatives: Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*)**

Deciduous holly occurs in swamps, damp thickets, low woods, along ponds and streams. Slow-growing, upright-rounded small shrub, typically grows 3'-12' tall. In wild, forms large thickets. With female plants and at least one male, flowers produce bright red berries in late summer to fall persisting through winter. Berries provide interest to winter landscape and winter feed for birds.

### **High Bush Blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*)**

Fun and easy to grow, provides blueberries for family and wildlife; striking fall color.

### **Red Chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*)**

Stunning red fall color; berries provide birds and other wildlife with vital nutrition.

### **Invasive: Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica* or *Polygonum cuspidatum*)**

Native to eastern Asia, introduced in late 1800s as an ornamental. Shrub-like, semi-woody perennial, fast growing, has bamboo-like stems that form dense leafy thickets 6'-9' tall. Shoots arise from coarse, spreading rhizomes up to 50' long. Flowers in white clusters in late August/September. New colonies form from very small rhizome or root fragments. Once established, persistent. Control: remove plants including all rhizomes. Monthly cutting or weekly mowing throughout growing season.

### **Replacement Alternative: Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*)**

8'-15' in height and 6'-15' in width, likes part sun to shade and prefers moist soil. Fragrant yellow flowers in early spring; then smooth green leaves that smell of cloves and anise when crushed. Luminous yellow fall color attracts migrating birds to female spicebush when covered in bright red berries that are excellent food source for numerous birds. Spicebush is host plant for Spicebush Swallowtail butterflies. Requires at least one male shrub nearby for female shrubs to produce fruit.

### **Invasive: Japanese Stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*)**

1'-3' tall annual. Sprawling, mat-like manner, yet resembles small, delicate bamboo. Leaves narrow, lance-shaped with distinctive, pale, silvery stripe of reflective hairs on upper surface. Flower spikes in September yield 100-1,000 seeds per plant, seeds viable in seed bank for 5+ years, germinate readily. Control: shallow-rooted, easily pulled by hand in late summer just before flowering, when soil is moist, or mow/weed-whack.

**Restoration Replacement Alternatives:** Seed with annual rye grass which competes with invasives and allows natives in seed bank to propagate.

**Native groundcovers:** Native pachysandra (*Pachysandra procumbens*;) Does not take over; flowers large, often with pink blush, fragrant; foliage color transforms into grey-silver-green mottling in fall. Plant on semi-shady east or south-facing slope in light soil.

## MEMBERSHIP FORM

☐ Enclosed is my tax-deductible, annual membership contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

I would prefer to receive the semi-annual newsletter, *In the Mainstream*, via:

☐ The name and address written below, or

☐ The email address listed below.

### Riparian Society

Steward \$1000 and up

Protector \$500-\$999

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### Basic Membership

Supporter \$50-\$99

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Donate on-line with  
Paypal at  
[www.norwalkriver.org](http://www.norwalkriver.org)



Oyster Shell Park by Sara da Silva

Yes, my company has a Matching Gift Program. Company Name \_\_\_\_\_

Please make check payable to: NRWA, Inc., and mail to the  
Norwalk River Watershed Association, Inc., P.O. Box 197, Georgetown, CT 06829

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Tel. \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

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Street Town State Zip

## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

NRWA programs highlight the importance and features of the Norwalk River and its watershed and ways people collectively and individually can improve the region. Programs are free, unless specified, but space may be limited; reservations are suggested. Call the leader listed or NRWA at **877-NRWA-INFO (877-679-2463)** or email us at [info@norwalkriver.org](mailto:info@norwalkriver.org) for information, directions, and reservations.

**Saturday, September 13, 10AM-4PM Sunday, Sept. 14, 11AM-4PM. Live Green Connecticut.** Visit the NRWA table and learn to 'Live Green' at this two-day family festival for all ages, at Taylor Farm Park located at 45 Calf Pasture Beach Road in Norwalk. Enjoy delicious food, live music, eco-friendly shopping, environmental speakers and exhibits! More info at [livegreenct.com](http://livegreenct.com).

**Saturday, September 20, 9:30AM to 3PM. Oyster Shell Park Shoreline Cleanup.** Come help clean up Oyster Shell Park! Afterwards we will weigh the collected, bagged trash, categorize it and report it the Ocean Conservancy to help them track and eliminate ocean debris as part of International Coastal Cleanup Day. Volunteers meet at Heritage Park by Ann and North Water Streets in Norwalk. Waterproof footwear advised. Families welcome. Rain date: Sunday September 21. The residents of Jefferson at 55/77 Water have kindly offered pizza and sandwiches in their clubhouse, restroom access and limited parking at 55 Water

Street for all volunteers. Co-sponsored by NRWA, Norwalk Land Trust, HarborWatch at Earthplace and Jefferson at 55/77 Water. For more info, call 877-NRWA-INFO.



***Come help spruce up Oyster Shell Park near the Norwalk Aquarium on September 20, International Coastal Cleanup Day.***

**Sunday September 21. 350.org People's Climate March in New York City.** In September, world leaders are coming to New York City for a UN summit on the climate crisis. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon is urging governments to support an ambitious global agreement to dramatically reduce global warming pollution. With our future on the line and the whole world watching, we'll take a stand to bend the course of history. We'll take to the streets to demand change. Wilton Go Green is organizing a group to travel together by Metro North. More info at [wiltongogreen.org](http://wiltongogreen.org) and [peoplesclimate.org/march](http://peoplesclimate.org/march).

**Saturday, September 27 & Sunday, Sept. 28, 11AM-5PM. Audubon Greenwich's HawkWatch Festival & Green Bazaar.** Come celebrate the annual hawk migration over Audubon Greenwich's "Quaker Ridge Hawk Watch." There will be live birds of prey shows, games and activities for all

ages, eco-friendly business exhibits, great food and music. Rain or shine. More info at [greenwich.audubon.org](http://greenwich.audubon.org).

**Tuesday, October 7, 8:00AM to 4:30. Invasive Plants 2014: Where Are We Now?** This symposium will be presented by the Connecticut Invasive Plant Working group (CIPWG). People with all levels of interest and experience are invited to attend. Held at the UConn Student Union in Storrs, CT. The keynote address will be given by Dr. Sarah Reichard, Professor and Director of the University of Washington Botanic Gardens. Attendees are advised to register early. The fee is \$45 – EARLY postmarked or online by September 8; \$55 – REGULAR postmarked or online after September 8; \$25 – STUDENT (must bring current ID). More info at [cipwg.uconn.edu/2014-symposium](http://cipwg.uconn.edu/2014-symposium); or contact Donna Ellis at (860) 486-6448; [donna.ellis@uconn.edu](mailto:donna.ellis@uconn.edu).

**See [norwalkriver.org](http://norwalkriver.org) for more fall events.**

### ***In the Mainstream © 2014***

Norwalk River Watershed Association, Inc. *The Norwalk River Watershed Association, incorporated in 1996, is a not-for-profit membership organization whose mission is to improve the water quality and aesthetic value of the 40,000-acre Norwalk River watershed; to encourage recreational use of the existing trails and open space; and to promote research, education, cooperation, and action on the part of the stakeholders in the seven watershed towns in CT (Ridgefield, Redding, Wilton, New Canaan, Weston, and Norwalk) and NY (Lewisboro).*

### **Officers of NRWA Board of Directors**

Kristen Begor, President (Wilton)  
Louise Washer, Vice President (Norwalk)  
Kitsey Snow, Treasurer (Ridgefield)  
Elizabeth Craig, Secretary (Wilton)

Protect our surface water and ground water. Do NOT flush medicines down the drain or toilet. Instead, turn them in at your town's Drug Take-Back Day, your local pharmacy's take-back program or locked box located at your police station.

## FAREWELL AND THANK YOU TO LONG-TIME TREASURER MARK RISER

NRWA extends a heart-felt thank you to Mark Riser for his ten years of dedicated service as treasurer of the organization. Mark began attending NRWA events with his children not long after the organization began in the late 90s. After meeting him at several events, NRWA founder Lillian Willis asked him to join the board in 2004. "I must have acted like I knew a few things about the critters in the river as well (I was turning over rocks and showing the leeches, crawfish, scuds, tadpoles, etc. to my kids). Finally, Lillian said 'you ought to join the board of directors,' and I did," says Riser.

Mark works in private equity and holds a BS in engineering and an MBA. He is a life-long outdoors enthusiast and enjoys fishing and hiking Ridgefield's open spaces. The Risers moved to Ridgefield in 1995. "The reason we started showing up [at NRWA events] is that the Norwalk River was at the bottom of the hill we lived on near Topstone Mountain, so we followed the 'blue and white markers' to the river where I took the kids fishing and camping (slightly illegally) regularly," Riser recalls. Riser grew up hunting and fishing with his father and three brothers and has continued the tradition with his own children. NRWA thanks him for his interest in, and his service to, the Norwalk River Watershed and looks forward to his family's continued presence at events.



*Mark Riser at a past NRWA spring Amphibian Walk displaying a critter he and his daughter, Helen, discovered.*