



August 2024

**ORGANIZATIONAL
UPDATES**



WildOnes North Alabama hosted Donnie Bryan, Vice President of WildOnes Middle Tennessee, during our August seminar.

August Seminar, Board Meeting, Elections, Survey and Call for Volunteers

by **Charles Pannell** on 31 August

In August WildOnes North Alabama hosted Donnie Bryan, the Vice President of WildOnes Middle Tennessee chapter, to talk about gardening with native plants for four seasons of interest. Donnie highlighted his journey from retired teacher to native plant enthusiast, explaining how he transformed his 0.25 acre suburban yard in an HOA into an unbelievably diverse landscape full of springtime ephemerals, keystone plants, and unique native plants from Monticello Gardens that keep the garden interesting throughout the year. If you missed Donnie's inspiring talk, a link will be posted to our member-only [FaceBook page](#) and website in the coming days, so you can revisit his plant selections and gardening tips.

Member-only Garden Tours



A WildOnes Middle Tennessee Garden Tour at the home of Rita Venable, author of [Butterflies of Tennessee](#) showcases a suburban HOA garden designed for butterflies. WildOnes North Alabama hopes to replicate these garden tours across North Alabama.

We have two member-only garden tours scheduled during the remainder of 2024 and hope to have many more in 2025. Visiting native North Alabama gardens can provide immediate inspiration for your own garden projects, and the tours will be planned in diverse

landscapes and residential settings, from urban and rural properties to suburban HOAs. Each garden and landscape will be a unique opportunity to see how native plants grow, form complementary communities and will help develop a native garden portfolio for North Alabama.

On Saturday, 28th September, Cathy and Harold Zappe will host a garden tour on their mini-farm. They relocated to Huntsville, AL, from the mega-diverse [Fynbos](#) biome in South Africa about 25 years ago and have been enthusiastic about native plants for decades. Their property includes garden rooms, water features, forested areas, pasture, vegetable gardens and a grassland restoration in progress.

On Saturday, 16th November, Herb and Terry Lewis (who spoke in May about “Gardening for the Birds”) will open their garden to WildOnes members. Designed specifically to attract bird life, the garden displays five water features and landscape elements incorporating numerous plants, hardscape and walkways. Over the last eight years the Lewis household has developed a bird sanctuary by adding native plants to attract butterflies, pollinators and birds. A key feature of their “Outback” Garden is a 12 ft. diameter bubbling rock water feature specifically designed to attract migrating birds. Other elements include a shade garden and a meadow area planted with native wildflowers and shrubs. The new garden is lovingly referred to as the Outback Garden, because every time Terry would look for Herb, he'd be "Outback".

If you are a member and would like to attend either or both of the upcoming garden tours, please contact wildonesnorthal@gmail.com to reserve your spot. Attendance will be limited to 30 members on a first come, first serve basis. Sign-up sheets will also be provided at upcoming Seminars and meetings, provided there is still availability. Anyone interested in hosting a garden tour in 2025 should reach out to us with details about your garden/landscape and when you would prefer to host.

Board Meeting

Periodically, the WildOnes Board of Directors meets to chart the trajectory of our chapter. In early August the Board met to discuss what is going well, what could be improved, and what we need to do to be more effective in our educational and outreach endeavors. We discussed the need for more networking opportunities, volunteer committees, pros and cons of our current meeting space, strengths and weaknesses of past seminars, the budget

and many other topics. One output of the meeting was the creation of a member-only Facebook page ([WildOnes North Alabama Member Chat](#)), where members can post gardening and landscaping questions, coordinate with other members, request seeds or plants, or ask for help to identify native and invasive plants.



Wild Ones North AL Member Chat

Our new member-only Facebook group was created to improve communication and coordination for all our educational and volunteering opportunities.

Call for Volunteers

As our organization continues to grow, it is important that we make good use of the talents and energy of our members to contribute to the native plant movement. For this reason, the Board has created the following committees to support our efforts:

Committees: Native Garden Tours, Weed Wrangle, Wildflower Hikes, Seminar Planning, Childhood Education and Outreach, Plant Exchange/Sale, Tabling, Newsletter

We need your help to get our fellow North Alabamians excited about native plants and sustainable gardening. If you'd like to volunteer or lead a committee, please reach out to the President at wildonesnorthal@gmail.com. If you have additional committee ideas that you would like to lead or support, please reach out to us with your suggestion.

Member Survey

As Wild Ones members, we are drawn together by a love of native plants and the life that they support. As a group of dedicated individuals, we have many unique opportunities to

educate our local community and improve the plot of earth we call home. We invite everyone to take our [survey](#); it is intended to help us organize our collective efforts and to provide everyone a chance to share their ideas. We will review the survey results during our October meeting.

October meeting & Board elections

Our October meeting will be our first member-only meeting that will include elections for our Board of Directors and an open planning discussion about the progress and goals of the chapter. We want to hear from you and will have breakout and brainstorming sessions for committees. We also invite members to share slides or pictures from your garden (as 2-5 min presentations) showing the plants that have thrived, the wildlife you have observed and the challenges you have faced while incorporating native plants in your garden. If you'd like to run for office on our Board of Directors, please contact let us know which position you'd like to serve. While there is currently a full slate of candidates, we welcome competition from passionate members who'd like to help chart the organization's future:

Candidates running on the October ballot:

President - Charles Pannell

Vice President - Kelly Cody

Secretary - Lauren Linder

Treasurer - Lyn Weir

Membership Chair - Rhonda Zook

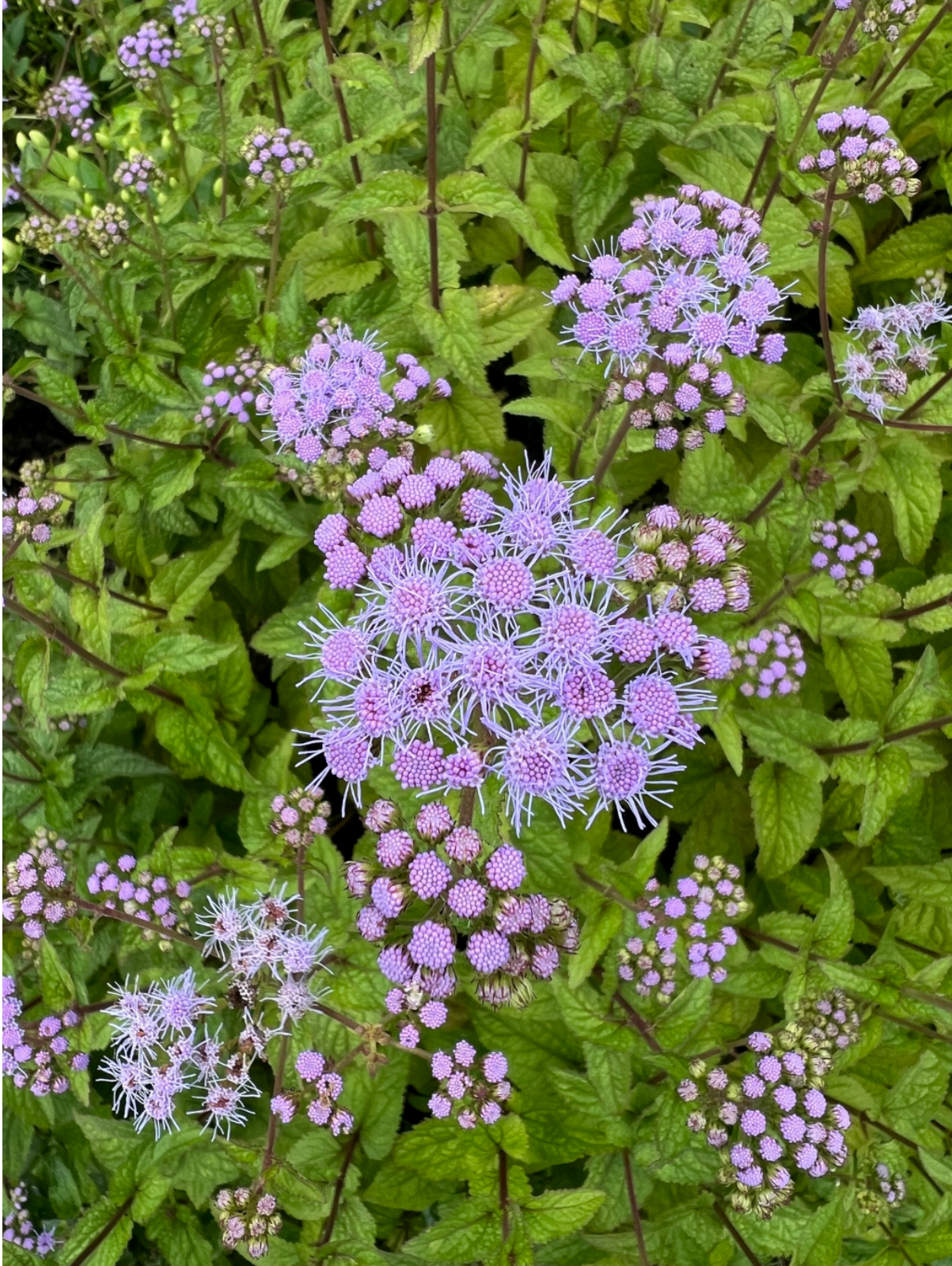
NATIVE PLANT SPOTLIGHT



Blue mistflower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*) is an easy-to-grow native garden perennial that provides copious nectar during a critical time of the year for pollinating insects.

Blue mistflower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*)

Few plants usher in the darkening days and cooling weather of late summer/early fall better than Blue mistflower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*). Blue mistflower is one of four species in the genus *Conoclinium* (all native to the Americas) and the only one native to Alabama. It is a member of the often weedy Asteraceae family - one of the most diverse families of flowering plants in the world (rivaled only by Orchidaceae) - and includes familiar plants such as lettuce, dandelion, chicory, ironweed, Joe Pye weed, asters, chrysanthemums, sunflowers, thistles and many other plants that are important for wildlife, people, and the economy (as both food crops and invasive weeds). As an aster, blue mistflower will often spread in the garden, but don't let its aggressive tendencies deter you from adding it to your landscape.



Few plants are as cheerfully prolific in the Fall garden as Blue mistflower. Each individual capitulum (flowering head) consists of a tightly-grouped collection of disk flowers that can be clearly seen in this photograph. Image courtesy of iNaturalist contributor [ladybug22](#).

Plants in the aster family were formerly classified as composites (family Compositae) because their flowers are actually a collection of tiny “ray” and “disk” flowers united in a flowering head (called a *capitulum*) that is surrounded by modified green leaves called involucre bracts or phyllaries. Some plants in the aster family have both ray and disk flowers (eg. sunflowers), while others contain all ray flowers (eg. dandelion) or all disk flowers (eg. mistflower). The specific features of the flower head are useful for identification purposes. The leaves of blue mistflower are arranged oppositely, are ovate in shape, have toothy margins and have a crinkled texture. Learning to identify the plant in early spring can help gardeners control its profligacy in places where it is not desired.



Blue mistflower has crinkly textured, ovate, oppositely arranged leaves with roughly toothy margins.

Blue mistflower blooms from late summer to early frost (roughly August-October in our area) and produces copious nectar in the fall for butterflies, bees and other pollinators; its seeds reportedly serve as food for various species of birds. Mistflower prefers wet to mesic soils, can tolerate a wide variety of soil pH and grows in full sun to dappled shade. It typically grows 1'-2' tall, is deer and rabbit resistant and is reported to be a host plant for the following moth species: [Haploa clymene](#), [Phragmatobia lineata](#), [Carmenta bassiformis](#), and [Schinia trifascia](#). Mistflower can spread aggressively in moist soil and full sun, but in drier conditions (and during droughts), it may completely die back (but will often resprout from the seedbank). It is best used in naturalized areas, in wet or mesic soils, along streams and ponds, in moist meadows, in rain gardens or in garden gaps that need to be quickly filled with a native species.

Blue mistflower can be easily propagated from seed (winter sowing or cold stratification), stem cuttings, and by division. They can also be used as cut flowers. The plant appears similar to the commonly cultivated garden Ageratum (*Ageratum houstonianum*), a plant which is native to Mexico and Central America.

INVASIVE SPECIES SPOTLIGHT



Sweet autumn clematis is a highly invasive clematis species that readily naturalizes wild areas, including several acres along the Tennessee River near Ditto Landing. It is still being sold at box stores and is grown in the [nursery trade](#) despite its known invasiveness.

Sweet Autumn clematis (*Clematis terniflora*)

When walking wooded trails across North Alabama in August and September, you may notice a rambling vine growing over trees and shrubs in sunny openings that produces a great profusion of sweet smelling small white blossoms. While its vanilla-like fragrance might be intoxicating and its flowers beautiful, this plant is actually a noxious invasive weed, commonly known as “Sweet Autumn Clematis” (*Clematis terniflora*) from the Ranunculaceae (buttercup) family. Native to China and Japan, it was introduced to North America in 1877 when its seeds were sent by overseas botanists to the Arnold Arboretum in

Boston for cultivation. Horticulturalists immediately noticed the many garden-worthy virtues of this exotic vine, including its massive clusters of fragrant star-shaped flowers, deer-resistance, heat/drought-tolerance, its 30 feet of growth, and finally, its ability to survive North America's cold winters. However, one overlooked aspect of this vine was its ability to quickly generate a huge abundance of seeds that each feature a long white fluffy tail. This tail allows the seeds to spread long distances across the landscape via wind, where they readily germinate on fertile soil.



The beautiful, prolific, sweetly scented flowers of Sweet Autumn Clematis are the primary ornamental feature of this species that accelerated its spread in the nursery trade.

Upon sprouting in sunny areas, Sweet Autumn Clematis has a propensity to quickly climb over native vegetation, smothering and killing it (akin to kudzu). While it has no tendrils, it propels itself upwards by wrapping its stems around anything it can find. It thrives in forest edges, waste areas, roadsides and other disturbed sites. In controlling this invasive, the cut stem method (including application of herbicide to the cut stem) and grubbing seedlings are [recommended](#). Foliar chemical applications of glyphosate or triclopyr are another effective method of destroying this invasive plant.

It is important to differentiate Sweet Autumn Clematis from its native cousin, Virgin's Bower (*Clematis virginiana*), which blooms at about the same time. The easiest way to

distinguish the two species is via the leaves. Sweet Autumn Clematis has ovate leaves with smooth (sometimes lobed) margins often arranged in triple leaflets, while Virgin's Bower has similarly shaped and arranged leaves but with slightly coarsely serrated margins. What can be even more confusing is that both plants are often sold at nurseries under the common name "Sweet Autumn Clematis", so, be well aware of the differences between these two plants if you ever attempt to purchase one.



Unlike the native Virgin's Bower (*Clematis virginiana*), Sweet Autumn clematis has smooth, entire leaf margins.



Our native *Clematis virginiana* has toothed margins but flowers that are very similar, if a bit smaller than the invasive *Clematis terniflora*. Photo courtesy of iNaturalist contributor [jvarick](#).

While many gardening websites and nurseries still promote Sweet Autumn Clematis as a garden-friendly decorative fragrant vine, it should NOT be planted under any condition, as its presence as an invasive is not something that any responsible gardener should tolerate. Where it is found in your landscape, it should be immediately eradicated. Its existence in our landscape threatens native plants and serves to reduce our local biodiversity.

NATIVE IMPOSTERS! - BUYER BEWARE



This picture from an anonymous greenhouse in the Huntsville area shows a plant being sold as Joe Pye Weed “Pink Frost” that might easily be mistaken for our native Joe Pye.

Will the real Joe Pye please stand up?

As the interest in native plants grows, prepare yourself to be confronted with non-native imposter plants masquerading as native plants in a garden center near you. Such is the case with “Joe Pye Weed - Pink Frost,” (*Eupatorium fortunei*), a plant native to East Asia that is

currently being sold in garden stores in North Alabama. The (real) native Joe Pye Weed is *Eutrochium fistulosum* (formerly *Eupatorium fistulosum*), and it is totally unnecessary and irresponsible to introduce and distribute non-native species from genera that are so well-represented by our native flora. While *E. fortunei* "Pink Frost" is not (yet) reported to be invasive in our area, it boggles the mind that it is being sold in lieu of our native beauty *E. fistulosum*. Watch out for other imposters like the Asian Beautyberry (*Callicarpa japonica*) that can also commonly be found in garden centers, and always tell garden center owners that you WANT native plants - the message will eventually sink in.



Our native Joe Pye Weed stands on its own and needs no competition from non-native imposters to rival its glory in the garden or rural landscape.

UPCOMING EVENTS
WILD ONES NORTH ALABAMA

Please see our [Events Calendar](#) on the website for a listing of all upcoming events. Our September 19th Seminar will feature guest speaker Aaron Stiles from Foraging Ahead, who will speak about [Native Habitats for the Urban Setting](#).

In October a member meeting and election will take the place of our typical monthly seminars.

We will take a hiatus from our Third Thursday meetings in November and December to make way for the holiday season before reconvening for our next seminar in January.

[READ MORE ON OUR WEBSITE](#)

