



September 2024

ORGANIZATIONAL UPDATES



WildOnes North Alabama hosted Aaron Stiles of [Foraging Ahead](#) during our September seminar.

September Seminar, Zappe Garden Tour and Chapter Elections

by **Charles Pannell** on 30 September

In September WildOnes North Alabama hosted Aaron Stiles, the business owner of [Foraging Ahead](#), to teach our group about designing native gardens for urban settings. Aaron discussed how to take inspiration from natural habitats to create curated gardens and the importance of planting in layers, creating focal points, ensuring a seasonal cascade of blooms and using abiotic elements, such as rock piles, to create micro-habitats for amphibians, reptiles and invertebrates. Aaron also discussed the importance of thinking about what you are trying to accomplish with your garden and the creatures you want to attract, whether those are birds, butterflies, pollinators or reptiles. If you missed Aaron's talk or would like to revisit it, you can watch a recording on [YouTube](#). Donnie Bryan's August seminar on Year Round Gardening with Native Plants has also been uploaded to [YouTube](#) for your viewing enjoyment.

Zappe Garden Tour



Members of WONA listen to Harold and Cathy Zappe explain their garden design, water features and garden rooms on a rainy September tour.

Cathy and Harold Zappe hosted WildOnes North Alabama's first(!) native garden tour on Saturday, Sep 28th, at their home and farm in Harvest, AL. Hurricane Helene was still dropping some much-needed precipitation on the day of the tour, but that didn't deter

about 8 WONA members from braving the drizzle to learn from Cathy and Harold's 25 years of experience. The couple moved to Alabama decades ago and discussed their gardening philosophy, and how it originally emerged from their love of gardening with native plants in the Fynbos biome of South Africa. They discussed which plants had grown well on their site conditions, which ones had spread to other areas of their garden, and how they had worked to restore their grassland ecosystem with custom seed mixes from Roundstone.



Tall goldenrods (*Solidago altissima*) stole the show in the wilder parts of the grassland, but two other goldenrod species were observed during the tour, including *Solidago porteri* (cultivated) and *Solidago nemoralis* (wild). Goldenrods are one of the most important Fall flowering keystone species in our region, providing valuable late-season nectar for pollinators such as the Monarch and food for birds.

The Zappes highlighted some of their favorite native plants including Arkansas bluestar (*Amsonia hubrichtii* - native to a small area West of the Mississippi River), Mistflower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*), great blue lobelia (*Lobelia siphilitica*) and Porter's goldenrod (*Solidago porteri*) and discussed their efforts to create water features for the birds and plans to replace (soon-to-be-listed invasive) Crepe myrtles with native River birches (*Betula nigra*) along their driveway. WildOnes is grateful that the Zappes offered to host our first garden tour, and we have many more planned in the coming year.



An arbor leads the way to the pond and grassland along mowed paths.

The last garden tour for 2024 will be coming up on November 16th at 10 AM at Herb and Terry Lewis' "Outback" garden. Space is limited to 30 members, so if you'd like to attend, please reach out with the request to wildonesnorthal@gmail.com. Three additional garden tours are already planned for 2025, and if you'd like to host a native garden tour on your property, please reach out.

Facebook member chat

As a reminder, if you'd like to join our members-only Facebook group, please search for [WildOnes North Alabama Member Chat](#), where you 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.

October meeting & Board elections

Our October meeting will be our first member-only meeting and will include elections for our Board of Directors and an open discussion about the progress and goals of the chapter. This will be the last meeting of the year before we break for winter holidays and resume our seminars in January. We invite members to share slides or pictures from your gardens at the October meeting to showcase the plants that have thrived, the wildlife you have observed or the challenges you have faced while incorporating native plants in your garden this year.

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

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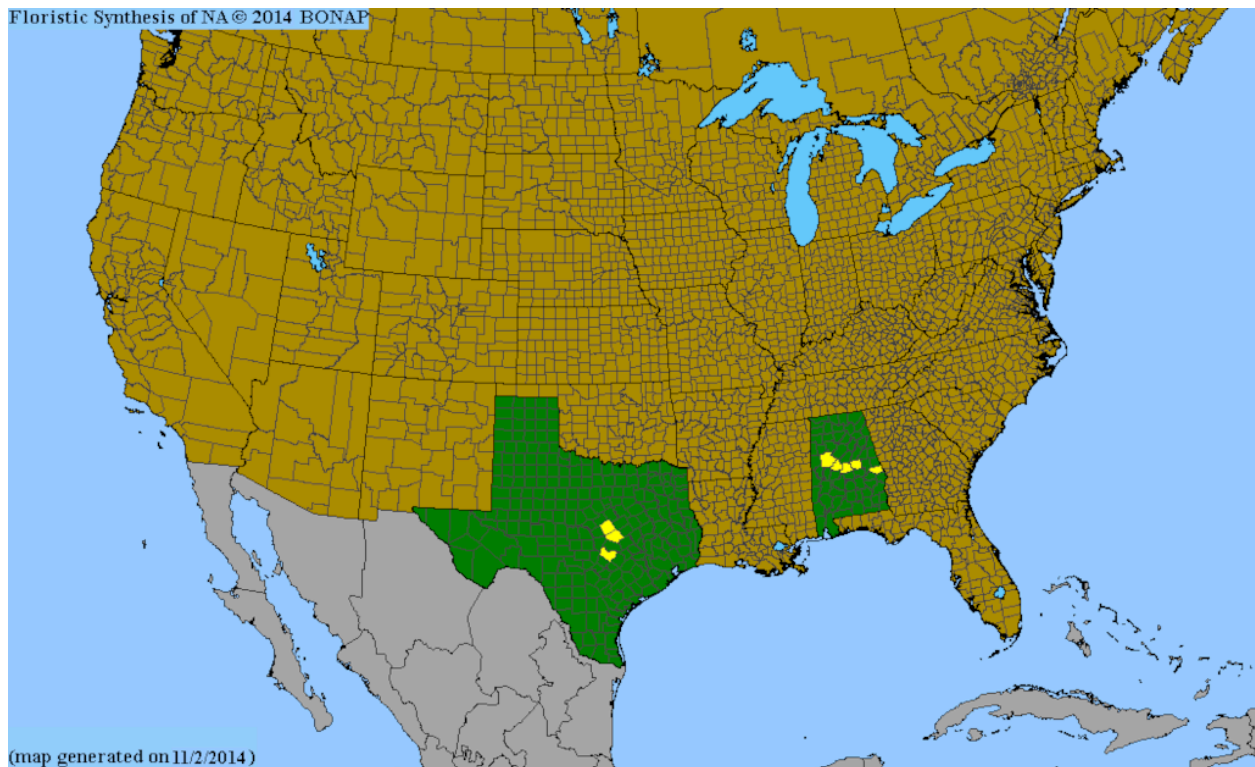
Alabama croton (*Croton alabamensis*) is a rare semi-evergreen shrub with silvery undersides to its leaves. It is documented from only 2 counties in Alabama - Bibb and Tuscaloosa.

Alabama croton (*Croton alabamensis*)

At the September WildOnes seminar, WONA member Jerry A. brought a number of interesting plants to share with our budding native plant community. One of those plants was Alabama croton, which I plan to lovingly incorporate into my garden this fall.

First collected in 1877 in Bibb County, AL, Alabama croton was quickly identified as a member of the spurge family (Euphorbiaceae), which is notable for its milky sap and small flowers. It was rare in the wild in 1877 and has probably become rarer since; it is sometimes referred to as “the rarest shrub in North America.” Alabama croton has disjunct

populations and subspecies in Alabama and Texas, so at some point in the distant past, its range must have been much more extensive than it is today. The subspecies occurring in Alabama has only been reported in the wild from Bibb and Tuscaloosa counties, although there is also a contentious record from Coffee County, TN. BONAP shows a slightly larger distribution across several counties in central Alabama. Alabama croton is estimated to have separated from its closest relatives in the sections *Corylocroton* and *Moacroton* [41 million years ago](#)! This plant is indeed special and is the largest croton species found in North America.



Alabama croton has two distinct subspecies occurring in disjunct populations in central Alabama and Texas. Photo courtesy of [BONAP](#).

The plant grows 4-8' tall and wide with a habit that some compare to native azaleas, has showy dark green foliage (with distinctive silver scaly undersides), and the old leaves turn a brilliant pumpkin-orange in the Fall; it is semi-evergreen to deciduous. The foliage, when crushed, is also reported to emit a fruity fragrance, often compared to apple or banana, but

I did not notice such an aroma when crushing the leaves of my specimen. Alabama croton is monoecious and produces small yellow flowers from February-April that provide early food for small bees, beetles and other pollinators.



Foliage turns a brilliant pumpkin-orange in the Fall. Photo from Bibb County courtesy of iNaturalist contributor [wildlander](#).

Alabama croton grows on thin, rocky outcroppings with alkaline soil in its native range. It prefers the shade but may grow in part-sun conditions as well. Many WONA members have reported that this rare shrub did extremely well during the recent drought, which is great news for keeping a low-maintenance landscape. Alabama croton prefers neutral pH (6.0-8.0), although Mt. Cuba reports it tolerates slightly acidic to very alkaline soils. Good companion plants reported by [Mt. Cuba](#) include *Clematis viorna*, Fragrant sumac (*Rhus aromatica*), woodland phlox (*Phlox divaricata*), bluestars (*Amsonia* spp), Tickseeds (*Coreopsis* spp) and Gayfeather (*Liatris* spp.). This plant is deer resistant, and although I could not find any information about *Croton alabamensis* being a host plant, several species of [Anaea](#), [Aguna asander](#), *Mastor celia* and *Thecia strophius*, are [known](#) to feed on various *Croton* species. If you have the opportunity and the right conditions, please consider adding this rare plant (responsibly acquired - eg from another WONA member) to your landscape to keep it in our ecosystem in perpetuity. .

INVASIVE SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

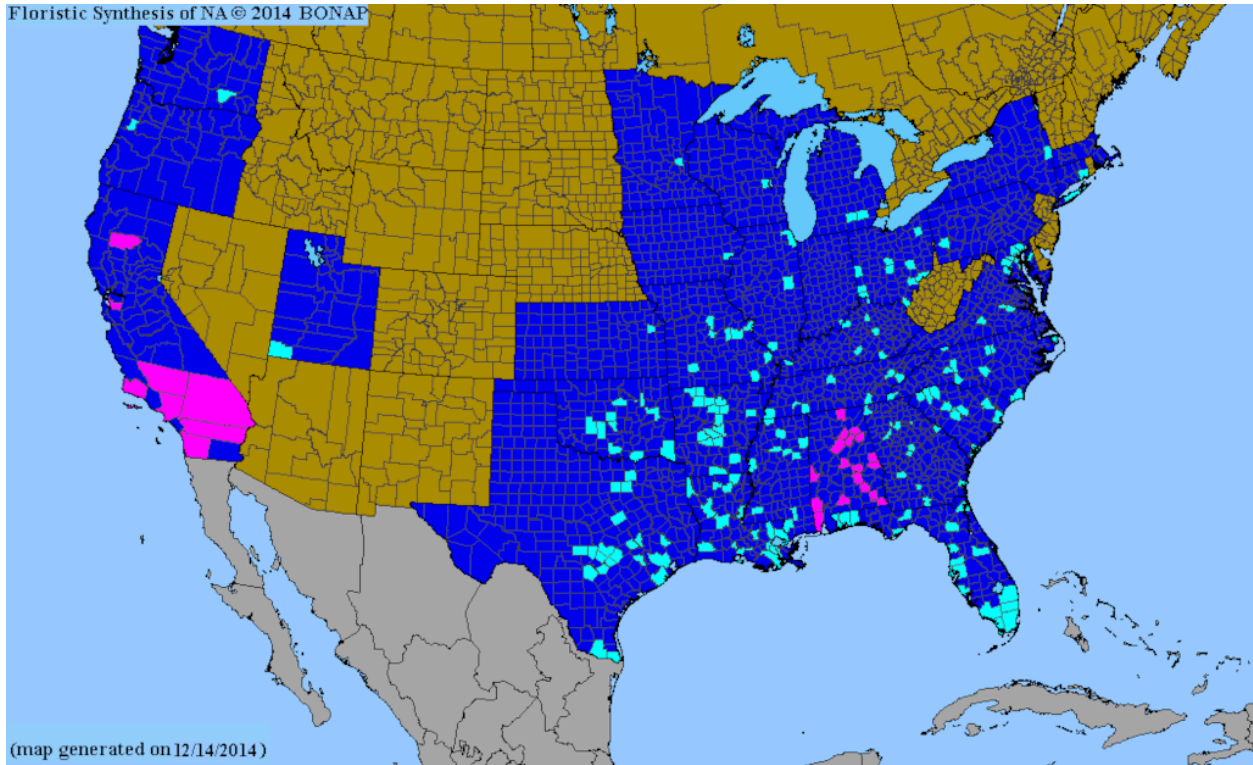


Mulberry weed is a rapidly spreading herbaceous annual weed that is a listed species in Alabama. It flowers and seeds prolifically and prefers moist, shady areas. Images courtesy of iNaturalist contributor [leroycluke](#), [human landfill](#), and [cbush24](#).

Mulberry weed (*Fatoua villosa*)

Lately, a little weed previously unknown to me has become the bane of my existence - Mulberry weed. If you haven't yet encountered this otherwise forgettable plant, count yourself lucky. As its name suggests, it is indeed part of the mulberry family (Moraceae), which is known for its weedy tendencies. This little invasive weed, like most of the others in our region, originates in East Asia. It is believed to have hitchhiked back to America with cargo returning from WWII and was first reported in Louisiana in 1964. From Louisiana, it spread rapidly during the 1990s in nursery stock. If you are buying any plants from a nursery, be sure to check vigilantly for this highly obnoxious invasive species.

The plant has heart shaped leaves and a glandular stem, which gives it a somewhat sticky feel. Its axillary flower clusters emerge in Late Spring, and the seeds are explosively dispersed up to a yard from the parent plant. It can grow to 4' tall but will start flowering and producing seed when it is as small as 3." While it is an annual herb, it tends to be perennial in warmer climates and can produce 2-5 generations per growing season!



Map showing the distribution of Mulberry weed. It has recently been listed as an invasive species in Alabama. Image courtesy of [BONAP](#).

Control:

This weed grows like the multi-headed Hydra; if you break off its stem, it will send up 5 more. The best control method is prevention: early identification (in April) and immediate removal. Once it starts growing, its numbers expand exponentially. Both pre- and post-emergent herbicides are recommended, but if you pull it, be sure to bag it and throw it in the trash. Composting this weed is not recommended. If any of our members have had success controlling this little invasive, please spread the news on how you did it. One member (a botanist) has recommended pulling it after a light rain. According to the University of Florida [Extension](#), applying pine bark mulch to a depth of 1.5" is effective in reducing the population by 90%. Others have tried more creative [methods](#) (don't try this at home!).

UPCOMING EVENTS
WILD ONES NORTH ALABAMA

Please see our [Events Calendar](#) on the website for a listing of all upcoming events.

October 10th (5-6 PM): Not a WONA event, but Alabama Extension has an “introduction to Landscaping with Native Plants class in Morgan County. More info can be found [here](#). Cost: \$10

October 17th (6-7:30 PM): WONA’s member meeting and election will take the place of our typical monthly seminars.

October 27th (1 PM): Not a WONA event, but the North Alabama Native Plants Society Facebook group will host a Fall Native Plant Share. Check out their Facebook page for more information.

Every Saturday in October (10 AM-2 PM): If you happen to be in Birmingham, Ruffner Mountain will host a Native Plant sale every Saturday in October. More info can be found [here](#).

November 16th (10-11 AM): Our last (currently) planned event for 2024 is the Lewis “Outback” garden tour. Read more on WONA’s Events page.

November/December(?): A Weed Wrangle may also occur during the winter months, but has not yet been approved by the land owners. A proposal for the work was submitted in early September.

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.

January 16th (6-7:30 PM): Our first monthly Seminar in 2025 will feature Sara Johnson’s presentation on “Gardening for Wildlife: Plant-Insect Interactions.” We hope to see you there!

[READ MORE ON OUR WEBSITE](#)



Native Plants, Natural Landscapes