

Native Plant Garden

by Mary Squyres



The native plant garden at CCE was designed and installed by two Master Gardener Volunteers, Mary Kirkwyland and Mary Squyres, with the goal of illustrating and encouraging the use of native plants in a home landscape. In 2013 when we first started to plan the garden, the use of native plants had not yet gained the popularity it has today. And although we both liked the informal cottage garden style of many typical native plant gardens, our original goal was to use native plants in a neat garden that would fit in any garden setting, including a fairly typical suburban

setting of tidy plantings. We wanted to encourage people to use native plants even if their desire was for a “well-mannered” landscape.

An additional goal for the garden was that it be low maintenance over the growing season. This characteristic of the garden proved fortuitous over the couple of years of the pandemic when opportunities to get together and work in the garden were limited.

Before planting the native garden, most of the pre-existing non-native plants were removed. A notable exception is the lovely Japanese maple, a memorial to late Master Gardener Volunteer Lynn Colvin. Another lingering non-native in the garden is the small bulb *Anemone blanda*, or Grecian windflower. This has seeded itself in amongst the tree roots of the European hornbeam tree – which, as its name implies, is also not native. Removing this large tree was definitely beyond the scope of our project, though.

The site presents some challenges. One is that it is shady in the morning, but then receives hot afternoon sun in the summer. Another challenge is the very dry zone under the hornbeam, where the tree roots fill the soil and outcompete any new plantings for water. Somehow the windflower has survived here, but attempts to introduce new plants here have failed.

Some plants have settled in and done very well. The outstanding shrub success is the black chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*.) It blooms profusely in the spring, then produces a heavy crop of berries in the summer. The flowers are great for pollinators, and the berries are food for birds. Some perennials that are thriving include Solomon’s seal, (*Polygnum biflorum*), bluestar (*Amsonia tabernaemontana*), and nodding onion (*Allium cernuum*.) The “cherry on top” in this garden is the beautiful sign painted by Master Gardener Volunteer Angela Loh.

This spring, beebalm (*Monarda didyma*), coneflower (*Edhinacea purpurea*), and brown-eyed susans (*Rudbeckia triloba*) have been added. These are all great plants for pollinators and birds. Here’s hoping for a great gardening season!