



The Chinquapin

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Summer 2014

The Official Publication Of The Royal Oak Nature Society

Native Vines: The Overachievers of the Forest

by Dena Serrato, Certified Green Industry Landscape Designer, Certified Arborist

In the spring of 2013 I wrote an article about the benefits and joys of growing native shrubs and small trees in home gardens. This time I would like to discuss an important and often overlooked class of plants: native vines. We will explore the benefits, attributes, and even a few drawbacks of growing them in residential landscapes.

If native shrubs and small trees are considered the ‘bones’ of the landscape, then vines are the curly locks; sometimes soft and wavy, often coarse and rambunctious, but never ever boring. Vines, especially ones growing in forest habitats, have learned to compete for sunlight by growing vertically towards the sun. They do this by using trees or other structures to their advantage. Vines employ a number of specialized organs such as tendrils, aerial roots and adhesive pads as attachments to help them reach their lofty goals. Tendrils are fascinating structures. They are prehensile (able to grasp) and sensitive to contact. When stroked lightly on its lower side, the tendril will, in a minute or two, curve toward that side. As it brushes against an object, it turns toward it and—the shape of the object permitting—wraps about it, clinging for as long as the stimulation persists. In contrast, twining plants wrap either their stems or elongated leaf petioles around a support as they grow. **Clematis** is one example of a vine with twining leaf petioles.

Before deciding to grow native vines (or any vine) in your landscape, it is important to match the plant with your growing conditions. There are native vines that can grow in either sun or shade, and in either wet or dry soil. Because some vines are very robust, it is crucial to understand their growth potential and provide them with a strong support if needed. When installing a structure such as a trellis, pergola or arbor, the installation should be considered permanent. The structure should be carefully

sited in the landscape and should be anchored into the ground. When covered with vines, these structures become vulnerable to the wind. The leaves act as tiny sails that catch passing breezes, and if not secure, the structure can topple over. A small fan trellis may be sufficient for a clematis, but would be seriously undersized for a trumpet creeper. In addition, be sure the vine selected has the ability to climb the intended structure. Tendrils need a narrower support than twining vines. No amount of hoping will allow a tendril-climbing vine to climb the side of a structure without some added support around which the tendrils can attach.

The following is a sampling of native vines that I am currently growing in my garden or have observed in nature. I bought my vines from member nurseries of the Michigan Native Plant Producers Association and from native plant mail order nurseries located as close to Michigan as possible. Plants discussed below are accompanied by a photo of that plant.

With creamy white scented flowers that bloom from mid to late summer and fluffy seed heads that persist into fall, the **Virgin’s bower** (*Clematis virginiana*) is a vine that is appropriate for smaller gardens. It can be trained on a trellis or arbor and has a fine textured appearance. I have it growing up a large climbing rose bush. The rose blooms in June, then the virgin’s bower takes over the show for the rest of the season.



(Continued on page 2)

****PLEASE NOTE**** : Our June speaker program will be held at the Senior/Community Center (3500 Marais) and not at the Royal Oak Middle School. Please see page 3 for details.

(Continued from page 1)

Don Drife, our Nature Society botanist, gave me a seedling of **Vasevine/American bells** (*Clematis viorna*) about 5 years ago and I have been delighted with it ever since. Although not native to Michigan, it is native to Ohio and throughout the Southeast. I tried to get it to grow up the trunk of a dead snag tree, but I suppose the tendrils did not have enough to hold on to. I now have it growing on a fan trellis. It produces small waxy pink flowers in mid to late summer and has pinwheel-like seed heads in the fall.



With big heart-shaped leaves and odd pipe-shaped flowers, **pipevine/Dutchman's pipe** (*Aristolochia durior*) is a showy plant that grows quickly but needs support such as a trellis, arbor, or fence. Although it will grow in sun, it will also thrive in deep shade where many other plants will not. I have it growing in the understory of a large Norway maple on an 8 foot tall metal trellis. It also tends to scramble along the ground in search of a new structure to inhabit. It is the host plant of the native Pipevine Swallowtail butterfly. The photo shows a female laying eggs while a male looks on.



Trumpet creeper (*Campsis radicans*) is a vigorous climber with clusters of trumpet-shaped orange to red flowers from mid-summer to autumn. It is native to Midwestern states and has become naturalized in Michigan. Due to its ability to grow to 25 feet or more, it needs a strong support and room to grow. It is one of my favorite vines because it attracts hummingbirds and northern orioles to its bright orange tubular flowers. The flowers are followed in the fall with long pea-like seed pods. It grows well in poor soil and prefers full sun. It has aerial rootlets, so train young shoots onto a trellis. It is known to be invasive in warmer states, but has not become a problem in Michigan.



Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) has the ability to grow high into the forest canopy, but it seems to prefer to wind its way along the ground in my backyard. It is identified by its leaves, which have five leaflets. The leaves turn brilliant red in the autumn, making the tree it is growing in look like it's on fire. This plant is often

confused with poison ivy, which it frequently grows alongside of. Poison ivy has only three leaflets, and its leaves have only a few teeth, or no teeth at all. Virginia creeper always has teeth on its leaves. The tiny, yellowish-green flowers



are not very showy, but the $\frac{1}{4}$ inch purplish-black berries resemble clusters of grapes. Although they are poisonous to humans, they are very beneficial to many species of birds and mammals. Give this vigorous vine plenty of support and room to grow!

There are many varieties of wild grape growing in local forests, including the **riverbank grape** (*Vitis riparia*). This climbing, multi-stemmed vine can grow so well it can totally envelop bushes and trees. I admit that I spend more time cutting the vines off my fence and other plants than any other vine in my yard. Although it is known as the riverbank grape, it grows well in more upland locations as well. The tiny white flowers grow in elongated clusters and are quite fragrant. The fruits grow in pyramidal, hanging bunches and are dark blue or purple. Wait until after a frost before attempting to eat them. I grew up in Dearborn and it was a common sight to see people in local parks collecting leaves of wild grape to make stuffed grape leaves.



Hog peanut (*Amphicarpaea bracteata*) is an obscure little vine with an impressive botanical name! It is one of the few nitrogen fixers for shade - commonly found in dense mats in dry open woods. It can be useful as a groundcover in inhospitable places. I have it growing in a mixed perennial/ shrub bed and it has not been overly- aggressive. It only grows to 3 feet in height and twines itself



around neighboring plants. There are 2 types of flowers: light violet flowers that form peapods above ground, and self-pollinating flowers that bury themselves below ground and form small edible beans.

(Continued on page 3)

SPEAKER PROGRAMS

June's general meeting/speaker programs will be held at the **Senior/Community Center** (3500 Marais- north of 13 Mile Rd between Crooks and Main). At our monthly **Wednesday** meetings from September to June, we present speaker programs that are usually slide shows focusing on various natural history topics. If you watch nature programs on PBS or the Discovery Channel, this is better because you can meet with the speakers afterwards and ask questions. The general meeting begins around **7:30 pm**, with the speaker program following several minutes later.

"Nature Society Year in Review" is being held on **June 4th**. This year, our June program will be held at the Royal Oak Senior/Community Center (3500 Marais) instead of at the Middle School. We will talk about what has been going on with the Nature Society, Tenhave Woods, Cummings Park, and our arboretum in Worden Park East. A photo show will depict some of those activities. We will finish off the evening by talking about some things we are planning to do in the future.

(Continued from page 2)

The **Groundnut** (*Apis Americana*) plant is a climbing vine that develops pinkish-lavender and maroon flowers which form in clusters that appear in mid to late August. It produces edible pea pods just below the flowers, but it is the underground potato-like tubers that most people are interested in eating. In fact, it was a staple in the diets of early Native Americans and is highly nutritious. Groundnut leaves will open up to catch the sun and fold up if there is too much sun. At evening time when sunlight is waning the leaves will hang down to catch all the light available. Also during a heavy rain the leaves will hang down to offer less resistance. I have not grown this plant in my garden so I am not sure how big it gets or how tall it grows.



The most important thing to know about **American bittersweet** (*Celastrus scandens*) is how to distinguish it from the highly invasive oriental bittersweet. You definitely want to avoid growing any invasive plants! The native has more narrow leaves while the leaves of the oriental are quite round. The berry clusters of the native hang from the end of the stems, while the berries of the oriental species originate from the leaf nodes and grow



along the vine. American bittersweet is a pretty twining vine that has taken to my fences quite readily. Its berries are eaten by many types of birds and mammals. You should purchase the plants from a reputable native plant nursery and plant at least 3 or more plants. The individual plants have either male or female flowers and planting a number of them ensures that you will get at least one male plant to pollinate the females.

Wild yam (*Dioscorea villosa*) is a twining vine that grows to 18 feet with shiny, ribbed heart-shaped leaves. It produces sprays of tiny white flowers and winged seed pods. The tuberous root is edible and is used for medicinal purposes. It prefers to grow in moist forests, but the vine I have is in dry shade and is doing well.



To read about the additional native vines that I am currently growing in my garden or have observed in nature, please go to the last page of this newsletter.

I bet you had no idea how many native vines there are to plant in home landscapes and how versatile they can be. I would start with a few, maybe virgin's bower and trumpet creeper, to see how they grow. Remember to give them an appropriate amount of space to grow and to give them good support. They will reward you in many ways.

NATURE WALKS

CUMMINGSTON PARK: Park and meet at Leafdale & Torquay

TENHAVE WOODS: Park in Marais/Lexington lot and meet at the Lexington entrance (300 feet east of parking lot). For the Owl Hoots & Full Moon walks, park and meet at the Marais/Lexington lot.

ARBORETUM: Park and meet on the north side of the Royal Oak Senior/Community Center (3500 Marais)

Wearing boots while in the parks is recommended in the winter & spring months. Using insect repellent and dressing appropriately is advised from late spring to the end of summer. All public nature walks are free & reservations are not

"Late Spring Nature Walk" is being held at **Tenhave Woods** on Wednesday, **June 18th**, at **7:30 pm**. Join us and see what is happening in the woods during the late spring and beginning of summer.

"Mushroom Walk" Saturday, **June 28th**, at **Tenhave Woods** beginning at **10:00 am**.

"Mushroom Walk" Saturday, **July 26th**, at **Cummingston Park** beginning at **10:00 am**.

"Meadow of the Arboretum" is being held at the Royal Oak Nature Society Arboretum on Wednesday, **July 30th**, beginning at **7:30 pm**.

"Meadow of the Arboretum" is being held at the Royal Oak Nature Society Arboretum on Wednesday, **August 20th**, beginning at **7:30 pm**.

"Mushroom Walk" Saturday, **August 23rd**, at **Tenhave Woods** beginning at **10:00 am**.

Royal Oak Nature Society Friends of Fungi is a group that promotes the understanding of, and an appreciation for, fungi in general and those fungi found in Tenhave Woods, Cummingston Park, and other local urban woods. This group is open to anyone who wants to learn more about fungi which also includes mushrooms. They meet on Wednesday's at the Royal Oak Senior Center (3500 Marais) beginning at 7:00 pm in November and again January thru March. There are monthly public walks from April thru October. This group is lead by Mary Fredricks, a member and botanist/mycologist of the Royal Oak Nature Society.

For more information, please check out the Friends of Fungi link:

<https://www.ci.royal-oak.mi.us/portal/Community%20Links/Nature%20Society/Announcements/friends-fungi>

Royal Oak Wild Side

by Bob Muller

This winter has been long and hard, but the snowfall in some ways has made it easier for a number of plants and small animals to survive. As cold as it was, deep snow insulates the ground. If you cleared back the snow, you may have been able to dig into the ground because not all of the ground was frozen. This especially happens in the forest where we do not rake back the leaves like we do in our yards. This adds to the insulation. This past winter was easier for the wildflowers than it was on us. Although they got a late start to the growing season by waiting for the snow to melt, the plants do tend to catch up for lost time with faster growth. The leaves on the trees will still come out in early May. The wildflowers are always in a race with the leaves as the wildflowers need the sun to provide enough energy to produce flowers and seeds. They need to get this done before the tree leaves block out the sunlight. In early April we begin to see many morning cloak butterflies on the sunny days. These butterflies hibernate and are always out before the

first of the wildflower blooms. Deep freezes often kill many insects that also hibernate in the ground; this was an easy winter for them. The downside of this brutal winter is that this coming summer will probably have a high population of yellow jacket hornets. Deep snow also replenishes the water table. In early spring Dragonfly Pond is at its maximum depth, which helps to provide enough water for our amphibians. Spring peepers are out and singing in early April. It's not long after the peepers are out that the American toads, grey tree frogs and western choir frogs will also be out singing to attract the ladies.

Spring is always a favorite time of many as the changes happen almost daily. The temperate world rushes to take advantage of the sunlight in order to save enough energy to survive the cold that will return in six months.

So, come out this spring to the nature parks and enjoy the natural world.

Nature Nights held in 2014

The Nature Society put on two Nature Nights for 2014. One was held at the Royal Oak Library on February 18 and the other at Oak Ridge Elementary School on March 6. Total turnout for both nights was about 200 adults and children. The Nature Society wants to thank Mary Karshner from the Library plus Dennis Kranik and Carolyn Jennings from Oak Ridge for being our Nature Night coordinators. Next year around the end of January, we are currently scheduled to do a nature night at Helen Keller Elementary School.

A special thanks goes out to all of our exhibitors:
Kristine Hill & Dean Olkowski-Birds
Nancy Vickers & Joyce Drife-Crafts
Don Drife & Heather Muller-Owl Pellets
Dena Serrato-Seed Planting
Bob Muller-Skulls & Skins
Phillip Kukulski -North American Native Fish
Amanda Felk & Christina Funk-Bats
Troop 1627-Tree Rings
Rebecca Johnson- Amphibians
John & Mike Topor-Fossils

A BIG THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTING MEMBERS

A special thank you from the Nature Society goes out to the following 2013/14 Supporting Members for their support and financial contribution to us:

Doris Applebaum
Kristie Bonner
Pam & Mike Brady
Pat & Ray Coleman
Helen & Connie Cost
Laurine Cybulski
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Please check out our Facebook page & become a fan of the Royal Oak Nature Society.

Page: <http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Royal-Oak-Nature->



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1 year Household Membership
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- Patron (\$50 & up)

- Receive newsletter by:
 Regular mail OR
 E-mail

NATURE SOCIETY TEAMS

Please contact us if you would like to become actively involved with one or more of our teams:

Stewardship: Maintains a trail system and enhances the overall park experience at Tenhave Woods, Cummingston Park and the Arboretum.

Communications: Publicizes organizational activities to the general membership and public through various mediums and performs any other forms of communications required by the board.

Education: Provides outreach and liaison to outside individuals, groups and schools to promote environmental education.

Fundraising: Is responsible for the fund-raising efforts of the Nature Society, which includes the coordinating and organizing of the Annual Spring Fundraiser & other fund-raiser programs approved by the board.

Programming: Is responsible for setting up the speaker programs, workshops and all of the nature programs within Cummingston Park, Tenhave Woods and the Arboretum.

Ways & Means: Investigates means of grant solicitation and then follows through accordingly.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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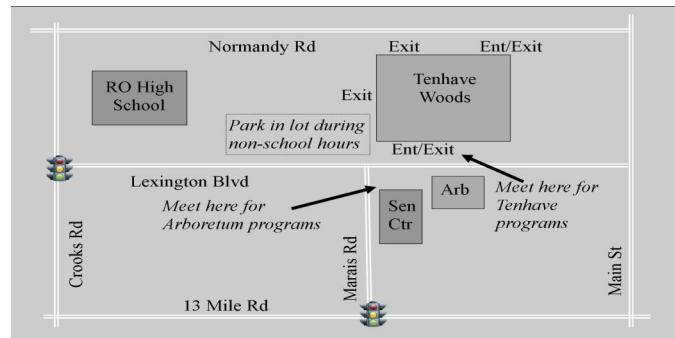
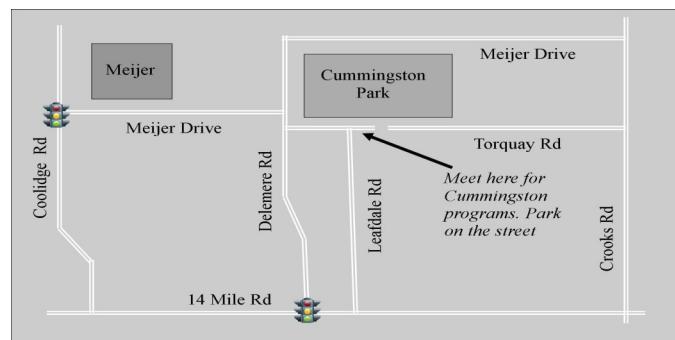
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At Large: Dena Serrato (248-542-2820)

Troop/Pack 1627 Representative & Engineer: Richard Stoll (248-398-2437)

Cummingston Park, Tenhave Woods, and the Arboretum

Traffic Light



To locate and print out Tenhave Woods & Cummingston Park trail maps, please go to our web site (listed below under our tree logo), link on to "Park Locations" and then "Map for park trail locations"

The Royal Oak Nature Society is a nonprofit education and stewardship group working within the city of Royal Oak's two nature parks, Tenhave Woods and Cummingston Park. Our mission is to foster awareness and usage of these two natural areas. We accomplish this by providing stewardship for the continuing improvement of these parks. We also offer a wide range of natural history educational programs.

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FIRST CLASS MAIL



Native Vines (continuation)

In our Summer 2014 newsletter, Dena Serrato wrote an article, “Native Vines: The Overachievers of the Forest”. In it, she included a partial sampling of native vines that she is currently growing in her garden or has observed in nature. Vines discussed on this page will complete that list and are accompanied by a photo of that plant.

Greenbrier (*Smilax rotundifolia*) leaves resemble those of the wild yam, but they are not nearly as ribbed and puckered. It climbs by tendrils and also has small prickles along the stems that help it to secure itself in place. It can grow to 30 feet if it has something to grow on, or it can grow as a thicket-like shrub. The small light yellow-green flowers are borne in small round clusters in late spring. The dark blue to black berries, often covered with a powdery, waxy bloom, mature in late summer and

persist over winter.

They are an important food source for wildlife. Birds also like to nest in the tangled stems. I have not yet tried growing this vine in my garden.



O.K., I am not suggesting that anyone plant **poison ivy** (*Toxicodendron radicans*) intentionally in their yard! But what if it is already there? I have a number of clients in Beverly Hills and Franklin that own small woodlots, some adjacent to the Rouge River. Poison ivy grows naturally in these moist forested habitats. Some clients hire a service to eradicate poison ivy from their properties, but some have taken the approach of living with it respectfully. They know where it is and what it

looks like. They avoid those areas and can appreciate the brilliant orange-red show the leaves put on in the fall. That is the same approach we take in our Arboretum behind the Senior Center.



Wild cucumber (*Echinocystis lobata*) and **Bur cucumber** (*Sicyos angulatus*) are the only annual vines in the bunch and are members of the cucurbit family. You must plant seeds every year to get them to grow, but some plants may self-sow. I sometimes visit a park in west Dearborn where the Rouge River cuts through it. Wild cucumber grows on the edge of the floodplain forest there and is covered in sprays of airy white flowers in summer, followed by curious, loofa sponge-

like fruits that dry on the vine. It travels by tendrils up to 25 feet high. Bur cucumber is similar to wild cucumber. Wild cucumber has hairless stems and larger single pods, while bur cucumber has hairy stems, and clusters of smaller pods.



Moonseed (*Menispermum canadense*) is the only native vine that I have regretted planting in my yard. I bought one plant from a native plant nursery 15 years ago and it grew politely on a trellis for about 5 years. Then I started noticing little shoots popping out of the ground, first adjacent to it, eventually many feet away. I tried to pull them out and realized that each sprout was connected to a network of rope-like rhizomes that travelled in every direction. The tenuous rhizomes and stems cut my hands if I tried to yank them without wearing leather gloves. The vines now occupy an area of about 10 feet by 30 feet, covering fences and climbing up a 15 foot arborvitae hedge. I am seriously considering blasting the whole area with brush killer. I would have to transplant any desirable perennials and shrubs that I have growing

there and make sure I don't take any roots of the moonseed vine with it. It is a shame because it is a cute vine with star-shaped leaves, small

white flowers and clusters of red to black berries. The berries contain seeds in the shape of a half-moon, hence the name.

