



# Lake County Seed Collection Guide

## For Native Gardeners

Kelly Schultz<sup>1</sup>, Dale Shields<sup>2</sup>

version 1 8/2021

<sup>1</sup>Lake County Forest Preserve District, <sup>2</sup>Volunteer Stewardship Network

Images ©DJS Shields. Produced by: Dale Shields & Kelly Schultz ©Lake County Forest Preserve District [kschultz@lcfpd.org]

The pictures in this guide were assembled to help native gardeners identify ripe seeds of native species. The squares are 1” on a side in the indoor shots with white squares on the gray background. The seed shots are on a metric scale (mm divisions). Names used are those of Flora of the Chicago Region by Gerould Wilhelm and Laura Rericha. Our heartfelt thanks go to Laurie Ryan of the McHenry County Conservation District for her review.

### Harvest notes

Successful collection of viable seed requires an understanding of when to collect, how to collect, how to store, how to process, and when to sow. Determine these criteria and have a plan before harvesting seeds, especially of uncommon species. The species are listed in order of the photo dates, so will give an approximate time for collection, but collection dates vary according to local weather effects on blooming and pollinators; proximity to Lake Michigan; slopes; sun vs shade, etc. Many seed harvest charts are available with collection dates, but it is best to scout each site rather than relying on historic dates.

Seeds collected before mid-June should be sown right away. They are intolerant of dry storage and most of them require both warm & cold treatments to stimulate germination. Late June seeds are more tolerant of dry storage; sow these seeds soon, but you can let them dry for a few weeks. Seeds ripening July and later can be held for fall/winter sowing, sow by Jan 1<sup>st</sup> for best results.

**Collect ethically & sustainably.** Everything is protected in forest preserves, including seeds. Collection is only allowed by staff and volunteers in our restoration programs. If you are collecting within those programs, it is important to avoid overharvesting wild populations. For perennials: **leave 50% behind.** For annuals, biennials, rare, threatened, or endangered species: **collect only 10% of the seed.**

### Seed Groups

*Time sensitive groups – seeds disperse in a few days or weeks due to wildlife, sensitivity to wind, etc.*

**Elaiosomes** are “ant candy” attached to the seeds. Ants are strong and motivated, able to quickly carry the candy back to their home and tossing the heavy “candy wrapper” (seeds) into their compost piles. Check these species frequently; ants will rapidly collect all of the seeds. These seeds have higher germination when sown within a day or two.



**Ballistic** capsules catapult their babies away, up to 30 feet! Search YouTube for “exploding seeds” to see these in action. To harvest: learn the ripening sequence & harvest just before explosion; store in a \*sealed\* paper bag or mesh bag for a day or two. Another option is to cover the seed heads with mesh hoods (\*after flowers wilt\*) to contain the seeds. Snip the entire stem after the seeds have popped, and carefully open the hoods indoors.



**Fluffy** seeds are quite common, allowing for wind to efficiently move seeds over long distances. Collect when fluffy. It is ok to collect these seeds \*slightly\* early, by collecting entire stems with seeds that are either fully poofed or have dropped their ray florets (the colorful "petals"); snip the stems and let them poof in a paper or mesh bag. Spring fluffy seeds are typically more sensitive to strong weather.



**Milkweed** seeds are ripe when pods are split open & seeds are brown. Ignore the pod color. Pro tip: rubber band the unripe pods, to prevent seeds from flying away.



**Berries** turn a vibrant color when ripe, as an advertisement to the wildlife to EAT ME and disperse the seed. Collection window is small for some of these seeds. These species need to be sown fresh in damp soil OR cleaned & stored in plastic in the refrigerator (which maintains a higher level of humidity). The natural process of a seed stored in a juicy berry, followed by chewing, digestion, and dispersal in a pile of “fertilizer” means these seeds are not used to completely drying out.





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*Mama's Boys will remain on the stem for a while, often for weeks.*

**Shakers** drop seeds very close to the mother plant, when shaken loose by the wind or a passing critter. Usually a Mama's Boy, unless strong weather occurs.

**Beaks** are a subset of the shaker group, with seed capsules that split open like a beak when the seeds are ripe. Collect when beaks are open.

**Coneheads** are flowers with a cone-shaped center. Imagine these flowers without their colorful parts, and you know exactly what they look like when seeds are ripe. Seeds are inside the hard cone.

**Crumbly Coneheads** are cone-shaped or thimble-shaped. Softer than standard coneheads, they crumble when ripe and are easily stripped by hand.

**Shattering** seeds can be tough to visually judge for ripeness. Use a \*gentle\* touch test to see if the seeds easily loosen. Spring seeds remain green (perhaps for camouflage) and swell slightly. Fall seeds typically turn brown or beige when ripe. Often found in colonies, these seeds do not travel far on their own. Some of these species drop quickly & are not Mama's Boys.

**Hitchhikers** are easy to tell when ripe – they hitch a ride on your pants! Color can be an indicator, but not always.



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### Spring Beauty

*Claytonia virginica*

PORTULACACEAE

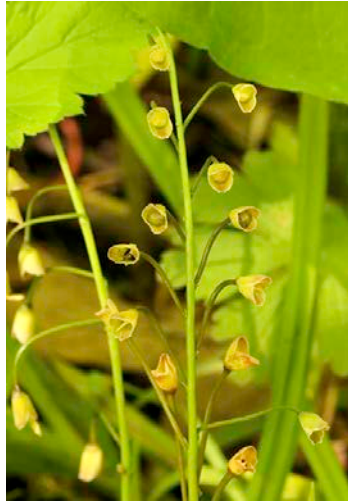


Photo: 5-22-18

Beaks. Elaiosomes. One of the first spring flowers, with pink stripes! In seed, it looks like a bunch of tiny duckbills along the stem. Inside the duckbills are capsules that will split open to drop out the seed. Collect the stem when at least one of the capsules is open; the rest will open in the bag. Good for shade gardens (consider as an alternative to Siberian squill). This plant goes dormant in summer.

### Common Oak Sedge aka Penn Sedge

*Carex pensylvanica*

CYPERACEAE

CAREX: ACROCYSTIS

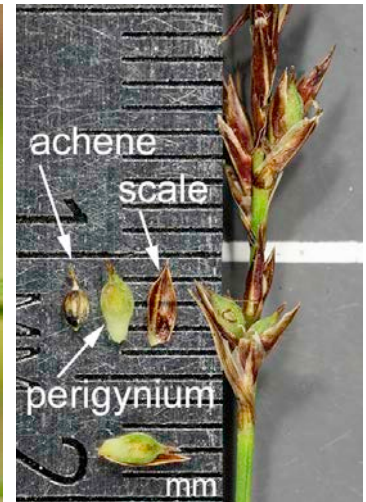


Photo: 6-2-18

Shattering. A wonderful woodland "lawn" that grows to about 6" tall. Penn sedge is reportedly poor from seed. The truth is that these seeds MUST be sown right away. Look for round beads, check with the touch test for ripeness. Spreads easily through vegetative reproduction.

### Bloodroot

*Sanguinaria canadensis*

PAPAVERACEAE



Photo: 6-8-18

Elaiosomes. One of the earliest flowers, cheery bright white blooms pop up and the leaves unfurl a little later. The elaiosome is obvious in bloodroot, like a white gummy worm. Wear gloves to prevent the pod's yellow sap staining your fingers. Collect open capsules. Can give swollen pods (~ 1/2" wide) a \*gentle\* squeeze to see if it pops open to reveal the wine-colored seeds.



### Wild Geranium

*Geranium maculatum*

GERANIACEAE



Photo: 6-13-17

Ballistic. Purple spring flowers, an occasionally a few bonus blooms in fall. Geranium (aka cranesbill) in seed looks like a bird's long beak with 5 bumps at the bottom. The beak is actually composed of 5 ladders that turn brown, then spring up to catapult the seeds away. Collect brown bills; once it looks like a chandelier it has already flung away the seed.

### Rue Anemone

*Anemonella thalictroides*

RANUNCULACEAE

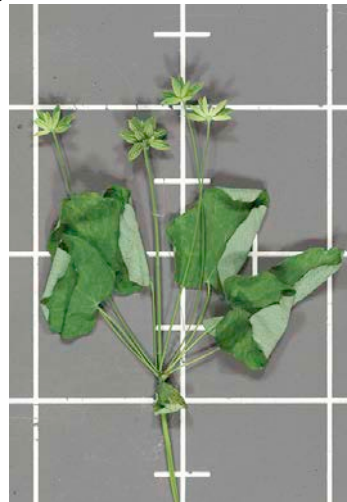


Photo: 6-15-18

Shattering. This sweet little white flower grows in mature woodlands, about ankle-high. Leaves surround the stem in a whorl, and the white flowers are replaced by football-shaped seeds. Collect when the seeds come loose with a gentle touch test. Sow fresh.

### Jacob's Ladder

*Polemonium reptans*

POLEMONIACEAE



Photo: 6-15-18

Beaks. Inside the papery "Chinese lantern" is a capsule that slowly turns from green to beige-yellow, and then opens to drop the seeds. Shortly before opening, capsule becomes a little translucent and the brown-burgundy color of the seeds becomes visible. Peel back the papery lantern to check, and collect when the capsule is yellow-beige or translucent. Sweet purple flowers, leaves are parallel like ladder rungs.



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Smooth  
Yellow Violet

*Viola pubescens*  
var. *scabriuscula*

VIOLACEAE



Photo: 6-23-18

Ballistic. Some violet species have seed pods on stalks, others are stalkless, like this one. For stalkless pods: check with a \*gentle\* squeeze or look for split capsules. For stalked pods: the pod starts out nodding towards the ground, then raises its head to the sky, and finally splits and catapults the seed away. Capsules will ripen at slightly different times, on the same plant. Good for many pollinators.

Wild Columbine

*Aquilegia canadensis*

RANUNCULACEAE

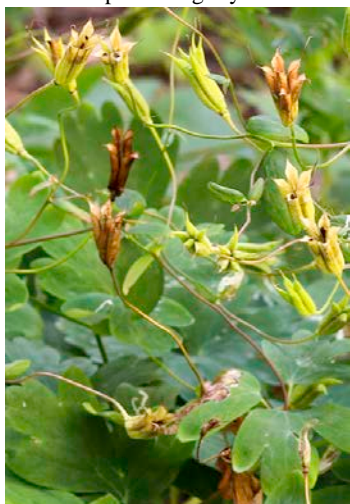


Photo: 6-24-17

Beaks. The native columbine has bold red and yellow flowers. The seed capsules look somewhat like the flower, but upside down. Collect when beaks open to reveal the oil-black seeds. The beaks will turn colors too, but the open beak is a more important indicator that seed is ready for harvest. Short-lived perennial, most often grown in full sun to part shade. Bumblebees perform acrobatics to pollinate upside down.

Reflexed Wild Ginger

*Asarum canadense*  
var. *reflexum*

ARISTOLOCHIACEAE

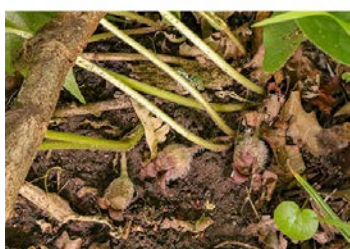
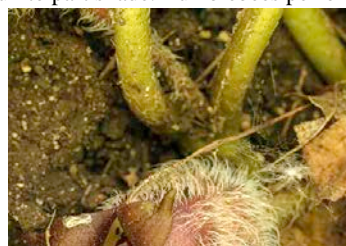


Photo: 6-24-18

Elaiosomes. The spade-shaped leaves make a lovely native groundcover. Burgundy flowers are hidden under the leaves, right on top of the soil. Capsules degrade into a mealy mess; collect when soft & mushy. Plants also divide & transplant easily from the shallow roots. Shade.



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Woodland Phlox

*Phlox divaricata*

POLEMONIACEAE



Photo: 6-24-17

Ballistic. Like garden variety phlox, the wild species have 5 petals. The blue-purple petals drop, revealing hard capsules tucked in the center of the 5 sepals. Capsules swell & turn green-beige, before splitting into 3 pieces & shooting the dark seeds away. Sepals often peel backwards like a star shortly before catapulting. After flowers start to fade, cover with mesh hoods to capture seeds

Prairie Woolly Sedge

*Carex pellita*

CYPERACEAE

CAREX: PALUDOSAE



Photo: 7-3-19

Shattering. This sedge is notable for its woolly (like peach fuzz) seeds. Seed color is variable – pale green, yellow, or purplish before drying to a muted brown. Common in wetlands and plays well with other natives; a good option for dense rain gardens or wetland edges.

Curly-styled Wood Sedge

*Carex rosea*

CYPERACEAE

CAREX:  
PHAESTOGLOCHIN

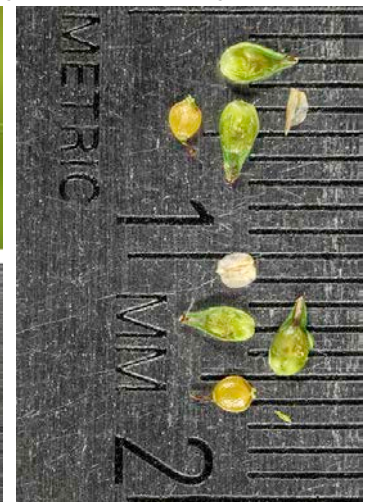


Photo: 7-6-2018

Shattering. One of the “star sedges.” A sister species, straight-styled wood sedge, is also sold at native nurseries. They look VERY similar, but this one has curly styles (see inset circle). Either species is great to have. Both grow in shade. Both grow in medium moisture soils, although this one can tolerate slightly drier soils too. Seeds strip off easily by hand when ripe.



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Common Spiderwort

*Tradescantia ohiensis*

COMMELINACEAE



Photo: 7-10-17

Beaks. Mama's Boy. Each flower reportedly blooms for a single morning, closing in the sunny afternoon. Luckily each stalk has dozens of flowers, extending the season of this royal purple beauty. Seeds also ripen sequentially; Mama's Boy due to weeks seed formation. Look for sepals changing from green to brown; target heads with at least 50% brown. Snip stalks. Sap can be itchy, but soap & water stops the itch.

Prairie Trillium  
aka  
Red Trillium

*Trillium recurvatum*

TRILLIACEAE

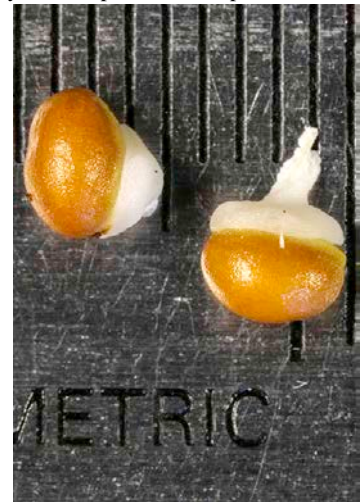


Photo: 7-23-18

Elaiosomes. The quintessential trillium with maroon-red petals around black anthers. Leaves are mottled shades of green. Happiest in some shade; they can tolerate full sun but often fade away faster without shade. Look for yellow-ish capsules, they will be slightly soft and easily pop off the stem. Takes 2 years to germinate, and may take additional years before starting to flower.

Shooting Star

*Dodecatheon meadia*

PRIMULACEAE



Photo: 7-29-17

Beaks. Look for brown & open capsules. Capsules start off green-yellow and nodding, then raise to the sky, then turn brown, and finally open. Seeds are tiny. Germination is high, but survival past seedling stage is low due to damping off. Takes several years to flower.



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### Thimbleweed

*Anemone cylindrica*

RANUNCULACEAE

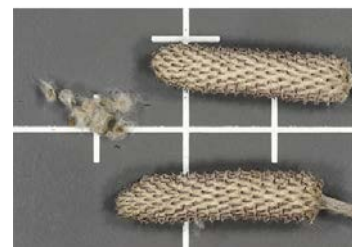


Photo: 8-1-17

Crumbly coneheads. The thimble-shaped cone fluffs up into a soft, cottony cloud. Look for loose cotton, strips easily by hand when ripe. *A. virginiana* has leaves that are less deeply lobed, thimbles are less slender (more like gumdrops), and typically found in partial to full shade.

### White Wild Indigo

*Baptisia lactea*

FABACEAE



Photo: 8-6-18

Beaks. Mama's Boy. Black pods split open to release seeds, ranging in color from chestnut to caramel to mustard. Wild populations may have weevils, but this is unlikely in home gardens. Collect charcoal-black pods. Open up a few immediately to look for weevils. If weevils are present, store in a ziploc and place in the freezer; weevils will hibernate instead of eating your seeds.

### Brown Fox Sedge

*Carex vulpinoidea*

CYPERACEAE

CAREX:  
MULTIFLORAE



Photo: 8-8-2017

Shattering. Sedges are like grasses but with triangular stems. There are several fox sedge species readily available; they have long bristly clusters of seed. This one is a good option for rain gardens. Seeds will be brown when ripe, strip them off the stem by hand.



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Pale Purple  
Coneflower

*Echinacea pallida*

ASTERACEAE



Photo: 8-8-18

Coneheads. Mama's Boy. Purple coneflowers have been the poster child of native gardens – pretty and great for pollinators! Snip dark heads, ideally when a few seeds have fallen out of the conehead. This species has candy corn seeds with a chocolate stripe, other species are solid gray. The sturdy spikey heads are protective of the seeds. Use thick gloves, pliers, or a short soak in water (then dry the seeds well).

Blue Flag

*Iris virginica* var.  
*shrevei*

IRIDACEAE

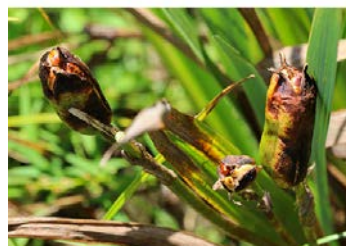


Photo: 8-16-18

Beaks. Our only native iris, the lovely blue flag transforms to terra cotta colored seeds stacked within a banana-like pod. Collect \*open\* banana peels. Flower parts & seeds are in groups of 3s & 6s, a trait showing their distant relation to the lily group. Rain garden beauty.

Bottlebrush Grass

*Hystrix patula*

POACEAE

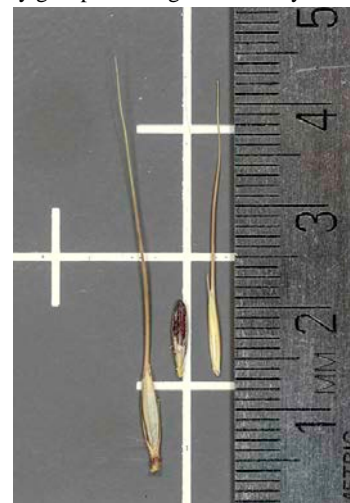
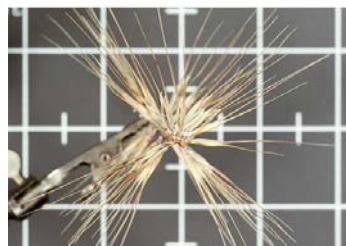


Photo: 8-16-17

Shattering. Mama's Boy. A staple in woodland restoration and with a unique "bottle brush" arrangement, forming an X from above. Strip beiseed by hand but wear gloves; the knobs where the seeds attach can be rough if collecting a large quantity.



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### Butterfly Weed

*Asclepias tuberosa*

ASCLEPIADACEAE



Photo: 8-24-17

Milkweed. Bright orange flowers are great for pollinator gardens! Collect when the vertical seam in pod starts to split open. Can check with a \*gentle\* squeeze, the seeds must be brown inside. Milkweeds are tough to process. Best to clean them fresh (before fluff dries & expands).

### Golden Alexanders

*Zizia aurea*

APIACEAE



Photo: 8-25-17

Shattering. This common parsley-relative has bright yellow flowers that become green seeds and finally ripen to brown. Collect when easy to strip by hand. Most often mesic to wet-mesic prairies, but can be in open woodlands, savannas, prairies, and fens, from wet to dry.

### Starry Campion

*Silene stellata*

CARYOPHYLLACEAE

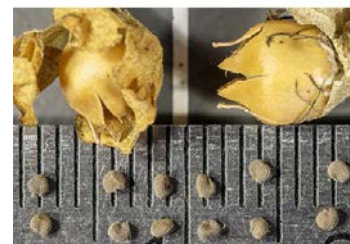


Photo: 8-28-18

Beaks. This lovely plant can be found in healthy savannas, open woods, and sometimes wet-mesic prairies. The flower is a white fringed star. A papery shell surrounds the capsules. Collect beige capsules. Good for light shade gardens, happiest with tall friends.



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Wood Mint

*Blephilia hirsuta*

LAMIACEAE

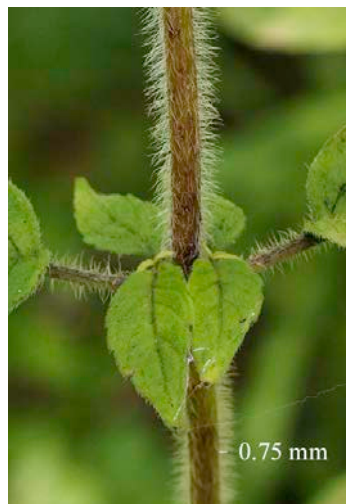


Photo: 8-28-19

Shakers. Like *Monarda* and many other mints, seeds are held in “tubes” (the calyx). Tip into your hand, seeds will fall out if ripe. There are similar species; this one has a minty odor when leaves are crushed, and likes a little shade.

White Baneberry

aka

Doll’s Eyes

*Actaea pachypoda*

RANUNCULACEAE



Photo: 8-31-18

Berries. An awesomely creepy plant, the common name is very appropriate. Collect when berries are white-ish. As with any plant called a “bane,” this is not one you want to eat. Good in woodland gardens. A lovely cluster of white flowers in late spring.

Purple Prairie Clover

*Dalea purpurea*

FABACEAE

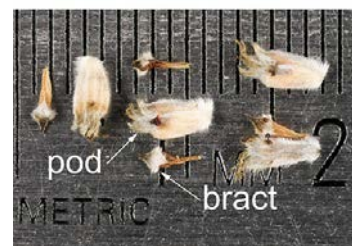
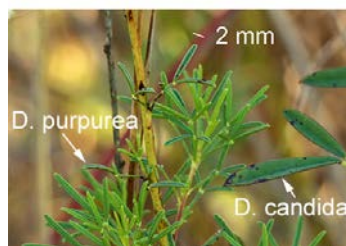


Photo: 8-31-17

Crumbly Coneheads. Purple prairie clover & white prairie clover create little tutus of flowers, blooming from bottom to top of the column. Both like dry sunny spots and can be grown together. White prairie clover seeds are enclosed in a dry papery hull, black & tan colored; Purple has fuzzy hulls, gray-peachy colored. Seeds do not need to be de-hulled, especially if sown outside in fall.



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Wild Bergamot

*Monarda fistulosa*

LAMIACEAE



Photo: 9-7-17

Shakers. Mama's Boy. A lavender firework of flowers found in prairies & savannas. Leaves have an odor similar to the citrus fruit of the same name (popular as an essential oil & in Earl Gray tea). Lavender florets drop off, leaving the tube-shaped calyx behind. Tip the head into your hand, seeds fall out when ripe. Popular with many pollinators, including monarchs and the endangered rusty patched bumblebee.

Yellow Coneflower  
aka  
Gray-headed  
Coneflower

*Ratibida pinnata*

ASTERACEAE



Photo: 9-7-17

Crumbly Coneheads. Mama's Boy. Ripe seeds easily crumble & can be stripped by hand. The seeds are graphite-gray, tucked between lighter gray/beige chaff. Seeds have a refreshing odor, usually described as citrus-like. Bright yellow flowers, good for dense sunny gardens.

Jack-in-the-Pulpit

*Arisaema triphyllum*

ARACEAE

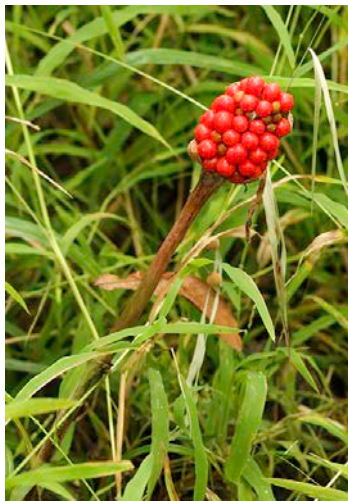


Photo: 9-7-18

Berries. Mama's Boy. Best known for the 3 leaflets & namesake flower, but leaves are often gone by harvest. The aggregate fruits resemble a tomato-red raspberry on steroids. Jack grows in mesic and moist woods. The juice can reportedly cause skin & stomach irritation; wear gloves to remove the seeds. (You can sow the seeds with the fruits on, but a critter may move the seed.)



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### Tall Bellflower

*Campanulastrum americanum*

CAMPANULACEAE



Photo: 9-10-17

Shakers. Mama's Boy. This is one of our few native annuals with lovely periwinkle-purple flowers. Green capsules form, turn beige, and then pores open to shake out the tiny (1 mm) seeds. Collect when open pores are visible. As with all annuals, collect only 10%.

### Showy Ticktrefoil

*Desmodium canadense*

FABACEAE



Photo: 9-11-17

Hitchhikers. Mama's Boy. Pink flowers turn into chains of velcro-like seeds; people have mistaken these hitchhikers for ticks. Trefoil refers 3 parts to the foliage. De-hulling is not necessary, especially with fall sowing. Collect when they hitchhike. Good for pollinators...but consider carefully if your garden will have children or pets running through them in fall.

### Prairie Dropseed

*Sporobolus heterolepis*

POACEAE



Photo: 9-12-17

Shattering. Big fountains of grass blades make this the most ornamental-looking native prairie grass. Smells like movie theater popcorn on warm summer days. Seed is easily stripped by hand when ripe. Best sown within 6 months of harvest. Decent germination, but slow to reach mature width; installing plants can be preferred over seed.



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### Smooth Solomon's Seal

*Polygonatum biflorum*

CONVALLARIACEAE



Photo: 9-16-19

Berries. Mama's Boy. True Solomon's Seal species hides its flowers under the leaves, with a "blueberry" fruit. This is the more common of the "true" species, with smooth leaves. Deer candy (like many lily-relatives) and may need protection if the garden is visited by wildlife.

### Feathery False Solomon's Seal

*Smilacina racemosa*

CONVALLARIACEAE

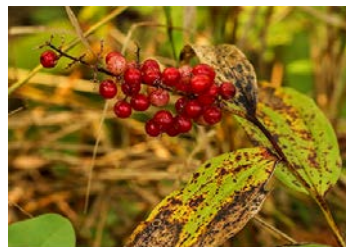


Photo: 9-15-18

Berries. Mama's Boy. False Solomon leaves look very similar to "true," but the flowers/fruit are clustered at the terminal end of the plant and ripe berries are red. Collect clusters that are mostly red; speckled red berries are half-ripe. Good in woodland gardens, along with "true."

### Woodland Sunflower

*Helianthus divaricatus*

ASTERACEAE

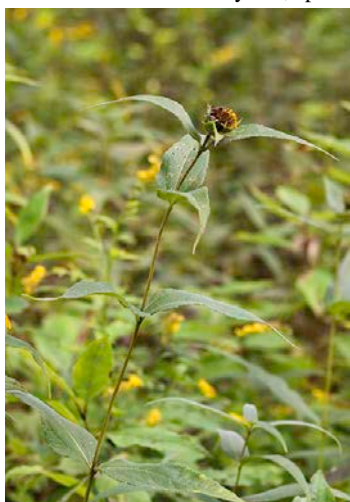


Photo: 9-16-19

Coneheads. Most native sunflowers are prone to weedy behavior, so use them thoughtfully. Provides food for butterflies & birds, can make an excellent shady edge, but not recommended for delicate woodlands or small shade gardens.



## For Native Gardeners

Kelly Schultz<sup>1</sup>, Dale Shields<sup>2</sup>

version 1 8/2021

<sup>1</sup>Lake County Forest Preserve District, <sup>2</sup>Volunteer Stewardship Network

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### Side-oats Grama

*Bouteloua curtipendula*

POACEAE

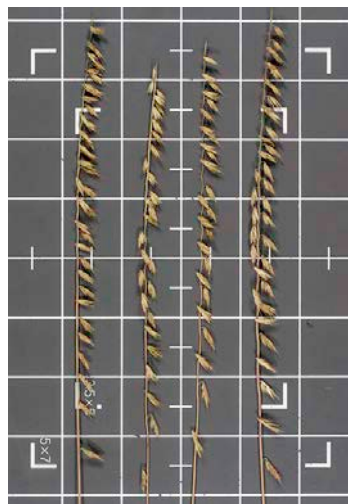


Photo: 9-19-17

Shattering. Seeds dangle towards one side of the stem, typically pointing toward the ground at harvest time. Vibrant red anthers are stunning & a beautiful reminder that grasses bloom too! A short grass (1-3' tall). Seeds are beige & easy to strip by hand when ripe. Full sun.

### Virginia Wild Rye

*Elymus virginicus*

POACEAE



Photo: 9-20-17

Shattering. Seeds are tightly packed & upright, like an idealized wheat stalk. The base of the seed spike is typically wrapped by the leaf sheath. Collect beige seeds; don't be deterred by the green bracts (see last pic). Grows in full sun to light shade, medium moisture.

### Flat-top Aster

*Doellingeria umbellata*

ASTERACEAE

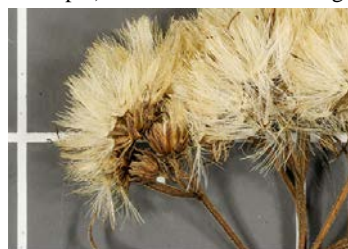


Photo: 9-20-17

Fluffy. Mama's Boy. An option for the edges of rain gardens, this species like to be near water (medium to squishy soils) but not flooded. White flowers are good for pollinators. Can tolerate a little shade but happier in full sun. Seed fluff is colored off-white. Collect when fluffy.



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### Nodding Wild Onion

*Allium cernuum*

ALLIACEAE



Photo: 9-20-17

Beaks. Globes of *Allium* flowers are familiar to gardeners; this native one has little flowers that can be pale purple to white. The main stem has a bend right behind the head, inspiring the common name. Look for clusters to split open in 3s, revealing the black seeds inside.

### Cardinal Flower

*Lobelia cardinalis*

LOBELIACEAE

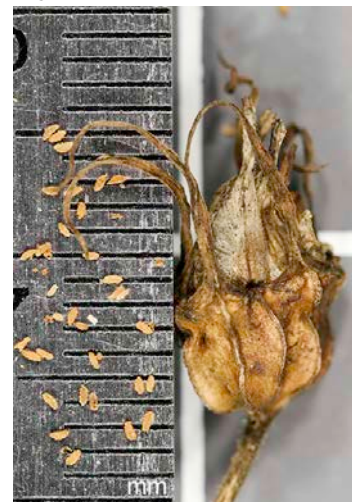


Photo: 9-27-17

Beaks. The bold red flowers make this species a favorite of hummingbirds & humans alike. Look for light brown capsules that open with 2 chambers (like a pig nose). A pretty choice for rain gardens, and often paired with its sister – great blue lobelia. All *Lobelia* species have teeny-tiny seeds: 500,000 - 900,000 seeds/ounce. Short lived perennials, make sure to keep some seed to replenish your garden.

### Common Mountain Mint

*Pycnanthemum virginianum*

LAMIACEAE



Photo: 9-27-17

Shakers. The first *Pycnanthemum* species was named in the mountains; our species carry over the name despite our flatlander habitats. This common species happily lives from dry-mesic to wet conditions & supports a wide variety of pollinators. Look for grayish heads; tip them into your hand & seeds will easily spill out of the clustered tubes when ripe. Smells lovely!



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### Foxglove Beard Tongue

*Penstemon digitalis*

SCROPHULARIACEAE



Photo: 9-28-18

Beaks. White trumpet flowers are attractive in full sun to part shade. Leaves can take on red or purple hues in fall. Look for rusty-brown pods that have split open. The pods are particularly hard; use strong rolling pins or stomping to release the seeds.

### Zig-zag Goldenrod

*Solidago flexicaulis*

ASTERACEAE

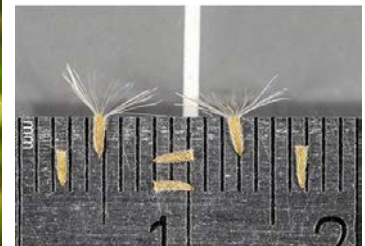
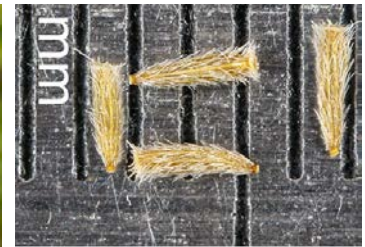


Photo: 9-30-17

Fluffy. Mama's Boy. This species has flowers/seeds in the clusters of the leaf axils (where stems & leaves meet). Leaves are broad serrated ovals with a point at the tip. Stem has a slight zigzag between axils. Mesic woodlands and mesic microhabitats in wetter woods.

### Canada Wild Rye

*Elymus canadensis*

POACEAE



Photo: 10-2-17

Shattering. This common grass will grow just about anywhere and is a fantastic native cover crop - fast to grow, but gives way in a few years to more conservative species. Easily ID'd by the long tails on the seed, which resembles a frizzy ponytail from a distance. Spike typically starts straight, but curves late in the season. Easy to strip by hand when ripe.



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### New England Aster

*Symphotrichum novae-angliae*

ASTERACEAE

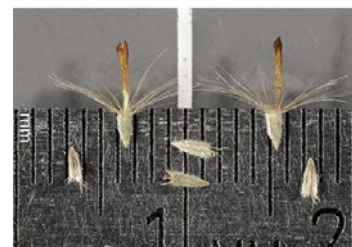
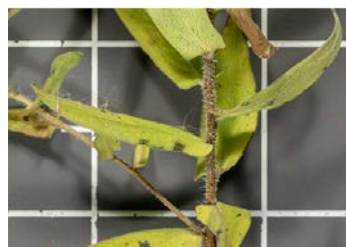


Photo: 10-4-17

Fluffy. Mama's Boy. A versatile aster, this species grows in full sun to partial shade, wet to dry-mesic soils. One of only a few native asters with vibrant royal purple flowers; it is rare to see other colors in natural populations of this species. Leaves clasp the stem. The pappus (seed fluff) is cinnamon brown.

### Elm-leaved Goldenrod

*Solidago ulmifolia*

ASTERACEAE

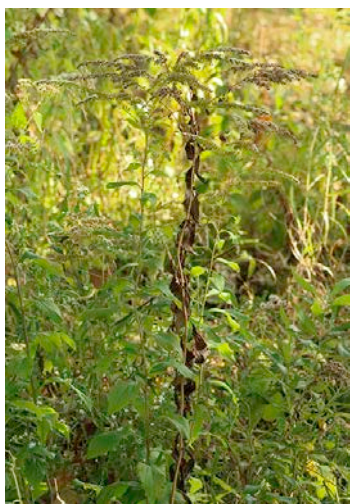


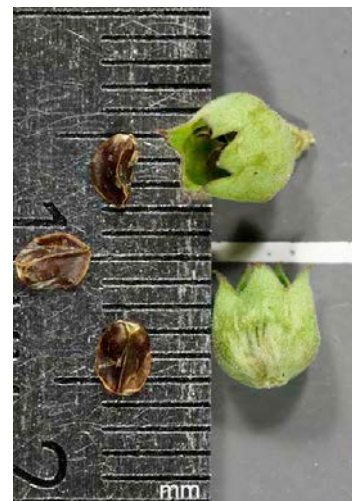
Photo: 10-4-17

Fluffy. Mama's Boy. Flowers are on long branching arms, like exploding fireworks. Leaves are broader than many goldenrods, but a far cry from an elm leaf. Part shade to full shade, good for pollinators.

### Obedient Plant

*Physostegia virginiana*

LAMIACEAE



Photos: 9-15-19, 10-6-19

Shakers. Mama's Boy. Obedient plant gets its name from the way flowers can be spun around the stalk to obediently stay pointed in another direction! Fun to play with. The flowers bloom from bottom to top of the stalk; seeds ripen in the same sequence. Up to 4 seeds per cup. Collect when seeds are fully brown; cup color is unimportant. Common to have mix of plump viable seed and wrinkly empty seed.



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### Smooth Blue Aster

*Symphyotrichum laeve*

ASTERACEAE



Photo: 10-9-17

Fluffy. Mama's Boy. Light blue-lavender flowers, loved by pollinators. A waxy blue-green color to the stem and leaves, especially early in the season. Leaves with a smooth, almost rubbery feel. Upper leaves are smaller than lower ones. Loves medium to dry, full sun to part shade. Pappus (seed fluff) is off-white, usually tinged with amber or rose. Collect when fluffy.

### Common Milkweed

*Asclepias syriaca*

ASCLEPIADACEAE

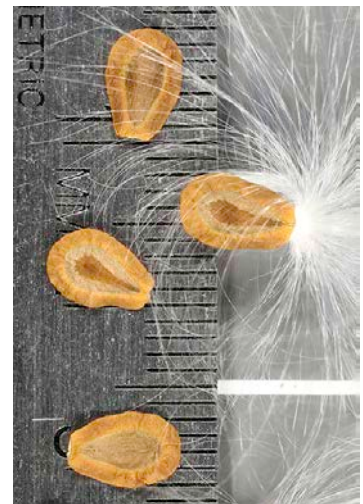


Photo: 10-9-17

Milkweed. Of all native milkweeds, this one is the favorite of monarchs. Pink globes of flowers, adaptable to a lot of soils. Spreads by runners too, recommended for wild gardens rather than manicured beds. They are ripe when the pod splits; ignore the pod color. This is by far the most common species and can be identified by the large pods, covered with soft hooks. Leaves are fuzzy underneath.

### Swamp Milkweed

*Asclepias incarnata*

ASCLEPIADACEAE

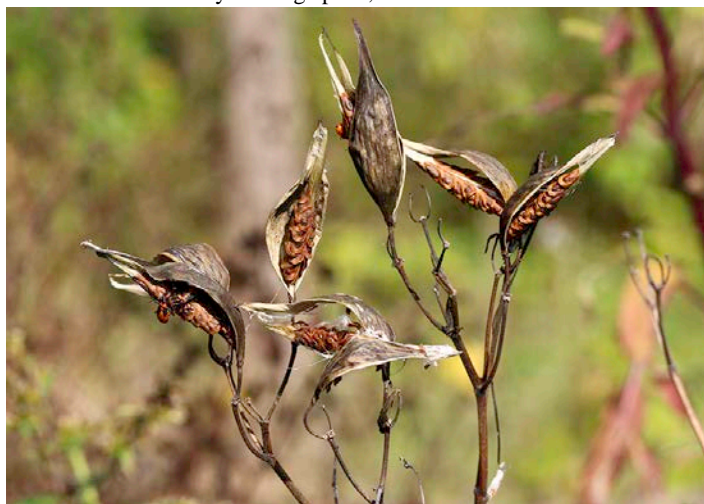


Photo: 10-9-18

Milkweed. A good choice for rain gardens, with bright pink flowers. Seed pods are finger-wide, similar to butterfly weed, but those pods have peach fuzz and this one has smooth pods. Collect split pods. Best to strip the seeds promptly or else sow the seed with the fluff attached.



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Closed Gentian  
aka  
Bottle Gentian

*Gentiana andrewsii*

GENTIANACEAE



Photos: 9-28-18, 10-14-18

**Beaks.** These bright blue flowers bloom late in the year and are good for squishy edges of rain gardens – damp to medium soils. Their closed bottle shape means only bumblebees are strong enough to muscle in and pollinate (watch for cute bumblebee butts in September). Flowers fade to brown, and seed capsules form inside. Plump capsules look like duck bills are full of tiny “fried egg” seeds. Collect open beaks.

Aromatic Aster

*Symphyotrichum oblongifolium*

ASTERACEAE

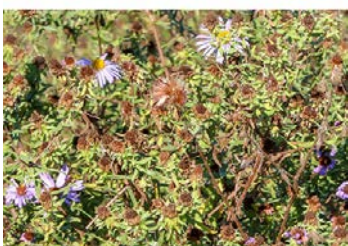


Photo: 10-16-17

**Fluffy. Mama’s Boy.** This uncommon aster can grow well in a dry sunny garden. A bushy dome of woody stems covered in royal purple flowers. Crushed leaves have a balsam-like aroma. One of the last to bloom, this species is great for pollinators and native gardening. Brown pappus (seed fluff). Collect when fluffy.

Brown-eyed Susan

*Rudbeckia triloba*

ASTERACEAE



Photo: 10-25-17

**Coneheads. Mama’s Boy.** The name is apparent after the conehead is empty of seeds. Snip heads that are dark - almost black - or crumble to see if seeds come out. This species is happiest in part shade, but can grow in sun to shade. Its sister black-eyed Susan is happiest in full sun.



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### Sweet Black-eyed Susan

*Rudbeckia subtomentosa*

ASTERACEAE



Photo: 10-25-17

Coneheads. Mama's Boy. Similar seed & head to regular black-eyed Susan, but this is a taller and showier plant. Leaves are primarily 3-lobed. An attractive flower suitable for full sun to part shade. Snip dark heads.

### Little Bluestem

*Schizachyrium scoparium*

POACEAE



Photo: 10-25-17

Shattering. Similar to big bluestem, little bluestem also has purple-blue stems, especially at the stem nodes. Seeds are fluffy white & excellent at catching the sunlight like starry constellations on the prairie. Ripens sporadically – easily stripped by hand; return next week and more seeds will be ripe. This grass grows 2-4' tall and loves full sun.

### Showy Goldenrod

*Solidago speciosa*

ASTERACEAE



Photo: 10-25-17

Fluffy. Mama's Boy. Aptly named, this is the showiest of the native goldenrods and the best suited for native gardening. Grows in little clumps, and the stems are typically a bold crimson late in the season. Yellow flowers are arranged in a Christmas tree shape, seeds have white fluff. When fluffy, strip by hand.



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Short's Aster

*Symphotrichum shortii*

ASTERACEAE



Photo: 10-26-18

Fluffy. Mama's Boy. Pale blue-lavender flowers with heart-shaped leaves, good for pollinators. This species loves mesic to dry woodlands and savannas. Seed fluff is tan. Collect when fluffy – strip by hand.

Turtlehead

*Chelone glabra*

SCROPHULARIACEAE



Photo: 10-29-17

Beaks. Reportedly named for the white flower's resemblance to a turtle's head, but the seed capsule is arguably a better inspiration for the name. Capsules are initially green with a distinct closed mouth (seam), which splits and opens up. Seeds are small papery "fried eggs" and shake out on windy days. Collect open capsules. Important host plant for Baltimore Checkerspot butterflies. Good for rain gardens.

Prairie Gay Feather  
aka  
Prairie Blazing Star

*Liatris pycnostachya*

ASTERACEAE

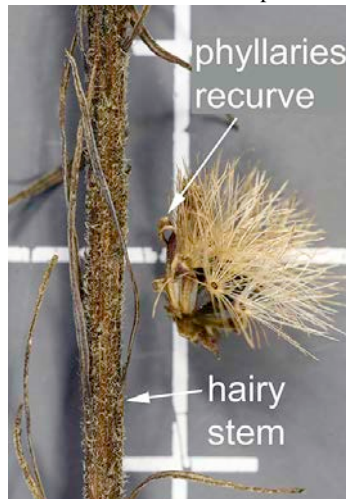


Photo: 10-29-19

Fluffy. There are many blazing star aka *Liatris* species, and all are generally attractive to humans and butterflies. Most of them resemble this species, with a densely packed column of pink-purple flowers than ripen to seed with tawny fluff. Collect fluffy seed.