

Put a Fish on Your Plate

The very word “summertime” translates into “let’s go fishing”! With all the health experts urging us to eat fish, we are trying to follow that advice. Adding fish culture to our backyard gardens requires more space than most of us have so we grab a fishing pole or depend on the market.

One of the delights of living here is the availability of fish from local waters, which surely gives us a reason to leave some natural places to absorb runoff. All sorts of plans are available to collect water from sudden summer downpours. Not only well engineered rain barrels that help your garden survive drought and save on the water bill but special places in your garden spaces where a rain garden can be incorporated with charm and efficiency. These areas have become a fashion! If you are not able to manage a larger scale solution to run off, you can create a small depression with plants and grasses to stymie the rush of water leaving your property for the Bay. Landscapes that are too well manicured result in runoff containing all manner of pollutants you do not want to eat with your fish.

When I was young (decades ago) fresh water fish from the nearby Great Lakes were abundant and one of our favorites was the nutty-flavored catfish. Over time catfish became less fashionable as other species gained favor. It was a surprise to learn that currently Maryland is attempting to rid the northern Chesapeake Bay of invasive catfish by coaxing the public to eat it! Two species, the blue and the flathead catfish are eating the Bay’s prized fish.

Beginning in the 1970s these invaders have been found in the Potomac and the James Rivers and other tributaries. Grocery stores and chefs have rallied to the cause with plentiful fish and elegant recipes. Another, perhaps less appetizing, invader, the zebra mussel, continues to extend its territory. These bivalves, whose name refers to the striped patterns on their shells, were first seen in the lower Susquehanna River and have slowly but steadily increased their range.

The larvae, called veligers, attach themselves to boat bottoms so it is important that recreational boaters as well as fishermen make sure to check their equipment to avoid spreading the larvae to a new location. The article in the May Bay Journal suggests using high-pressure hoses or hot water to detach the uninvited guests.

Because they are such strong feeders, they have reduced the food available to fish. They have also nearly extinguished the population of the native mussel in some places. It is thought that they arrived in the Great Lakes in 1988 in ballast water from ships coming from Europe. They have been seen in much of the country and are especially troublesome where they invade water intake pipes for industrial and municipal waterworks. The damage they do has been costly, in the billions of dollars.

And the good news: it is hard to follow up on events because they become ‘old news’ so rapidly. The appalling supertyphoon, Haiyan, last November killed 10,000 people in the Philippines, left 600,000 others homeless but has also resulted in Philippine efforts to curtail the global warming that provokes such disasters. Alerted to the negative impacts of climate change, the Philippines is determined to advance a sustainable energy policy. Not that this country of 97 million has much of a carbon footprint: the Philippine Islands accounts for just 0.2 % of global CO2 emissions. Their goal is to reach 50% power generation from renewable energy by 2030.

Meanwhile back at the ranch the US oil and gas industries are objecting to the modest tax credit granted to sustainable energy sources such as wind farms and solar development. It is hard to fathom the objections coming from an industry granted massive government subsidies for decades. Oil and gas were given billions each year beginning as long ago as 1918, a largesse continued long after the need was justified. Nuclear power received a lesser amount, \$3.5 billion each year between 1947 and 1999. Renewable energy received \$370 million annually between 1994 and 2009. For example, there was healthy investment and growth in the wind industry until last year when the tax credit was not renewed. One result was 30.000 wind jobs lost, jobs with family-sustaining pay. So much for 'we the people'.

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