

The Complications of Weeds and Seeds

The generally accepted definition of a weed is that it is merely a plant in the wrong place. Perhaps we can accept weeds more happily if we consider them wildflowers, don't you think? Wildflowers only become weeds when they aggressively shoulder out preferred species, taking over your corner of the world – Kudzu and Japanese honeysuckle come to mind.

The Japanese stilt grass that has taken over a part of my back garden is pure weed. It has no flower and it roots at the joint when it touches the ground, as if the seeds were not enough. Other self-seeders that bloom this time of year are welcome. All the white aster-like flowers that can be sorted out only by a botanist are lovely and come in all sizes all season from spring to frost. Any one of them encroaching on a planted favorite can be pulled out.

Goldenrod is always a welcome if uninvited spark of yellow, as is the yellow daisy of the compass plant, *Silphium laciniatum*. It can be too tall for a proper flowerbed but it is elegant along a country lane. It got its name because the leaves arrange themselves along a north-south axis.

Not all sunflowers are the enormous blooms that furnish seeds for the birds and the rest of us. Whether camphorweed, sneezeweed, heleniums, all of these yellow daisies are parents to the kinds whose prettied up faces adorn the catalogs. All of the wonderful sorts that are now available started out wildlings some place. They have been schooled over generations to lose their weedy nature. But most of us delight in the unplanted, un-programmed, unexpected splashes of color along our highways and byways.

They may have arrived via wind or birds or as seeds stuck into the fur of small critters. Most gardeners have equally sticky fingers. We tuck seeds into pots and forget what they are or where they came from. Sometimes we may happen along just as a seed coat pots open. Last week I nudged the fruit on a camellia and the three tightly packed seeds scattered. I only found two: they are tough and rough with sharp edges like a Brazil nut. Searching through the propagation books I notice that seeds are barely mentioned. Grafts or stem cuttings are the way to make more camellias. I don't need more: I just want to see what happens to the seeds. I put them into a pot and put the pot under a shrub. I could have waited until spring but then I would have had to pour boiling water over them and wait 24 hours. I doubt they become a shrub any year soon but seeds are hope, tangible.

TREE PLANTING TIME!

With October's bluest skies overhead and its mellowest soil underfoot, we look around for a tree to plant. You may have wanted to plant a black walnut, *Juglans nigra*, because it is a handsome shade tree and provides fine furniture wood for your descendents. There is even the possibility that you have the secret for extracting those

delicious nuts from their stubborn shells. However, you have heard that black walnut roots excrete a juglans poison that affects other plants, such as tomatoes.

Of course the tomatoes, needing full sun, are away from the tree but they are affected since the root system of any tree extends far beyond the crown of the tree. Other species of walnut may be a better choice as the toxic chemicals are limited to *J. nigra*. *J. sinerea*, the vigorous Butternut, is a native with sweet edible nuts and similar long pinnate bright green leaves. It won't reach 100 ft as the black walnut does but a height of 80 and width of 70 is a big enough tree! The English walnut, *J. regia*, provides easily shelled nuts and glossy leaves that are bronze-purple when young. It is tall, to 100 ft. but narrower.

If you are concerned about the black walnut already on your property, you may plant most ground covers, most shrubs and other trees near it as well as plenty of annuals and perennials—those that enjoy the dappled shade it provides. Japanese maples and Canadian hemlocks make good neighbors as do Chrysanthemums, Hosta, Geraniums, Astilbes, Cinnamon and Sensitive ferns, Spiderwort, Violets, Tulips, several Narcissus such as 'Cheerfulness', 'February Gold', Rose of Sharon, Pinxterbloom Azalea, and Exbury hybrids Rhododendrons 'Gibraltar' and 'Balzac'. This is a partial list developed by researchers at Tech.