



# Garden Curator's Letter

By Susan Wilkins



**E**very spring, what feels like a miracle occurs. The days begin to warm and lengthen. We find ourselves

dropping layers—mittens, scarves and heavy coats—and stepping out to feel the caress of sunlight on bare skin. When only weeks ago we traveled to and fro with our busy lives cloaked in winter's dark blanket, now the soft evening light or early morning's glimmer guides us into our gardens to discover what is emerging from awakened soil. A hint of green under decayed leaves—delight! A flower found in full bloom—pure joy! Tree buds bursting in vibrant hues above our heads—unstoppable! As our planet tilts and spins so steadily along, rested earth gives way to another season of refreshed potential and irrepressible growth. We have arrived and spring is singing.

This season marks the 108th year of the Wildflower Garden's existence. And each year, the importance of botanic gardens like this one grows. Within the Garden's 15 acres, over 500 species of plants (primarily natives) are nurtured and more than 130 species of migratory and resident birds find refuge for a little, or a long, while.

Thanks to a recent two-year study led by entomologists Elaine Evans and Joel Gardner, and funded jointly by the Friends of the Wild Flower Garden and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, we now know that at least 104 bee species call the Wildflower Garden home. Gardens that focus on fostering

biodiversity and healthy habitats for a wide variety of plant and animal life are quickly becoming more significant refuges for species that are feeling the pushes and pulls of the modern world. Botanic gardens worldwide are working diligently to conserve and understand the richness of plant life—and, often, insect, bird and other animal life, too.

As we set out into our gardens this season, at home and also as visitors and volunteers at botanic gardens like the Wildflower Garden, we can take great pleasure in knowing that we are part of a wonderful community of stewards spanning the globe. As communities and individuals focus on conserving natural areas, enhancing green spaces, creating habitat and bringing more of nature into neighborhoods, cities and farms, all of our lives are the better for it. Our collective efforts are truly something to celebrate. Happy gardening, everyone, and happy Garden visiting this spring!

And be sure to stay connected to all of the wonderful programs, classes, and special events occurring at the Garden this season. There is too much to list here, but please visit the Garden's Facebook page for up-to-date information. You can also receive periodic emails about Wildflower Garden happenings and news by joining the Wildflower Garden's email list. Simply go to [www.minneapolis-parks.org](http://www.minneapolis-parks.org) and click on the red envelope. Enter your email address and select the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden from the Things to Do menu.



Above – Virginia bluebells (Photo: Meleah Maynard); Top Right – Interrupted fern (Photo: Don Beimborn); Bottom Right – Showy lady's slipper (Photo: Sher Stoneman)



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As we settle into summer this year at the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary, the spring rains and mild temperatures have set the stage for a growing season characterized by luxuriant growth, abundant blossoms and a wonderful freshness that permeates everything. With these pleasant conditions arrive delighted visitors from far and near. I personally have never seen the Wildflower Garden so verdant and so full of joyful nature enthusiasts of all ages.

The Wildflower Garden is such a unique garden, not only within the Minneapolis Park System, but throughout the country and the world. Very few public gardens are dedicated to the preservation and exhibition of native plants in an unassumingly charming and decidedly bucolic naturalistic setting, right in the heart of a major metropolitan area. There is nothing contrived about the Wildflower Garden; its wonderful wildness has been encouraged and continues to be cultivated with the utmost care.

The Garden's essential dignity has been nurtured with reverent attention for over 108 years, and this quality is palpable to those who visit. In late June, I had the great fortune to attend the American Public Gardens Association conference where I was able to share highlights of the Garden's history, plant collections, education and volunteer programs and more with national and international botanic garden managers, curators, horticulturalists and botanists. Sentiments about the Wildflower Garden's significance as a historic, native plant botanic garden were reflected back wholeheartedly by leaders in the global public garden management field. The Wildflower Garden is absolutely one of a kind—a jewel of historical, ecological and horticultural value beyond appraisal.

As Eloise Butler noted in July of 1911, the year that she became curator of her beloved Wildflower Garden, there are many kinds of gardens. And I couldn't agree more that the most interesting among them are those that reflect the flavor and personality of the creative force behind them. When that creative force understands and has the ability to bring out and add dimension to the spirit of the place, the *genus loci*, there is potential for something to emerge that is utterly richer and has infinitely greater depth than the sum of its myriad parts. Timeless and essential, the Wildflower Garden is such a place. In our ever-changing world and landscapes, we are fortunate to have such an enduring model for

how wild gardens, full of diversity, novelty and surprise, can grow. And grow they must.

The Wildflower Garden is an opportune place in our community to connect with the richness of the natural world that we are a part of. With 108-year-old plant collections, a marvelous history, wonderful staff and volunteers ready to share their knowledge about the Garden's flora and fauna, and a fantastic setting for exploration and rejuvenation, it's a special resource where we can learn how to give our attention to nature and receive the benefits of that caring, in the most delightful of ways, nurturing our own well-being and our love of life, our biophilia, with each stroll down the trail.

As we go about our summers and enjoy the bounty of this beautiful growing season, let's keep our senses tuned to the subtle rhythms, sights and sounds and the timeless beauty of our special nature spaces and gardens. Enjoy!

*"There are many kinds of gardens. Those are most interesting that have an individual flavor and express, as pleasure grounds should, within the bounds of good taste, the owner's personality."*

—Eloise Butler



Culver's root

Photo: Gary Bebeau



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So quickly, another Wildflower Garden season has come and gone. It was a very full year, complemented by a truly beautiful season of weather. With plenty of moisture to nourish recently planted and well-established plants throughout the season, the Garden's flora was even more radiant than usual and so many visitors took delight in the beauty of this extraordinary place all season long.

We had many special events and projects this year, along with the ongoing hustle and bustle of programming and garden care. I would like to acknowledge a handful of highlights from the past season and send a warm thank you out to everyone who has contributed to these efforts. Please know that there is a lot more great work that is not mentioned, but is deeply appreciated.

Heartfelt thanks to the Friends of the Wild Flower Garden Board and to Mark Addicks and Tom Hoch for hosting a fantastic fundraiser in the beautiful gardens surrounding Mark and Tom's home. The fundraiser was a great success on many levels, and it was touching to see so many community members present to support the Wildflower Garden.

Phase 1 of the wetland boardwalk project was completed in July. Thank you to all of the donors, the Friends, the designers, the wood millers and modifiers, the boardwalk fabricators, and the installation crew, as well as to numerous Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board staff members who worked to bring this to fruition. A lovely celebration of the project and dedication of the bridge to former Gardener Cary George on September 20 brought many together to honor Cary's great work and legacy here.

Another enjoyable volunteer appreciation banquet was held in late October to celebrate the fabulous work that Wildflower Garden volunteers carry out every day. Thank you again to each and every volunteer for your efforts and enthusiasm this season. I also want to thank the Wildflower Garden staff who educate and inspire visitors with each encounter, and who organized and led a remarkable number of special tours and programs for youth and adults this season.

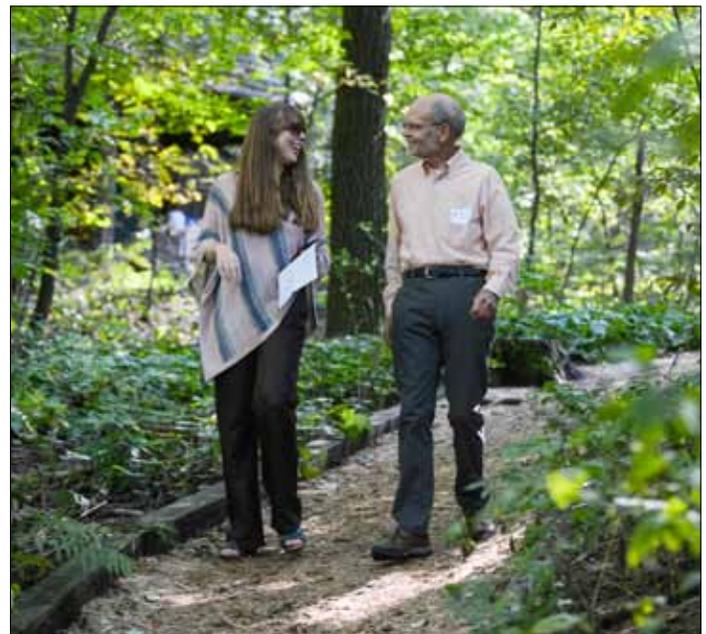
If you haven't yet gone to see them, 22 prints from the Eloise Butler Florilegium Project will be on display at Macalester College's Smail Gallery until August 1, 2016. Also of note, the Florilegium Project was featured in the November/December 2015 issue of the Department of Natural Resources' magazine, *Minnesota Conservation Volunteer*, which reaches an estimated 500,000 readers. We are fortunate to have this wonderful project (and the Wildflower

Garden) shared with such a wide audience within the conservation community.

Although the Garden gates are now closed to the public, we continue to work on several projects to maintain the health of the Garden and to prepare for next season's programs, plantings and special projects. For instance, oak wilt management is underway, as we continue our efforts to maintain the health of the majestic oaks of the Garden. The Shelter roof has been reshingled with new cedar shakes and it looks great. A new wood-burning stove insert will be installed soon in the now-defunct fireplace, so the Shelter will be as cozy as ever come next spring. Several ash trees close to garden trails have been marked and will be removed as part of our efforts to minimize the negative repercussions of anticipated Emerald Ash Borer infestations.

Five years have passed since the Garden's first management plan was approved by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board. This plan has proven to be very useful and supportive of our work at the Wildflower Garden. Updates to the management plan's project and program goals are being made for the next five-year period this season.

I'm continually awed by how much effort goes into stewarding the vitality and integrity of the Wildflower Garden. Thanks again to all who contribute to this dynamic and meaningful work. As we continue to care for the Garden and prepare for another vibrant season, we wish you the very best and look forward to seeing you in 2016!



Susan Wilkins and Cary George in the Garden before the boardwalk dedication ceremony.