

The Writings of Eloise Butler



Tramp Plants, Migrants from Foreign Lands, Thrive in Minnesota; They Often Pre-empt Ground, Crowding Out Native Citizens of Soil. - August 6, 1911

Most of our vegetable tramps, like the human ones, are of foreign birth. These migrants from the old world, where the land has been cultivated from times immemorial, inured through fierce competition, have become adaptable and fit to cope with hard conditions.

Hence, when brought by design or accident to a new country, they pre-empt the land, wherever they can gain roothold, and crowd out other plants. Our native plants can hold their own on virgin soil. But more than seven evil spirits (weeds) enter into land once cultivated, and then neglected, and dwell there, and the last state of that field becomes worse than the first. The best remedy for weeds in constant cultivation.

Some naturalized plant citizens, with attractive flowers, one might like to have in the garden, if they were not so aggressive. But, if admitted, they would selfishly shoulder out the weaker and possible more desirable inmates. The place for such vagrants is, therefore, the roadside where they will thrive on a hard bed and a

crust of earth. Bouncing Bet and Butter 'n' eggs may be cited as examples. A blue ribbon should be awarded them for certain sterling qualities. During protracted droughts, when other vegetation has succumbed and even the grass blades have shriveled, they alone put out their blossoms and brighten what would otherwise be a bare and desert waste. The name Bouncing Bet (Ref. 1) probably refers to the luxuriant growth; but the other name, "old maid's pinks", seems especially applicable. For to do their duty cheerfully under adverse circumstances is the metier of spinsters

The pale and the deep yellow colors of the flowers of *Linaria vulgaris*, so well set off by the slender, sage green leaves, are aptly characterized by the rustic name, Butter 'n' eggs. The nectar held in the sharp pointed spur lures the humble bee to the lips of the blossom, stubbornly closed, as in the related snapdragon, to other insect rovers.



Butter 'n' Eggs, *Linaria vulgaris*



Bouncing Bet (Soapwort),
Saponaria officinalis

Three sister composites - eupatoriums - grow together in the meadows. The homeliest, *E. perfoliatum*, has rather a coarse aspect, and its dull gray flowers scarcely command a glance from the passerby. Yet, under closer observation, they will not fail to please and will not be ignored when properly arranged in a vase. Every natural growth has a beauty of form, if not of color, that needs only to be seen to be appreciated. As Emerson said, "We are immersed in beauty, but our eyes have no clear vision." Folks brought

up in the old-fashioned way have a bitter memory of this *eupatorium* under the name of Throughwort or Boneset, which in the spring was dealt out copiously to every member of the household, as a thorough remedy to prevent or to remove influenzal bone aches and, in general, "to purify the blood."

The tall Jo-Pye weed, *Eupatorium purpureum*, succeeds the rosy-hued swamp milkweed in furnishing red tones to the meadows; a red, however, of a subdued, crushed raspberry hue. (Ref 2) It is named for a New England Indian, who concocted medicine from it for fevers that once had a ready sale.

The most beautiful of the eupatoriums is the White Snakeroot, *E. urticaefolium*, (Ref 3) also of medicinal repute. It is of value not

only on account of its profuse, soft, starry inflorescence of harmonious white, but because it is easily cultivated and can be depended upon to bloom after frosts have set in. In one garden at least in Minneapolis, besides the wild one, where it stars the ground in late summer, it is the most prized ornament. The flowers yield not a whit in beauty to those of the ageratum, which they resemble so much in form that they once bore the name *ageratoides* - meaning like ageratum.

Woods without vines are comparatively bare, formal and unduly trim. Best of all, vines form tangles in which birds nest and sing. Of the annual vines, none has a more graceful and riotous growth than the common Wild Cucumber (*Echinocystis lobata*). Lacking an upstanding object to embrace, it will run



Boneset, *Eupatorium perfoliatum*



Sweet-scented Joe-Pye Weed,
Eupatorium purpureum



Wild Cucumber, *Echinocystis lobata*.

along the ground and form borders of bewitching spires of bloom. The fibrous, netted inside of the seed vessel, sometimes called balsam apple, resembles on a smaller scale that of a vine of the South known as the towel gourd, which is sold in the market as a bath sponge.

The gourd family can produce huge fruits, as the mammoth squashes and pumpkins, the prize winners of county fairs. Prominent among the tropical gourds - for the family is most largely represented in the tropics - is the calabash, whose hard-rinded fruit, when cleared of its contents, is indispensable to the natives as receptacles for food. The big pumpkins on a calabash tree might brain, in falling, the luckless wayfarer.

Tours to the Garden. The following was also printed at the beginning of the text.

Miss Butler will conduct parties through the Wild Botanic Garden in Glenwood Park, Tuesday and Thursday mornings, meeting them at the terminus of the Fourth avenue south and Sixth avenue north Street Railway, Sixth avenue and Russell avenue, at 10 o'clock; also Saturday & Sunday afternoons, meeting then at 2:30 o'clock at the same place. One hour later on the same days, persons coming by automobile or carriage will be met at the entrance to the Garden, on the boulevard, at a point northeast of Birch Pond in Glenwood Park. To reach Birch Pond, turn in at the left on Western Avenue where the Park Boulevard intersects the avenue. Phone - T. S. Calhoun 1021; N. W. Main 4295.

Notes:

1. Bouncing Bet, also called Soapwort, *Saponaria officinalis*
2. We wonder if Eloise listed the wrong species. She refers to meadows and replacing the swamp milkweed and then calls the color a crushed raspberry hue. All three are more characteristic of *E. maculata*, the Spotted Joe-Pye Weed.
3. White Snakeroot. In later years the scientific name was changed to *Eupatorium rugosum*, and very recently the plant has been reclassified into the ageratums as *Ageratina altissima*. Eloise does not mention the toxic elements of this plant. Use the link below for this plant to read more.

The text of this article, along with photos by Mary Meeker of Wild Cucumber, White Snakeroot, Joe-Pye Weed, Bouncing Bet, Butter 'n' Eggs and Boneset, was published on Sunday August 6, 1911 in the *Sunday Minneapolis Tribune*. It was one of a series of weekly articles Eloise Butler published in 1911 to help acquaint the public with her newly established Wild Botanic Garden in Glenwood Park. Some of the plants she discusses are extant in the Garden today. In brackets within the text, and in the notes, have been added the necessary common name or scientific name, that she did not list in her article. Nomenclature is based on the latest published information from *Flora of North America* and the *Checklist of the Vascular Flora of Minnesota*.

Photo of Eloise Butler, ca. 1920, at top of page courtesy Minneapolis Public Library. Other photos ©G D Bebeau or as credited.

The Wild Botanic Garden in Glenwood Park, became the "Native Plant Reserve" and was then renamed the Eloise Butler Wild Flower Garden in 1929.