The Writings of Eloise Butler

Acrid Taste Gives Name to the Smart Weed; Miss Butler Describes Wild Grasses in the Park. - Sept. 17, 1911

Smart weeds [are named] not for their enterprise in taking possession of the wet lowlands wherever they can get roothold, or for their smartness in attire - many species being decked with gaily colored, graceful, drooping flower spikes of rich shades of rose graded down to pale pink, flesh color and white, which brighten large expanses of moorland - but because, if tasted, the acrid peppery sap will make one's mouth burn or smart.

Water Pepper. *Polygonum amphibium* Photo © Matthew L. Wagner, Wisconsin Flora.

A very humble relative - small-leaved, prostrate and a spreading pest, unnoticed except when you investigate the cause of the disappearance of the velvety turf on your lawn - is the knot weed, or dooryard grass. Do not be misled by the latter name, for it is not a grass. The term knot weed refers to a character of the family - the enlargements or "knots" of the stem just below the sheathing stipules. These are close together on this plant and the most noticeable feature, for the greenish flowers in the axils of the leaves are exceedingly small. The weed well illustrates the meaning of the generic name, *Polygonum* (many knees or joints).

Arrow-leaved Tearthumb, *Polygonum sagittatum.* Note the sharp reflexed teeth on the stem.

The Water Pepper, an aquatic *polygonum,* [*Polygonum amphibium*] with oblong, floating leaves, has a heavy, rose-colored spike that beautifies the borders of ponds. The tear-thumb, a malignant *polygonum,* [*P. sagittatum* , Arrow-leaved Tearthumb] with sparse white flowers, forces acquaintance, when we are botanizing in meadows, by making jagged wounds with its sharp, reflexed teeth that bristle on the edges of the angled, prostrate stem.

The familiar Climbing False Buckwheat [*P. scandens*], a slender vine with pendant racemes of small, greenish white flowers, is another species of this large genus. This will remind you that the cultivated buckwheat, *Fagopyrum* [*F. esculentum*], is a cousin of the *polygonums*.

A Wild Morning Glory, *Convolvulus sepium* [now classified as *Calystegia sepium*, Hedge False Bindweed], is everywhere present, running over waste places and doing good service by concealing unsightly objects with its lovely large flowers of pale pink or white, and making dense tangles in the woods, which, in the struggle to break through, forcibly impress one to rename it bindweed. Being

common and a weed, it is not properly appreciated. It might be improved and varied by cultivation, and it would outrank its relative, the tame morning glory, *Ipomaea*, as a porch vine, for it is a perennial and can always be depended upon to furnish shade. A certain piazza in Nova Scotia, decorated with a long established specimen of bindweed, is admired by all who see it.

Hedge False Bindweed, *Calystegia sepium*

White Turtlehead, *Chelone glabra*

A turtle takes a daily sunning on a rock in the little pond in the wild garden. His tail held stiffly erect suggested to someone a marlingspike, the tool that is associated with a boatswain. Accordingly the turtle was dubbed Bos'n, and a little one that has lately appeared, Bos'nette. Very appropriately, a plant with white-flowered spikes, named *Chelone* (turtle) [*C. glabra*, Turtlehead] graces the sides of the same pond. It is easy to understand how the name turtlehead was applied to this plant growing in the damp places that turtles frequent, when one has an opportunity to compare the lips of the animal with those of the flower.

Who has not seen a tall, stout weed with a long dense spike of sweet-scented flowers with rather large, deflexed, yellow petals? But how many take the trouble to know its name, *Oenothera biennis*, or Common Evening Primrose? The flowers are succeeded by stiff, four-valved pods splitting at the top, from which the seeds are threshed out by the wind. The seeds that sprout will form a rosette lying flat on the ground and made up of row upon row of oblong leaves narrowed at the base and becoming shorter and shorter above and towards the center - a fine example of one of the methods of preventing overshading.

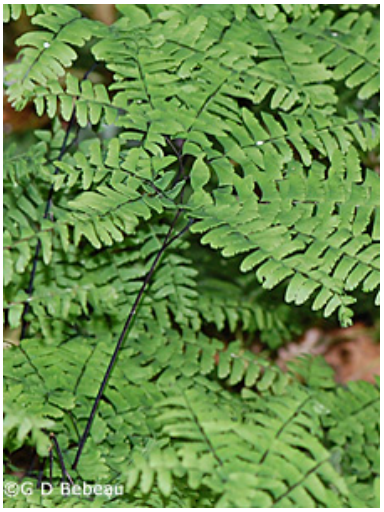
Evening Primrose, *Oenothera biennis.*

The rosette has varied autumnal tints and survives the winter to form, from a central bud, an erect flowering stalk that often branches like a candelabra, and completes its course when the seed is ripened. Such plants are biennials like many garden vegetables, cabbage, beet, etc. In flower, this weed decorates the roadside.

Some native *oenotheras* are prized ornamental plants, particularly *O. fruticosa* (Sundrops) [Narrowleaf Evening Primrose], a low perennial of easy cultivation and with bright yellow, profuse blooms.

Narrowleaf Evening Primrose, *Oenothera fruticosa.* Photo Robert H. Mohlenbrock, USDA-NRCS Plants Database.

The season must not go by without some attention to the ferns. The dearly loved shade or vernal plants flower and disappear when the trees are fully leaved. Then we find but few plants in bloom in the woods, and most of our pleasure in woodland walks, aside from the trees, comes from observing the fungi and the ferns. These do not usually need strong sunlight for their development. The attractiveness of ferns is wholly due to their foliage. The leaves or fronds of restful green, and usually finely dissected, are types of delicacy and grace. Justly popular is our one species of maidenhair fern, that favorably compares with the exotic forms cultivated in greenhouses.



Maidenhair fern, *Adiatum pedatum*. Note the dark polished leaf stalks.

Maidenhair ferns [*Adiatum pedatum*] are characterized by dark, polished leafstalks, and branched leaves of many pinnules with marginal spore cases protected by little inturned teeth. Groups of these ferns in the wild garden have fronds that are fully three feet high and that measure eighteen inches across.


Shelf, or bracket, mushroom on an Ohio Buckeye.

The shelf-like mushrooms found on stumps and trees may be called bracket fungi. Some of the woody forms are used for brackets in summer cottages and are often etched with fanciful designs. Many of these fungi belong to the genus *Polyporus* (many pored). The under surface of the bracket is studded with minute pores - the terminations of tubes which are lined with spores. Such fungi are hurtful to trees. Through a fissure in the bark the spores gain entrance, germinate, and form a network of fibers that prey upon the wood. The bracket grows out from these threads and is the fruit of the plant. Some of the softer brackets are edible when young, among them the sulphur polyporus [*Laetiporus sulphureus*]. This fungus, as one would infer from the name, is bright yellow in color. *Polyporus betulinus* [now classified *Piptoporus betulinus*] particularly affects birches. It is dull gray, while other species are a rich, red brown. Sometimes the bracket fungi assume strange shapes. Some have been found that resemble the head of Napoleon. Some species are phosphorescent and light up the dusky woodland with a ghostly glow that makes the bones of the timorous quake.

This was printed at the beginning of the text:
The 100 beautiful photographs, many of them colored by hand, illustrating the wild garden in Glenwood Park and the native flowers of Minnesota growing therein, exhibited by Miss Mary K. Meeker at the state fair, may be seen hereafter on application at the public library.
For the remainder of the season Miss Butler will conduct parties through the wild garden according to appointments by telephone,
Phone, N. W. Colfax 1689.

The text of this article, along with photos by Mary Meeker of Wild Morning Glory, Evening Primrose, Smartweed and the Sulphur Polyporus, was published on Sunday September 17, 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.