Self-Guided Tour

THE NATIVE PLANT CENTER’s

LADY BIRD JOHNSON DEMONSTRATION GARDEN

Welcome to the Lady Bird Johnson Demonstration Garden. The garden was established in 1998 to honor the First Lady and her commitment to the preservation of native plants and to increasing public awareness about their environmental necessity, economic value, and natural beauty. The native species in this garden are those that can be found regionally in natural habitats and will hopefully inspire you to consider using in your own gardens. Throughout the garden you will find plant labels identifying the most prominent specimens; for aesthetic reasons not every plant is labeled.

As orientation, please refer to the map on the information panel. The star indicates the area adjacent to the panel, your starting point. Behind the panel is a large cranberry viburnum (Viburnum trilobum) that bears a profusion of red berries valued by birds as a food source in winter. The bed to your right contains lovely purple-flowered ironweed (Vernonia fasciculata) and fragrant sweet pepperbush (Clethra alnifolia) that flower in late summer. Both are favorites of butterflies.

A few bayberry shrubs are at the rear of this bed; bayberry is a fast-growing, semi-evergreen shrub that produces small, powder-blue berries in fall. Easy to grow, it offers prime food and shelter for wildlife. In the center of the bed is a multi-trunked redbud tree (Cercis canadensis). Redbud stems are covered in striking purple-pink flowers in early spring before the heart-shaped leaves emerge. This particular specimen is actually very old but was cut down after being severely damaged in a storm in 2008 —what you see now are its vigorous regenerating shoots.

The garden under the northern red oak tree (Quercus rubra) near the bench holds an interesting mix of plants. You will find black-eyed Susan (Rudbeckia hirta ‘Goldsturm’) along with black chokeberry (Aronia melanocarpa) and dwarf fothergilla (Fothergilla gardenii), shrubs with fabulous leaf color in fall. Although it is native to the southeastern United States, dwarf fothergilla grows well in this area and thrives in sun or light shade. White plumes of black cohosh (Actaea reacemosa var. racemosa), bloom in June (this plant is a larval host for the spring azure butterfly), followed in July by white wild quinine (Parthenium integrifolium). Both make excellent cut flowers.

The entrance to The Native Plant Center’s administrative office is flanked by a mix of woody and herbaceous species, including cranberry viburnum (Viburnum trilobum), St. Andrew’s cross (Hypericum hypericoides), fragrant sumac (Rhus aromatica), dogbane (Apocynum cannabinum), and inkberry holly (Ilex glabra).

At the rear of the building is a shrub at the end of the last bed called witherod viburnum (Viburnum cassinoides). It flowers in early summer and has beautiful small fruits that change in color from green to pink to red to blue to black. There are also significant plantings of Virginia sweetspire (Itea virginica) and mountain laurel (Kalmia latifolia).

At the far northern end of the garden is a new bed that was cleared in early 2012 of masses of multiflora rose, oriental bittersweet, and other invasives that were smothering the trees. The site is being planted with native trees and shrubs particularly beneficial to birds. Care was taken in choosing the mix to showcase, when possible, different species of the
same genus so that professionals and non-professionals alike can compare the plants and see their differences. For instance, featured are both red chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*) and black chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*), and three types of viburnum—arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*), nannyberry (*Viburnum lentago*), and blackhaw (*Viburnum prunifolium*). Some of the selections are edible for people, too, such as pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*), American hazelnut (*Corylus americana*), and both highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*) and lowbush blueberry (*Vaccinium angustifolium*).

Looking to the far south end of the garden, you will see two silverbell trees (*Halesia carolina*). Their white bell-like flowers bloom in spring, giving way to interesting seed pods in summer and fall. Also in that area is pinkshell azalea (*Rhododendron prinophyllum*), which explodes in early spring with brilliant pink flowers that emit a heady, spicy-sweet aroma. This lovely shrub prefers partial shade and moist acidic soil. The stiff goldenrod (*Solidago rigida*) attracts butterflies when blooming in early autumn, and its seeds are enjoyed by birds. The native sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) trees growing in the parking lot divider and the plantings around the electronic sign at the intersection are all part of this Demonstration Garden.

The western boundary of the garden has been planted as wildflower meadows. The meadows were seeded in 1998, and, unsure whether all the perennial flowers and grasses that were sowed would appear, in April 1999 the meadows were also planted with “plugs”—one-year-old, bare-root stock. It’s more expensive than seed, but the results are more immediate. The plants are left to seed and overwinter to provide food for wildlife. The meadows are mowed once a year, in spring, to about six inches.

You will find purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*); prairie dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*), a short grass good for edging; large stands of black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta ‘Goldstrum’*); and white culver’s root (*Veronicastrum virginicum*). Of the flowers you may see blooming in spring are golden alexander (*Zizia aurea*) and spiderwort; in the summer, black-eyed Susan, Joe-pye weed (*Eupatorium purpureum*), coneflower, pink milkweed (*Asclepias incarnate*), and wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*). Fall heralds the arrival of asters and Indiangrass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) inflorescences. July–September you will see large colonies of common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) that were not planted but naturalized on their own and attract monarch butterflies, which lay their eggs on these host plants.

Visit the garden throughout the year to witness seasonal changes and the ongoing development of this native landscape. If you have questions or suggestions, or if you would like to volunteer in the gardens, please call 914-606-7870.

To visit The Native Plant Center’s other demonstration gardens, behind the Stone Cottage:

- Walk to the entrance of Parking Lot 1
- Cross the road, toward the Administration Building
- To its right is the Stone Cottage, the Center’s headquarters

THANK YOU FOR VISITING.

July 2012