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The View from Laughing Springs: Hans Reimann's ecological notes

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Flowering Native Understory Trees

When we think of our beautiful forests, our hearts are uplifted as our eyes rise up to view oaks, poplars, hickories, etc... that tower eighty, ninety feet above us with spreading canopies of leaf and limb shading our families from the hot summer sun. No forest is complete however, unless those big trees have their smaller companions growing under them. These understory trees rarely grow higher than thirty feet but their ecological value is priceless as habitat for forest birds such as the wood thrush, tufted titmouse, sparrows and warblers.

Many of these understory trees flower profusely in the spring, adding nectar sources for native bees and other insects. Local understory tree favorites include: flowering dogwood, hawthorne, crabapple, small cherries, maple leaf viburnum, redbud, fringetree, and southern arrowwood. Edge of the Woods Native Plant Nursery of Fogelsville and Bowman Wildflower preserve sell these and other native plants.

Invasive plant: Butterfly Bush

Most invasive plants have been introduced by accident; spread by unsuspecting animals and humans ignorant to their threat. However, a few plants recognized as invasive plant populations are sold at our local nursery and landscape outlets. The butterfly bush (*Buddleja* species) is a popular ornamental plant, native to Asia and Central America that is promoted as a butterfly magnet. The truth is that this plant can inhibit the native plants that butterflies need to complete their life cycle, and thus limit nectar for adults, digestible food for their caterpillars and safe places for cocoon building and hiding. Forest edges, roadsides, stream banks and rural dumps are favorite habitats for this "bad" plant. It spreads by seed through wind dispersal. For prevention and control, fading flowers need to be cut before seeds set and young plants should be weeded by hand or receive an application of glyphosate herbicide. To achieve total removal it is best to ensure a rapid ground cover of a native plant to prevent a butterfly bush from re-establishing.

Native alternatives include: butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), sweet pepperbush (*Clethra alnifolia*), Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica*), blazing star (*Liatris spicata*), and New York ironweed (*Vernonia noveboracensis*).