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Newsletter

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

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Garlic Mustard

The collective beauty of our forest ecology here in this unique watershed inspires a sense of place that transcends time as we know it. May I share with you some wisdom from the past, a stark reality of the present, and finally a brief profile of native plants for sale which, when recognized and or planted can help secure a hopeful, healthy future for our watershed. In 1901, yes a 104 years ago, John Muir, the great naturalist, was persuading Theodore Roosevelt to create the National Forest system when he wrote these words: "The forests of America, however slighted by man, must have been a great delight to God; for they were the best he ever planted. The whole continent was a garden, and from the beginning it seemed to be favored above all the other wild parks and gardens of the globe. To prepare the ground, it was rolled and sifted in seas with infinite loving deliberation and forethought, lifted into the light, submerged and warmed over and over again, pressed and crumpled into folds and ridges, mountains, and hills, subsoil with heaving volcanic fires, ploughed and ground and sculptured into scenery and soil with glaciers and rivers, -- every feature growing and changing from beauty to beauty, higher and higher. And in the fullness of time it was planted in groves, and belts, and broad exuberant, mantling forests, with the largest, most varied, most fruitful, and most beautiful trees in the world" Thank you Mr. Muir!

Into this forest garden man has accidentally unleashed plants that, without natural checks and balances, at the present time are crowding out our native plants at an alarming rate. One of the most prolific of these invasives is Garlic Mustard, *Alliaria petiolata* (Eurasian Origin). Garlic Mustard is a biennial herb that completes it's life cycle within two years reaching heights from one to nearly four feet. Identifying characteristics of first year growth include kidney shaped basal leaves with second year growth stem leaves growing alternately, sharply toothed and triangular, with the strong garlic odor when crushed. It flowers early in Spring in clusters of small four-petal white flowers in axils of leaves. This plant is frequently seen in disturbed woods, flood plains and waste ground throughout the watershed. I have found the best control method is: in early spring when the ground thaws, pulling the plants, with the root intact; or removing plants in the late fall after native plants have died back. In both cases, carefully bag for disposal because a dropped plant or root can regenerate.

Native alternative ground cover plants include: Wild Ginger, Spring Beauty, Foam Flower, Creeping Phlox, and New York Fern. These and other native plants can be found at Edge of the Woods Native Plant Nursery in Fogelsville, PA and Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve in Washington's Crossing, PA.

Our Watershed can be preserved and enhanced by planting one native plant at a time. Each Spring the Watershed Association participates in the Lehigh County Conservation District Tree Seedling sale. We will be purchasing the following trees as bare root specimens: Red-Osier Dogwood, Black Gum, Black Cherry, and Red Oaks. To obtain a complete list of plants for sale, please contact the Lehigh Conservation District at: 610-391-9583, ext: 17 between 8AM and 4PM; or Laughing Springs Forest Community at 484-554-6829. Now, is the time to plan for spring planting. Thank you for your support.