

HAMPTONS

HOME + GARDEN ISSUE

MARTHA STEWART

*AN EXCLUSIVE LOOK AT HER
SERENE GREEN SPACE
ON LILY POND LANE*

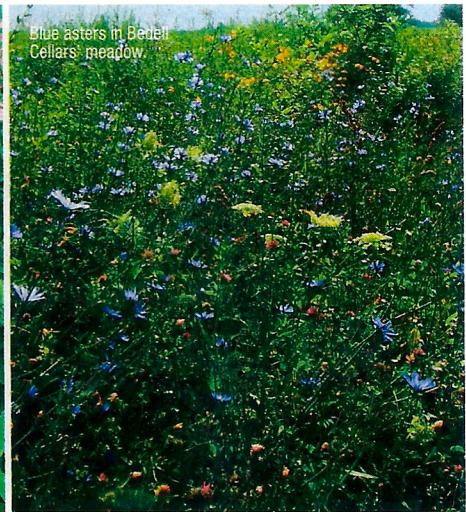
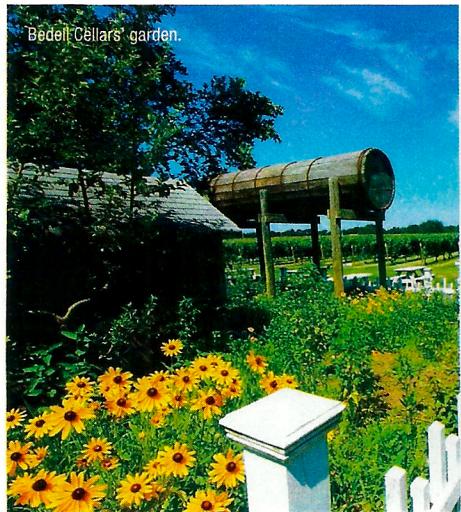
**GREY GARDENS PREMIERES
AT BAY STREET THEATER**

**THE NEW HOT HAMLET:
*Sag Harbor***

PLUS

AERIN LAUDER
TONY INGRAO + RANDY KEMPER
MASAHARU MORIMOTO



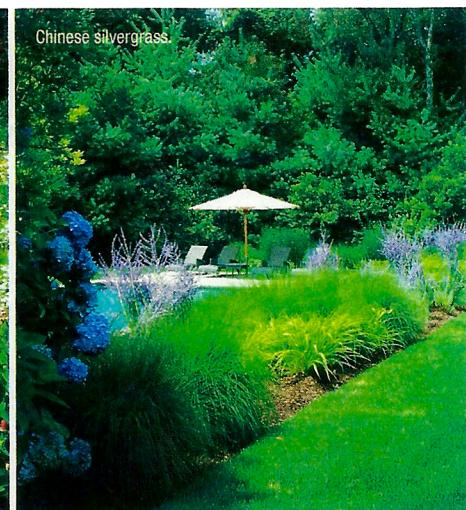
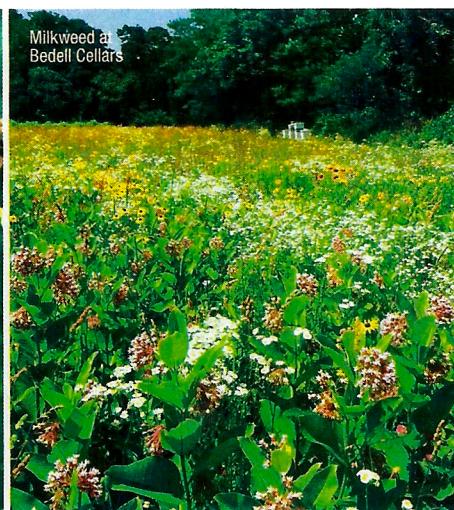
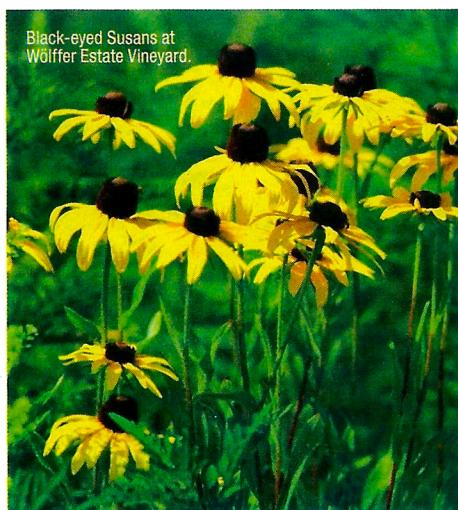


NATIVE BEAUTY

THE LIGHT, THE VISTAS, AND THE BOUNTY ARE WHAT ATTRACT MANY TO THE BUCOLIC EAST END, AND LOCALS WILL DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO HELP PRESERVE AND MAINTAIN OUR NATURAL RESOURCES.

BY PAULA DE LA CRUZ

FOR A FEW YEARS NOW, we have been learning that bees are disappearing. In fall 2006, the Environmental Protection Agency reported that United States beekeepers had lost from 30 to 90 percent of their hives' worker and drone bees. The mysterious condition (adult bees leaving and never returning) was dubbed Colony Collapse Disorder. Since then, research has pointed to neonicotinoid pesticides as the main culprit. In December 2013, the European Union banned the use of neonicotinoids for two years at the urging of its beekeepers and agriculturalists. But the US didn't follow that lead. Without bees, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) reports that the US stands to lose \$15 billion worth of crops every year. We certainly can't resort to pollinating trees by hand, as farmers do with apple and pear orchards in southwest



China, where intensive pesticide applications eliminated most of the region's bee populations. This summer we also are reminded of the importance of eating locally grown food, especially because the drought in California, the worst on record, is in its fourth year. As a result, more than 400,000 acres of Californian agricultural land were left fallow last year, with losses of more than \$1.5 billion. "If we want fruits," says Dr. Dennis VanEngelsdorp, a University of Maryland assistant professor and director of the Bee Informed Partnership, "we need a healthy bee population. We can all contribute by buying local honey and planting pollinator meadows."

The Long Island Native Plant Initiative (LINPI) has been dedicated to maintaining biodiversity since its founding as a grassroots, word-of-mouth group in 2005. "Now we are a nonprofit, mostly volunteer cooperative of more than 30 nonprofit organizations," says Polly Weigand, LINPI's executive director. "Every season, through the Soil & Water Conservation District, we organize workshops, consult on planting and maintaining native meadows, and advise how to control invasive species. We use a much smaller lawn area than we think, so part of it can be easily transformed into a native meadow. We can have our lawns and meadows!"

Because it's not a monoculture, a meadow is an elaborate composition of color, light, and texture. We see only a small portion of its ecosystem of grasses, sedges, mosses, lichens, perennials, and bulbs. "So much activity happens in the soil," says Weigand. Native plant diversity supports the lives of bees, birds, butterflies, and vital soil microbial activity. It also contributes to the production of great wine, an important Long Island crop. Richard Olsen-Harbich, winemaker for Bedell Cellars in Cutchogue, uses an acre of native meadow to produce an outstanding 80 acres' worth of grapes. "Insect-pollinated flowers have higher yeast levels," says Olsen-Harbich. "When insects pollinate grapes that are surrounded by insect-pollinated plants, it augments the yeast content in the fruit, which adds character to wine."

Wölffer Estate Vineyard in Sagaponack also uses a native meadow to protect the vineyard floor. Richie Pisacano, Wölffer's vineyard manager, says that when he first started working in 1997, "the soil had an unnatural density from years of repeated tilling." After almost two decades of growing a meadow in between rows of grape vines, the soil has a healthy bounce. "Great soil pushes back," Pisacano says. To be a part of the Long Island Sustainable Winegrowing association, "you have to have an ecological plan. We planted two rows of hedges around the property, and our meadow has 40 different wildflowers."

KEEP THE BUZZ GOING

For most of us, the mental image of a meadow is a bucolic pasture sprinkled with soft flowers. A native meadow is not a medieval tapestry scene; its beauty derives from the beauty of pure energy, buzzing with life. A perfectly manicured garden means fewer flowers, shelter, and nesting materials for pollinators.

"There are 4,000 native species of bees in this country," says



The slender mountain mint tolerate soil erosion, clay, and dry soils.



HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW?

Planting a native meadow out East is not beyond your grasp....

Start researching the site for your native meadow in the fall, and contact LINPI to learn what's the most suitable seed mix for your growing conditions.

The following spring, mow the existing vegetation very short and till the soil when it is dry. After watering thoroughly, cover the soil with a 2-4mm plastic sheet and secure the edges well. Leave the plastic on for six weeks to solarize the soil, which kills soil-borne pests. If the area is too large to solarize in this manner, cultivate the soil repeatedly.

Plan to plant in mid-May. For a small area (under 1,000 square feet), structure the meadow as you would a designed garden bed, with higher, middle, and lower layers.

Dogwood and blueberry shrubs are great host shrubs for butterfly larvae. To keep the meadow active all season, choose perennials that flower from May to September, like mountain mint, milkweed, asters, horse mint, cardinal flowers and goldenrod (unlike ragweed, which is wind-pollinated, goldenrod doesn't cause allergies).

Milkweed adds vibrancy and texture throughout the summer season. It is also the main food source for monarch butterflies, whose populations have declined 80 percent in the US in the past 21 years. Some plants that we mistake for weeds, like dandelions and wild clover, are actually great for pollinators.

If you are planting a

meadow and you absolutely must spray, use targeted ingredients just after dawn, when bees aren't active. Minimize tillage to protect ground-nesting pollinators, and ensure water sources are scattered throughout the landscape. The use of cover crops and permanent in-field vegetative strips can convert cultivated agricultural fields into pollinator habitat, which can benefit fruit and vegetable production (and farm profitability) by helping to increase on-farm pollination.

For comprehensive methods of establishing and maintaining a meadow, contact the Suffolk County Soil & Water Conservation District at 852-3285.



The milkweed, shown here at the Gardens at Landcraft Environments, is the main food source for monarch butterflies, whose US populations have declined 80 percent in the last 21 years.



GREEN TEAM

Through research and conscious cultivation, these organizations and designers are changing the landscape of organic gardening in the Hamptons. By Sabrina Evans

BEE INFORMED PARTNERSHIP

This collaboration between leading research labs and universities works to understand the honeybee decline in the US. It conducts the most comprehensive honeybee survey in the world, combining traditional science, economics, statistics, and medical research to pinpoint trends toward better beekeeping practices. 443-296-2470; beeinformed.org

LONG ISLAND NATIVE PLANT INITIATIVE INC.

An all-volunteer co-op of 30 nonprofits, government agencies, nursery pros, and citizens, the LINPI works to protect native plant populations by establishing

commercial sources of genetically suitable local plant materials for use in nursery, landscaping, and habitat-restoration activities. *Hampton Bays, 560-9945; linpi.org*

NATIONAL POLLINATOR GARDEN NETWORK

The NPGN represents 800,000 gardeners, 10,000 schoolyard gardens, and 250,000 US pollinator gardens to help restore critical pollinator populations through sustainable gardening practices and habitat conservation. 415-362-1137; pollinator.org

UNLIMITED EARTH CARE

Known for his simplistic

compositions, incorporating the natural landscape into a comprehensive design, landscape designer Frederico Azevedo employs native plants proven to adapt and known to require less water after centuries of growth out East. 2249 Scuttle Hole Road, Bridgehampton, 725-7551; unlimitedearthcare.com

VICTORIA FENSTERER

Victoria Fensterer, the designer who reimagined the greenery of Grey Gardens near Georgica Pond, respects the ecology of the Hamptons by incorporating into her projects local specimens that thrive in local soil. *Amagansett, 324-6657; victoriafensterer.com*

VanEngelsdorp. Eastern carpenter bees or wood-boring bees are harmless to humans. "Encourage them by creating soft-wood nests. The bees will not attack finished wood," he advises. A bright-green garden is often deceptively unhealthy, kept alive by copious amounts of pesticides and fertilizer, with half an ecosystem missing.

"Wilderness with a bit of design can be very romantic," says Victoria Fensterer, an award-winning landscape designer in Amagansett. Fensterer greatly favors natural meadows and stays away from invasive plants. Many ornamental cultivars that don't produce viable seeds, like Japanese barberry, butterfly bush, or maiden grass, are still aggressively escaping cultivation into the wild. Good alternatives to these are weigela (although not native, it's not invasive either), summersweet, and little bluestem grass. If you have any invasive plants and can't pull them out all at once, you can replace them in sections, or make sure you don't let them go to seed.

"Native plants are generally healthier and last longer than nonnative species," says Frederico Azevedo, owner of Unlimited Earth Care, a landscape-design firm in Bridgehampton. Dogwoods or inkberry holly are great understory trees to red oaks, magnolias, maples, and Eastern white pines.

TIPS FROM THE TALENTED

To keep plants healthy, Azevedo recommends adding chicken manure and compost in spring, and lime, as needed. Although a lawn does not consist of native grasses, you can keep it healthy by not mowing it too short or overwatering it. "The best way to fertilize the lawn is to spread a thin layer of aged manure or compost over the entire area," Azevedo advises. "Add corn gluten early in the season or just weed by hand. It's not just safer, it's also less expensive." Even if a garden is not completely native, it can use plants that don't impact the environment negatively. Russian sage or mountain fleece are drought-tolerant flowering perennials that are great for color and structure.

This year, the National Pollinator Garden Network started the Million Pollinator Garden Challenge (millionpollinatorgardens.org) throughout the country to help revive bees, butterflies, birds, bats, and other populations of pollinators. Competitive gardeners, or simply responsible citizens too shocked by the sad state of some ecosystems—including tens of thousands of fish in the Peconic River killed by wastewater treatment plants and fertilizer used on lawns—can add their pollinator-friendly gardens to an interactive US map. The plan is to keep gardeners engaged from spring through fall—from planting and photographing pollinators to finally collecting seed before the first frost. Right now only a few Long Island nurseries are participating in the Million Pollinator Garden Challenge, so this is the perfect time to cultivate your competitive gardener's edge.

Throughout spring and summer, LINPI organizes plant sales to support its programs, which include collecting native seeds for the Greenbelt Native Plant Center's Regional Seed Bank in Staten Island. Weigand encourages residents and visitors to participate in the seed collection because "it's a great way to learn about our local ecosystem. You don't have to plant a full meadow; even a few native plants contribute to biodiversity." H