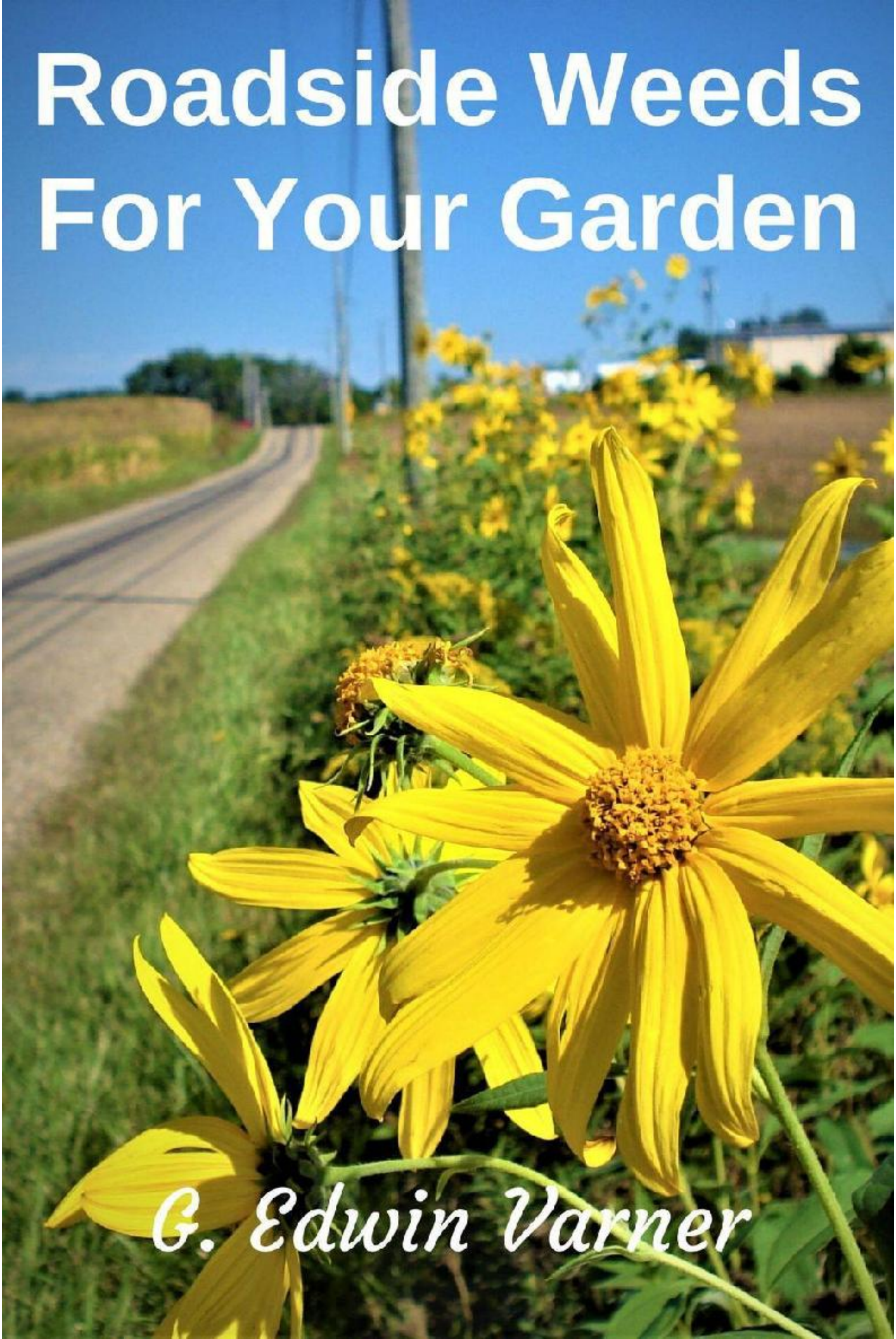
Roadside Weeds For Your Garden



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ROADSIDE WEEDS FOR YOUR GARDEN

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Written by G. Edwin Varner.

Preface

This ebook helps you to learn and discover beautiful and unique roadside plants to grow in your flower garden. This publication is not the definitive listing of all plants classified as weeds by many agricultural agencies throughout the world.

The information on each plant may contain inaccuracies about their histories, growing conditions, and hardiness. The following plants are common in my general area and may not be in your location. I advise caution if you wish to grow them in your garden, and it may be unlawful in some places to do so.

The following plants use their Latin name first then by a common name or names.

The digital photos are of the flowers at my home, drive-by roadside encounters, and Creative Commons (CC0) licensed images.

Introduction

The hitchhiker's guide to roadside weeds.

I know what you are thinking, but I have not suddenly gone insane. I lost most of my sanity years ago when I began gardening.

It's good to be innovative and experiment in adding new ideas on how to garden and decide what unusual plant to include in a flower bed or border. Sometimes, we need to be daring and do the unimaginable and unthinkable. This ebook involves becoming a pioneer in growing and enjoying the beauty of roadside weeds.

A weed is a misplaced plant growing where it's not wanted. It has lost its way, far from its original home, and has ended up in new locations. One new place can be in your flower garden. Deliberately grow weeds in your garden? Yes! Some of these plants have beautiful flowers, and you will read about them in this entertaining and informative ebook.

Many of these roadside plants are common in my area — and most likely, in yours. As you and your passengers drive along a road or highway, you may occasionally wonder what those colorful "weeds" growing near the roadside are. Then, suddenly, those beautiful flowers are out-of-sight, and as quickly out-of-mind. No one seems to give much thought to these "botanical ditch-dwellers" — until now.

By some extraordinary circumstances, the following plants grow near many unmowed country roadsides or road banks. How did this happen? I am not sure if researchers have conducted studies to determine how weedy plants began to live near the hustle-bustle of a roadway.

One fascinating theory is that weed seeds have hitchhiked onto soil embedded tire treads. After traveling for countless miles (kilometers) and many tire revolutions, the clumps of dirt eventually fall and later wash or blow off to the roadside by rain or wind. No matter the

methods of dispersal onto a road, it happens all the time and the result, if successful, will produce stunning flowers.

One important caveat when planting them in a garden is to know that they can quickly spread unless you remain vigilant to prevent self-seeding. Most weeds produce a tremendous number of seeds which can live dormant for several years until environmental conditions suit germination.

Can these plants become invasive? Yes, but by now, they probably are in your local area. But, we don't want them setting down roots in new territories. So, I would recommend you refrain from obtaining their seeds if they are not growing in your location.

There are many other plants I have not listed that grow along roads. I will not write about them, for they are very invasive.

Let's classify growing beautiful weeds as a fringe or exploratory form of gardening. You may discover some unique treasures no one else will have in their gardens. Give a wayward foreign wildflower a new lease on life, and to you in becoming an adventurous gardener.

To find wildflower seeds of the following species, please search online to find specialty nurseries that sell them.

Please note: Cultivating the following seeds or plants in your garden has the potential of them becoming invasive to your area. I advise caution when growing them.

Achillea – Yarrow

Achillea millefolium

CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

An ancient Greece health care provider.

Let's begin with a world traveler. Native to a large swath of Europe and Asia, you can find this weed (by varying degrees) in all continents except Antarctica. How has this plant managed to grow in all four corners of the world? Forget about thinking that people became enamored by the beauty of the white, flat-top flower clusters. The leaves offer more charm for their ferny or feathery appearance.

There are two major reasons for its globetrotting growth. The first reason is this species (and others) became valued for reputed health

benefits. Long ago, this plant became valued as an application to help ease various medical conditions.

One clue about this idea is with its generic name of 'Achillea.' The Greeks named it in association with Achilles, who supposedly used this plant to treat his soldiers' wounds when they stormed the city of Troy in 1200 B.C. The leaves, along with the flowers, may help to help staunch blood loss and be an antiseptic.

Well, this *M*A*S*H* triage idea proved too overwhelming to ignore for the plant became famous as a heal-all drug for communities to grow. It was used to treat wounds and ailments. Even as recently as the 1940s, several American drug companies sold the dried plant material for prescriptive usage.

The second reason this plant now grows everywhere is that it does grow everywhere. It has a remarkable ability to adapt to poor soils and environmental conditions, including having excellent hardiness. But, it's not perfect – it has its own Achilles Heel for it cannot grow well in fertile cultivated land. It tries, but faster-growing plants will overpower it.

This species prefers to grow in less competitive, disturbed land such as near roadsides, meadows, and abandoned farm fields. It can grow in wet and dry arid areas. Plants can be in bloom from early to late summer and produce millions of seeds. Over the years, colorful hybrids of this plant and other species have become valued for home gardens but have lost the ability to propagate by excessive self-seeding.

Asclepias – Common Milkweed

Asclepias syriaca

Milking it for all it's worth.

Native to North America, we commonly find this large milkweed in the eastern half of the United States and southern Canada but has also become established as a weed in parts of Europe. We find it growing in groups or patches, not only alongside roads but also in disturbed ground, and cultivated crop fields.

This species prefers sandy to gravelly, well-drained soils, and as much sunlight as possible. It blooms all summer with large ball-shaped clusters of pale-purple and greenish-pink blossoms. They also have the

added benefit of being sweetly scented. It can take two or three years from seed to establish blooming plants.

Being hardy perennials, they will live for several years and are hardy from zones 3 to 9. Mature plants can grow to over three feet tall and wide.

Environmentalists recommend we grow this “weed” in any vacant corner of our gardens. Years ago, this would be heresy to suggest, but times are now different. The reason for this change of heart involves the survival of the Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*). This colorful insect needs this plant (and other milkweed relations) to survive. The larva eats the leaves and absorbs the toxic milky juice they contain.

When the larva undergoes metamorphosis into an adult butterfly, its tissues still contain this toxic chemical brew. It is a chemical defense to keep birds (and predaceous insects) from eating this species.

Scientists once considered using this latex “milkshake” as a potential replacement for the rubber tree latex in the manufacture of tires. Well, the plan failed because they deemed it cheaper and more practical to continue using rubber trees.

Although its common name refers to this milky sap, another common name is silkweed, for it disperses its seeds by wind-driven silky fibers. The large seed pods can contain many tightly packed, silky-fiber-attached seeds. During World War 2, the regular material used to stuff military issued life jackets became limited in supply. Someone discovered Milkweed seed pod “fluff” would make a great, long-lasting, and super buoyant substitute. After the war, it reverted to being a bothersome weed again.

Lately, enterprising Canadian outdoor clothing manufacturers are selling arctic-tested, toasty-warm, insulated jackets and pants containing these seed fibers. Doesn’t it give you a warm feeling inside that this plant is not such an awful weed?

Let’s plant a few Common Milkweed plants in our gardens or in that troublesome area where nothing else seems to thrive. Milkweeds are up

to the challenge.

Swamp Milkweed (Asclepias incarnata)

This milkweed is also native to North America. Unlike the Common Milkweed, this species prefers to live in wet or semi-swampy locations, including roadside ditches.

The cluster of flowers is an attractive pinkish-rose, and they bloom throughout the summer. A common add-on name is '*incarnata*,' meaning pale-pink, as in, flesh tones.

This species is the parent to smaller growing cultivars or varieties better suited to growing in flower gardens.

Aster – New England Aster

Aster novae-angliae; Symphyotrichum novae-angliae

The constellation of stars in Autumn.

You do not need a calendar to determine when Fall is beginning. These stately plants, native to North America, display their bright purple flower clusters with yellow centers across the rural landscape beginning in late summer or early fall.

Our gardens are ablaze with hot colors of chrysanthemums along with cool purples and pinks of Asters this time of year. Growers bred many of hardy Asters from this tall wild species. It can grow over six feet and display its stunning purple blossoms for about two months.

Since it blooms in Autumn, the flowers provide an important nectar source for many pollinator insects, especially migrating Monarch butterflies.

This plant can act as a weed for it self-seeds a-plenty in favorable growing conditions such as fertile and moist soil, and sunny locations. It can tolerate drier soil, partial shade, and less than ideal productive habitat, such as a road bank, but may not grow as tall.

These stunning plants are hardy from zones 3 to 7 but suffer in warmer zonal locations.

We can grow this plant in our gardens if you periodically clip off the top and side growing shoots (similar in cultivating Chrysanthemums) until mid-summer to create a low-growing, bushy, cushiony plant by Autumn. The resultant flowering will amaze you!

Older reference books list this plant as *Aster novae-angliae* (which I grew up with), but botanists now classify it as *Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*. They can't leave the names alone for us regular folk. Oh well, between you and me, let's keep it listed as an aster. I won't tell if you don't.

To confuse us more, botanists and breeders have selected and genetically crossed other Aster species to create colorful varieties for gardens and landscaping. For example, *Aster novi-belgii* is the New York Aster or Michaelmas Daisy. It looks similar to the New England Aster both in color and season of bloom. It's many cultivars (or varieties) grow shorter, which is terrific for including in small gardens and containers.

These varieties are also hardy from zones 4 to 8.

White-Heath Aster (Aster pilosus; Symphyotrichum pilosum)

Sometimes growing with the New England Aster with similar growth requirements and hardiness is this smaller and bushier species. Instead of purple flowers, it sports many tiny white blossoms highlighted with central yellow disk flowers. It is also a native species thriving in eastern North America.

Some locations call it the Frost Aster — maybe for these white flowers, or it is a harbinger of frosty nights. The most likely explanation is the leaves have a pale white velvety sheen in the correct light and signifies a coating of frost.

Although not as blatantly showy as the purple Aster, it makes up for having millions of flowers throughout the Fall. So, why is it considered a weed? This species produces seed by the zillions and loves to infiltrate disturbed land, such as farm fields, pastures, edges of woodlands, and — you guessed it — alongside roads.

Chicory – Common Chicory

Cichorium intybus

Good to the last drop of blue.

I have to admit – this roadside weed is one of my favorites. A stunning member of the aster family, it sports many bright sky-blue or robin's egg blue flowers from late spring to Fall. There are occasional colonies of white blossoms (which I have seen and regret never stopping the car to collect some seeds) and the rarer pink individuals.

The plants are biennial, for they begin as vegetative plants, then the following year blooms. That's the usual rule, but it breaks some rules. If the growing conditions are ideal, the plants will grow as annuals and perennials.

No matter how they grow, viewing miles of these gorgeous flowers (interspersed with wild orange Daylilies or Oxeye Daisies) along the roadsides during the summer is stunning.

Growing by a road is typical for seeing these plants, although they can also grow in abandoned farm fields, pastures, and railways. From these areas, you can accurately deduce they prefer growing in full sun, and gravely, dry soil. Like most "roady" plants, they will also tolerate salt-laced and heavy metal-enriched roadside conditions.

Originating across Europe and Asia, botanists recorded Chicory to be thriving in the USA Midwest by the mid to late 1800s. Classified as a weed, there appears to be a consensus that it is not an evil, invasive "thug" ready to terrorize every square inch of land.

The only time I notice this plant (in full bloom) is near local country or suburban roadways. I also find it amazing this plant has not been "upgraded" into the limelight of being bred into colorful garden flowers. It's so distressing being an overlooked individual.

Although dismissed as a potential garden icon, Chicory has established itself in a different talent. It is not the flowers but for its roots – roasted roots, that is. The thick roots are chopped, dried, and then roasted and ground to become a coffee substitute or as an additive. As of this writing, I have not yet sampled a cup of Chicory coffee. I hope to sip some along with raising a clump of garden-grown plants someday. How about joining me?

Crownvetch

Coronilla varia or Securigera varia

Far from being the crown jewel of weeds.

It starts innocently when importing non-native plants (and animals) for specific functions or reasons. But later, those ideas can become an uncontrollable curse.

Crownvetch (or Crown Vetch for those of you preferring a two-word name) arrived in the United States in the mid-1800s from Europe, North Africa, and Asia. In the 1950s, it became advertised as a quick method to control erosion. For those of you familiar with another super-duper erosion-control plant named Kudzu, imported in the 1920s and 30s, things don't always go as planned.

Although not as invasive as Kudzu, Crownvetch can become a problem in some areas. As a member of the Pea-Bean family, this low-growing groundcover vine can incorporate nitrogen from the air and add it to the ground. It can form its own fertilizer (just like Kudzu.) If not appropriately cultivated, it can become a serious problem that it is difficult to eradicate.

Its saving grace is it grows well in disturbed or less-than-ideal areas that other plants have trouble growing, and in too steep or sharply inclined areas that are hazardous or impossible to mow.

Other areas for its growth include well-drained reclamation acreage and roadside plantings. Here, in these areas, under proper management, it provides a remarkable job in stabilizing and improving poor soil. The only recommendation is not to plant seeds in very fertile areas where the vines can rapidly spread. Lately, more landscapers are taking the hint not to plant this vine any longer.

So, can we plant them in our gardens? Discretion is the better part of valor would be my advice to you – but – those clusters of pale to dark pink blossoms are so darn pretty. I would not plant them in the garden but in containers and remove spent blooms to prevent seed formation.

The flowers bloom all summer and into early Fall in most regions. The plant is hardy, growing in zones 3 to 9. Just be cautious if you grow this vine to prevent unwanted spreading to other areas.

Daucus – Queen Anne's Lace or Wild Carrot

Daucus carota

The Lady Macbeth method in removing blood stains: *"Out, damn'd spot! Out, I say! ..."*

If you want a prime example of a weed that not only grows near roadsides but everywhere else, you don't have to look any further than this plant. Once finding open fields, disturbed land, meadows, and other cheap real estates, it blooms and reseeds itself with gusto. Who would have thought a wild relation of an orange grocery store vegetable could be a force to deal with today?

Native to Europe, people cultivated it in ancient times as a food item — as we do now with carrots. Today, it's not worth the trouble harvesting the white roots since your local grocery store is nearby.

Having such a dainty name and appearance like lace doilies (I never thought I would use that word in a sentence), this plant was once popular long ago. It helps to have royalty added to its name.

Legend tells of Queen Anne of England (1665-1714) was sewing white lace and accidentally pricked a finger with the needle. A drop of blood dripped onto the center of the lace. I am sure she said some choice words not befitting a Lady about her painful injury.

If you look at a sizeable lacy flower cluster of small flowers on this plant, you will notice a little sterile purple flower at the very center. That blossom represents Queen Anne's tiny drop of dried blood. Now, that's a great story!

Queen Anne's Lace can grow tall — well over five feet — and have several branching stems. The carrot-like foliage is also attractive being feathery.

Although the plant and flower clusters are attractive, especially for making floral displays, it is not practical to grow in any garden. But, you can substitute it with a non-invasive and popular pale pink to a dark purple variety called **Dara** (shown above.) This variety is very floriferous and hardy.

A close relative called *Ammi majus*, usually called **Bishop's Flower**, is an annual, looks "somewhat" the same as Queen Anne's Lace, but the flowers are a striking pure white (without the tiny purple blossom) and do not grow as tall.

Dipsacus – Teasel

Dipsacus fullonum

A wolf in sheep's clothing.

From the list of roadside plants in this ebook, this one has a formidable appearance – as in, you better leave it alone. All parts of this plant display sharp prickles, especially the flower head when dried. When growing and being green, it looks attractive with its tiny blossoms, but when dead and dried looks menacing.

Native to Northern Africa, Europe, and parts of Asia, Teasel came to North America in the late 1700s, not only for being a botanical curiosity but also as a tool. A weed as a tool? Yes, for the teasing of wool.

Teasing means a sharp comb (or card) combs through the wool to remove left-over impurities and to fluff up the wool fibers. The dried prickly flower head had the common name of ‘card teasel’ regarding the actual wooden (and later metal wire) brush (aka “card”) used to comb (tease) the cleaned wool. Typing that explanation gave me a headache – and you now have one just by reading it. My apologies.

Anyway, these dried Teasel flower heads provided cheap, if not practicable, substitutes for real teasing combs. It must have been adequate for the plant was popular and spread across agricultural North America.

Today, botanists classify this plant as a severe invasive plant that can quickly form extensive colonies and kill-out native plants. To spread, it needs to first establish itself in less than hospitable habitats. The plants can quickly grow and spread in disturbed, moist lands, such as farm fields, bottom-land meadows, and roadside ditches. If the soil is fertile – they are on the fast-track in uncontrollable invasiveness.

As mentioned earlier, the young plants are “somewhat” pretty of being light green, and the flower heads bloom in early summer with small pale lavender-colored blossoms.

The dead plants are a different story, but we can use them as interesting craft materials. My aunt loved to use plant materials in seasonal indoor displays. For teasel, she would spray them with bright, metallic silver or gold paint for Christmas or pure white for winter displays.

I would not grow these plants in your garden unless you wish to use them for dried plant material artistic displays, or you plan to become an old-style textile manufacturer specializing in wool garments.

Eutrochium – Joe-Pye Weed

Eutrochium purpureum

Life of Pye

For those of you who like tall-growing plants for a garden, this hardy zone 4 perennial is ideal. Native from central to eastern areas of North America, it can grow up to eight feet tall. Blooming from mid to late summer, we can find this plant growing in moist ground — either in depressed meadows, the edge of forests, and in roadside ditches.

I have seen impressive stands of “Joeys” flanking a few country roads. I was fortunate for county road maintenance crews did not mow them down before viewing them.

We should grow these plants in any garden to impress all eyes (and nose) with their huge, sturdy stems, impressively whorled leaves, and breathtaking, vanilla-scented dome-shaped, pale-pink to rose-pink flower heads. Descriptive words can't convey the magnificence of this plant!

So, how did the Joe-Pye name originate? Rumor has it an old native Indian medicine man, known by colonial New England settlers as Joe Pye, used extracts of this plant to help cure several diseases, particularly typhoid fever. The Indian word for typhoid was "jopi," and because of errors of pronunciation (and spelling) became "joe-pie" or "joe-pye." Anyway, people named this amazing plant in his honor.

Don't let the size of this plant intimidate you into adding in your garden. If you can allow enough space, it will reward you with impressive results of gorgeous flowers.

Helianthus – Wild Sunflowers

Helianthus maximiliani; grosseserratus; giganteus; tuberosus and more

Always having a sunny disposition.

So far, we have been cruising down the road, noticing the previously mentioned plants. But now we have to stop for a traffic jam. If you think of sunflowers as being only those common large-headed types (*Helianthus annuus*) planted in a garden, you are mistaken.

Many other native species are flourishing in North America. They all thrive in dry, open grassy areas such as meadows (prairies) but also in "making the best of it" roadside abodes.

These are tough plants surviving hot sun and dry soil. Unless you can easily identify specific differences of each species, they can all look similar. Sometimes, if two or more species are growing close to each other, hybrids can also complicate matters of identification.

Well, let's not dwell too long on this. Growing near roadsides are these spectacular annual and perennial plants, and we can raise many in our gardens. Yes, the keyword is "raise" for all species grow tall – but bushy – with all summer long blooming.

On a historical note, American Plains Indians grew these various species as a year-long food source (saving the nutritious seeds.) It was German naturalist Prince Maximilian of Wied-Neuwied led an expedition into the American West during the 1830s and came across one or more species. One species, named after him – *Helianthus maximiliani* or Maximilian's Sunflower – grows wild in many central and eastern US states.

Another important species, the Jerusalem Artichoke (*Helianthus tuberosus*), also called sunchokes, is also native to central North America. It was (and still is) cultivated for its starchy tubers. These root tubers are long-lived and thrive in the dry prairie environment.

Early explorers learned of this species from the Indians and sent shipments of tubers back to Europe in hopes of it becoming naturalized there. It would have been more popular had it not been for a more productive and easier to grow starchy vegetable called the potato.

Seeds of all these species also went to Europe and beyond, especially to Russia, where hybridization eventually created sunflowers having seeds containing higher amounts of nutritious oils used for cooking. Remember one thing – people raised sunflowers as a food resource and not for ornamental value (that was a bonus).

Today, we raise sunflowers not only for their oil but also as a snack for baseball players and birds, along with for displaying those pretty garden flowers. Few roadside weeds can have this claim of historical fame.

Ah, the traffic jam is now easing. It’s time to move along to view...

Hemerocallis – Orange Daylily

Hemerocallis fulva

Something to make your outhouse the talk of the neighborhood.

You can always tell a plant is popular when it has several common names. You can choose which name you prefer from the following list: Wild Daylily, Tawny Daylily, Tiger Lily (though not being a “true” lily), Common Daylily, Roadside Daylily, Ditch Daylily, and the prize for originality goes to Outhouse Daylily. If you need to beautify your outdoor privy, this plant will be sufficient.

The plant’s name signifies how long an individual flower lives, but there are so many future flowers available, the plant appears to be in constant bloom most of the summer.

Of all the roadside weeds, this plant is probably the best colonizer in adverse areas. It's common to see large colonies blooming during the summer on road banks, edges of woodlands, and besides old weathered farmhouses. The common denominator of all these areas is the neglected conditions. Like all plants, they would prefer to grow in fertile soil, but if not available, they will claim it with no reservations.

This daylily grows all over the world, and each country believes it is native there. It is actually native to China, Japan, North, and South Korea. Because of its superior hardiness (zones 2 to 9 for heaven's sake!) and adaptability to various growing conditions (not to mention it's outstanding, simplistic beauty), it quickly spread worldwide.

It is safe to assume this daylily started the buzz for people to appreciate other species and genetic varieties to plant in their gardens. This plant is so common in the wild it is rare to find it offered for sale in nurseries. Today, there are billions (not really, but close to it – someday) of Hemerocallis varieties worldwide with this species contributing to the outstanding warm colors and hardiness. Try to locate the double-flowered cultivar of this plant – it's gorgeous!

Either deliberately planted near roadsides or found a home there by accident, many non-gardening people see miles of these blooming plants while driving may have sparked an interest in planting them in their gardens or near their houses. Most of the time during the summer, while driving, I will see long stretches of these wild Daylilies growing alongside roads intermixed with robin-egg-blue Chicory (*Cichorium intybus* – described earlier). The complementary colors are stunning!

I have seen places where gorgeous road banks of blooming daylilies mown down by road crews. These plants did not obstruct a driver's view of the road. The shock of viewing this unnecessary destruction was unsettling. How could anyone mow such beautiful flowers without experiencing guilt? The road crew within a day transformed a long stretch of those yellowish-orange flowers into a swath of hideous sun-dried bits and pieces of leaf, stem, and petal.

Wanton disregard and destruction of beauty is a form of mental illness – no matter if you're doing your job. Mother Nature regrew those daylilies, and during the following summer, the road banks were ablaze with hot summer color as if nothing had happened 365 days prior. Nature always corrects man-made ugliness.

Hesperis – Dame's Rocket or Sweet Rocket

Hesperis matronalis

All because of eating that forbidden fruit.

Contrary to what the common name suggests, it has nothing to do with space rockets. Rocket is an old name for mustard plants or its close relatives. This plant is in the same family as cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower.

Like the previously mentioned Orange Daylily, this plant also has many common names, including Dame’s Wort, Dame’s Gilliflower, Damask

Violet, or Dame's Violet, Night-scented Gilliflower, Mother-of-the-Evening and heaven knows how many other "Dame's what-evers."

The Latin name *Hesperis* means "of-the-evening," and *matronalis means* "motherly." Somehow, it became associated with Eve (as in the famous Adam and Eve couple) but in a more negative way. Seventeenth-century English herbalist, Nicholas Culpeper called this plant "Eve's Weed." Shame on you, Nicholas.

Native to Europe and Asia, it is a flower garden escapee growing wild in many moist, partly shady roadside ditches and outside woodlands.

Although Hesperis will make beautiful and hardy garden plantings, it can produce a tremendous number of seeds (like all members of the Cabbage Family) and is ecologically invasive in several areas of North America and other continents.

One major factor for why this plant has spread so far and wide is because of the harmful practice of seed companies to include it in wildflower seed mixes for gardeners to sow in shady, moist areas for springtime blooms. I sometimes wonder if they include Dandelion seeds, but they don't.

It is a biennial, blooming from early spring to midsummer with purple or white flowers. Botanists classify it as a vespertine flowering plant – meaning, it blooms and releases a sweet lily-like perfume into the evening air. Well, it smells better than cooked broccoli!

Hardy from zones 3 to 9, it thrives in part sun to full shade and moist, loamy soil. You can include it in your garden but clip off the seed stems.

Impatiens – Jewelweed or Touch-Me-Not

Impatiens capensis; pallida

Lemuel Gulliver is in for a "big" surprise.

Native to most of northern and eastern North America, these annual wild Impatiens thrive in shady to partly sunny, moist woodlands, roadside ditches, and stream beds. The most common species is *Impatiens capensis* or the **Orange Spotted Jewelweed** with various shades of yellowish-orange to deep reddish-orange flowers with long nectar spurs. They also sport bright, enhanced spots or blotches that act as visual cues to attract pollinators such as hummingbirds and a variety of bees (especially bumblebees).

A not-so-common sister species is the **Yellow Jewelweed** (*I. pallida*) with pure yellow pouch-like blossoms.

Under the best of fertile, moist soil habitats, these plants will produce tall-growing but hollow, watery, or succulent stems with hundreds of flowers blooming all summer until a killing frost. During this time, a typical plant will produce elongated seed capsules that behave like Lilliputian hand grenades — if Jonathan Swift had written about these tiny people having such a modern weapon. When ripe, these pods will burst open with a surprising micro-explosive force at the slightest touch of a finger. You may not realize this, but our common bedding annuals of Impatiens and Balsam will have the same reaction.

Native Americans used these plants for medicinal applications. The juicy stems and leaves may relieve itching and pain from exposure to poison ivy, stinging nettles (I hate that plant), insect bites, stings, and other irritations. The sap contains substances that may help control certain types of skin fungus.

As of this writing, I am not sure if these plants act as invasive weeds in other areas of the world. Here, in North America, they can become overgrown in shady areas, but since they are native and pretty, we do not control their spread. Hey, if these beautiful plants benefit the hummingbirds and bumblebees, let them grow far and wide.

To raise them in a shady area of your garden, collect fresh seed in the early Fall and slightly cover them with soil. By spring, they will germinate even when the wet ground is cold.

Lathyrus – Everlasting Sweet Pea

Lathyrus latifolius

Always read the fine print.

This beautiful vine can create a lot of confusion for many people. The problem lies with its name.

First, we assume it is an actual Sweet Pea (*Lathyrus odorata*), having very fragrant flowers. It is not.

Second, people (including new gardeners) assume it is a perennial variety of a Sweet Pea instead of being an annual. Hey, who wants to grow an annual plant when a perennial type (with an attractive descriptive name as being “everlasting”) is available?

And so, the disappointment begins when people realize this species does not have any trace of scent and limited in flower color to rose-pink or white. What a bummer!

This confusion may be the reason this vine became popular and spread to almost all areas on the earth. Native to the Mediterranean regions of southern Europe (just like *Lathyrus odorata*), it spread to other continents – possibly via the exchange of garden flower seeds.

First reported growing in early American and Canadian gardens by the late-1700s, the plant became a weed when it escaped gardens and established itself into the countryside. Any pampered plant leaving the comfort of a garden to "go it alone" in the world has to be robust and tough, and this species is.

Today, we find it growing wild – to the point of being labeled as invasive in some areas – near roadsides or road banks, railways, farm fence rows, and other disturbed soil sites.

The plant is almost indestructible, for it survives in zones 3 to 9, quickly spreads by excessive re-seeding (from blooming all summer), and slowly creeps underground by rhizomes in most types of soil.

Well, it's here to stay, but from a garden plant standpoint, grow it and enjoy it. There are many other invasive weeds worth worrying about in your area.

Leucanthemum – Oxeye Daisy

Leucanthemum vulgare

“Gardeners loves me... Farmers loves me not.”

I do not know if children continue the practice of “petal-ectomies” – the practice of plucking off daisy petals to determine if a love-interest is sincere. Still, I know farmers and botanists would love to chop off all daisies if given a chance. The reason is the Oxeye Daisy is weedy in many parts of the world, especially here in North America.

Native to Europe and hardy to zones 3 to 9, this tenacious plant can colonize most soils and easily out-compete native plants. Reports show it growing in North America in the 1800s. It came here as a stowaway in

imported crop seed. When the plants bloomed, it caught the attention of everyone and became a must-grow plant for their gardens.

Farmers and ranchers later found out the plants spread crop diseases and grew uncontrollably in meadows. Cattle and horses dislike eating these plants, so the land becomes unusable.

Today, botanists list the plant as one of the most invasive plants found in the United States and Southern Canada. It is against the law to sell them or have them grow in gardens in many areas. (I am not sure, but are there garden-police officers on duty?)

If prime growing real estate is unavailable, these daisies are blooming-their-heads-off near roadsides and nutrient-exhausted fields. A field or long stretch of highway lined with these daisies in the late spring are breathtaking! They are eye-candy but lack any important qualities – except for providing nectar and pollen for pollinator insects.

Couldn't someone do something so we could grow them (lawfully and safely) in our gardens? Someone eventually did, but it took several years to do so.

American horticulturist and plant breeder extraordinaire, Luther Burbank (1849 to 1926), had a brilliant idea. He wished to breed a new daisy, one that behaved itself, was hardy, floriferous, and grew best in a garden instead of in the wild.

After 17 years of exhaustive breeding work involving the Ox-Eye daisy and other hardy daisy species, he created the world-famous **Shasta Daisy** (*Leucanthemum x superbum* or *Chrysanthemum maximum*) named after the Shasta mountain in California. Seventeen years of laborious breeding work to create a new flower – think of that!

Today, the large daisies sold in garden centers and those grown in our gardens are variations of his stunning plant. It is not weedy, for it cannot grow well outside of a garden. Best of all, the garden police will not arrest you for growing them – if they were to raid your garden. As for your marijuana plants, well, that's a different matter.

Lotus – Birds Foot Trefoil

Lotus corniculatus

My mind stretched too much and snapped.

The award for the strangest name for a weedy perennial groundcover goes to... and here it is!

This plant's name has two appearances: the "bird's foot" refers to a resemblance of the ripe brown seed pods to that of wading birds' feet. Stretch your imagination a little to see the likeness. No, I don't see the similarity. The other name of "trefoil" refers to the three upper leaflets (looks like clover) of the compound leaf. Now that, I can see.

Now that you understand (or not) this plant's unusual name let's look at the main attraction of this groundcover — the small, but gorgeous,

bright yellow pea-like flowers. As the individual blossoms age, their color can change to deep orange and red. The overall appearance is sheets of deep yellow, but you have to get up-close-and-personal to see these additional colors. Blooming begins in early summer and extends for about two months.

Not only grown for these flowers, this plant is also a foliage crop harvested for making hay for livestock. The attractive flowers are a bonus — just like those of alfalfa and clover plants.

Native to Europe and Asia, in the late 1700s or early 1800s, North America and Australia imported seeds to develop an exotic hay-making crop. The reasoning was livestock digest this plant better than clover plants – which they do. Well, you guessed it, these new territories proved a haven for uncontrollable growth.

Today, this low-growing plant spreads almost everywhere, from near roadsides, meadows, prairies, and even into your lawn. The plants can survive from zones 4 to 9, flourish in full sun to light shade, and thrive in many types of soils.

I occasionally see large swaths of this plant growing in lawns bordering private highways or roads. It begs the question of how it became established there in such a large area. Was it a deliberate planting? Oh well, I think the beautiful small, but abundant, long-blooming flowers look far more attractive than dandelions.

Yes, you can grow this plant in your garden — or better yet, the exterior of the garden for it looks great contouring around the beds or borders and in rock gardens. You can insert plants between stepping pavers or stones or made into a small lawn since they can tolerate some foot traffic. If your plants get untidy — mow or trim them.

Lupin or Lupine

Lupinus polyphyllus

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At least Johnny Appleseed didn't throw apple seeds outside car windows.

Is Lupin spelled with the letter "e" or not? It depends on where you live. In North America, it does, but for the rest of the world, it does not. I like Lupin better since many people pronounce it as loo-pin.

The Latin words lupin and lupus mean wolf or wolf-like behavior. People once considered the wild Lupin plants as a botanical wolf. Wolves often stole the sheep from shepherds, so wild Lupin were horrible weeds that took over land better used for valuable crops.

Today, like all members of the pea-bean family, farmers consider them useful in improving soil fertility. But, problems occur when they reach overwhelming proportions.

Sometimes, invasive plants come not only from other continents but directly out of our gardens. There are natural stands of these plants in the western areas of North America that blanket extensive acres of fields and encroach near roadsides to give drivers a pleasant vista. The trouble (well, let's call it a "pleasant" problem) begins when people — especially gardeners — duplicate this visual experience without thinking of the potential consequences.

Wild Lupins have purple, white, and blue spikes of flowers. When the rainbow-colors of the **Russell Lupin** (*Lupinus polyphyllus*) strains became the rage with gardeners, people began to spread seeds here-and-there to create a kaleidoscope of colors near roadsides and nearby fields.

One report of this happened in New Zealand when tour bus drivers intentionally spread these seeds along their routes to create eye-candy amazement for their tourist passengers. Officials place another blame on landowners who needed plants to control land erosion caused by the roads. They chose Lupins for their ability to enrich the soil, and for them being pretty. Whatever the reason, the plan worked too well, and they have spread all over the place.

A similar event happened in northern areas of New England, where the Russell Lupin strain has become wild (again) because of becoming invasive along roads and farm fields.

One unusual account of deliberate rampart Lupin spreading occurred in Maine. According to reports, back in the early to mid-1900s, a lady named Hilda Edwards (later renaming herself Hilda Lupina) deliberately threw Lupin seeds beside roadsides. She did this while walking about town or throwing them outside a friend's car windows on her travels through Maine and other nearby states. She seems to have been a modern-day Johnny Appleseed but obsessed with Lupins instead of apples.

No one seems to mind all this blaze of colors, except wildlife officials, for Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire have spring lupin festivals when the flowers are in full bloom.

Other states, including those leading into the Midwest, have also experienced observations of them growing near roads and fields. Officials have tried to teach people the folly of deliberately sowing the seeds in the wild. Most people ignored them or countered with vocal protests.

Botanists consider not all Lupin roadside plantings wrong. If we can use a native species as a planting, so much the better. We find an excellent example near several Texas highways when the native (and state flower) **Bluebonnet** (*Lupinus texensis*) blooms in the early spring.

Oenothera – Common Evening-Primrose

Oenothera biennis

The night shift of roadside bloomers.

Most, if not all, of the roadside weeds listed in this ebook, bloom during the day. This plant prefers to bloom from dusk until early morning. Unless you can enjoy the sight of these flowers with the high-beams of your car's headlights, your best opportunity is to grow them in a garden.

Evening Primroses are not related to the true springtime flowering Primroses. Why named for them is anyone's guess for the blossoms

don’t look like primroses. Oh well, no matter, it’s another example of amateur botanical misidentification.

This biennial plant is native throughout North America. It has an affinity to grow in disturbed ground – such as abandoned fields, roadsides, drainage ditches, vacant lots, and other less than ideal locations.

It blooms from early to late summer with soft to dark yellow, four-petal flowers on over six-foot-tall branching stalks. Each blossom lasts one night but more follows each succeeding evening.

In the early days of colonization of America and Canada, this plant (and other close relations) became a must-grow item, and people shipped seeds back home to grow in European gardens. Descriptions of this towering plant and its night-blooming yellow flowers first became known in the 1600s, and people desperately wanted seeds. Part of this reason is the plant reputedly has medicinal seed-oil value.

To attract pollinating moths, the flowers exude a sweet perfume into the air. This fragrance may have also provided another reason European gardeners wished to grow this towering plant. Then again, all gardeners cannot resist having such a plant to brag about in a garden.

Today, this species and others continue to grow in gardens but also in the wild. Although naturalized all over Europe, from what I have researched, botanists do not consider it a troublesome invasive weed. Go figure.

Papaver – Field Poppy; Corn Poppy or Common Poppy

Papaver rhoeas

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"In Flanders fields the poppies blow; Between the crosses, row on row, …"

Growing near roads and in old meadows, nothing can compare to this eye-catching historic plant. Being an annual or biennial, its small seeds can live for years, waiting for the soil to become disturbed. When so, either by a plow or battlefield grave digging, the seeds germinate, then quickly grow and bloom into vibrant red flowers.

Once considered a nuisance agricultural weed, it is no longer thought so because of better crop farming practices (such as better purification of crop seeds and applications of herbicides).

Today, these poppies spread via escaped seed from garden plantings or intentionally sowed for roadside plantings for beautification. I plead guilty to allowing this to happen near my home. I tried to “dress-up” a boring grassy roadside by self-sowing many cheap seed packets of this poppy. It worked well; motorists would slow down and admire a long ribbon of scarlet blossoms waving in the breeze — until a road crew came by a few weeks later to mow the grass. Roadside grass mowing crews are my nemesis.

The bright, red flowers bloom from spring to late summer depending on your location and climate. Native to southern Europe, especially around the Mediterranean areas, the plants would thrive in newly plowed fields from long-dormant seeds. When the cereal crops — either corn, wheat, or oat — became ripe, so were these poppies. At the time of harvesting, all these seeds became mixed. Later, in the following spring, some poppy seeds sprouted along with a new cereal crop, and the cycle began again.

Historically, the red petals became a memorable symbol of the tragedies of war. Colonel John McCrae, a Canadian surgeon with Canada’s First Brigade Artillery, composed a famous poem in 1915 describing the horrific results of a World War I battle. Called, *“In Flanders Fields,”* he traumatically described the rows of soldiers' graves highlighted in a sea of grass by these red poppies. Today, people wear real or artificial red poppies in observance of Remembrance Day in Canada and Memorial Day in America.

If you feel the need to sow and grow a weed in your flower gardens – let it be this memorable and glorious flower.

Ranunculus – Meadow Buttercup

Ranunculus acris

Frogs, yellow chins, and buttermilk.

Spring announces itself with bright, shiny yellow blossoms outside woodlands, along roadsides – including in road ditches – and across vast acres of meadows. My goodness, a whole lot of... buttercups. Oh yes, and those blasted dandelions, but I refuse to discuss them.

The common Buttercup (also called European Buttercup) is a hardy perennial but can also exhibit biennial and annual tendencies depending on local growing conditions.

It is a relative in the huge Ranunculaceae family, possibly the oldest family of flowering plants, which includes Magnolia trees. That

statement is nothing to shout out with amazement, but I think it is fascinating. For an added jolt of wonder is this family's name is Latin for "little frog" for many species love to grow near water or in wet soil.

Most plants bloom heavily in spring, but we can see sporadic flowers into midsummer. They can grow tall, having several side branches that produce additional side branching then end into flowering stems. The five-petal, shiny yellow blossoms have many stamens – which is another characteristic of the family.

Native to Eurasia, Buttercups have adapted to many areas as long as the soil remains moist. Some locations can become too populated to the level of being invasive. But they don't have to be, for cultivating the ground and improving drainage has had excellent results in controlling the coverage of these plants.

A once-popular but now proven misconception is cows will produce more butterfat in their milk if they graze in buttercup-filled pastures. The truth is cows dislike eating these plants and avoid them.

Another bizarre idea is if you hold buttercups under someone's chin, and if it shines yellow, then that person loves to eat butter.

You can sow buttercup seeds in your garden, border, or rock garden if the soil remains moist and undisturbed. For more enjoyment, grow the popular, large, highly colorful, fully double petaled relatives of buttercups called **Ranunculus**. Plant the corms (bulbs) in the spring and treat them as annuals. Most varieties are eye-popping beautiful!

Rudbeckia – Wild Coneflowers

Rudbeckia laciniata

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Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

I can forgive you for thinking these flowers are sunflowers. I thought they were sunflowers until a fellow gardener corrected me. (Yes, I do make a few – a few – simple mistakes.) They have the height and flower appearance of sunflowers but are in a different group of plants. The ray flowers are pale to bright yellow, but the disk florets are greenish-yellow.

Native to North America, **Cut-leaf Coneflowers** are hardy from zones 3 to 9 and prefers to grow in a partially shady, moist and fertile soil. We

can find them outside shaded woodlands, damp meadows, floodplains, and, for our immediate purpose, roadside ditches. Unlike most of the plants listed in this ebook, botanists do not consider this plant invasive.

Blooming happens from mid to late summer on four to ten-foot-tall branching plants.

We can grow it in moist, partly shady gardens, but their appearance is questionable. Yes, the flowers are beautiful, but the lowest most leaves on the stems wilt and turn black. Instead of falling off the stems, they remain. Not a good look for this plant, but being a wildflower, it couldn't care less if its appearance is shabby.

Rudbeckia triloba

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For those of you preferring something less-wild and easily recognizable, we can raise this species in gardens. Commonly referred to as **Brown-eyed Coneflower**, they are closely related to the Black-Eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*).

This smaller-flowering species grows in disturbed farm fields, outside woodlands, and along roadsides. Think of this species as a weedy Black-eyed Susan, which forms mats of wiry flower stems and smaller yellow to orange brown-centered blossoms. The plants grow to less than three feet tall but are bushy.

Blooming begins midsummer and extends to Fall in most locations. Native to central to eastern North America, this Rudbeckia is hardy from zones 4 to 8 and spreads by self-seeding a-plenty.

Although not listed as invasive, this plant can quickly form new colonies, and if planted in a garden, could become a problem. If so, break out the hoe if you need to establish control.

Saponaria – Bouncing Bet, Soapwort

Saponaria officinalis

Rub-a-Dub-Dub, Bess bounces over a tub

Commonly called Bouncing Bet, Soapwort, or Latherwort, this plant is an unusual member of the Dianthus or carnation family. The reason for being unique is the leaves have the remarkable ability to form soap suds when crushed in water. The Latin name of "*Sapo*" means soap. Because of this ability, the plant became, over time, an important item to wash clothing when regular soap was not available.

According to historical accounts, the common name of Bouncing Bet is an old English term for a laundry woman. "Bet" may have been a mispronunciation of "Bess." "Bouncing" may refer to the way the

women would appear to bounce up and down while bending over the washtub agitating clothes or linen. That's one eye-opening theory, at least. Wash day may have been a popular entertainment for the menfolk.

Anyway, native to Eurasia, Soapwort eventually made its way to colonial America in the 1700s. Since then, the plant escaped from gardens into the countryside.

Summer blooming, the single white to pink, grape scented blossoms can produce many seeds and also spread via underground rhizomes. Not being too invasive, as compared to the other plants in this ebook, it has found its way to becoming naturalized throughout North America – particularly outside moist woodlands, near roadsides and in wet ditches.

The plants slowly spread and grow to over two feet tall, thriving in the sunshine to partial shade and fertile soil. They are exceptionally hardy from zones 3 to 9.

A recommended rare variety called '**Flore-Pleno**' has double-petaled white to pale-pink flowers. It is sterile and propagated by cuttings or divisions of the rhizomes. The grape fragrance is magnified because of the extra set of petals. Overall, it is a plant worth finding, growing, and enjoying in your garden!

Solidago – Canadian Goldenrod

Solidago altissima and other species

Guilty until proven innocent

There are annoying unattractive weeds, and then there are beautiful weeds you do not think of being weeds. Goldenrods are great examples. Yes, they can be invasive – covering old farm fields or meadows, outside woodlands, and bordering long miles of roadways. You will forget about this when admiring their bright yellow flower clusters for several weeks from mid to late summer.

Long popular in Europe as valued garden plants, the opposite is true for gardeners in North American. One primary reason is Goldenrod is not just one or two species but nearly 140 species and varieties. It's difficult

to get excited about these flowers when they seem to bloom everywhere – at the same time when the real culprit of hay-fever, Ragweed (*Ambrosia psilostachya*), blooms.

People have misunderstood believing Goldenrod causes the hay-fever allergy. Its flowers have sticky pollen and produce nectar to attract pollinating insects. Ragweed has dust-like pollen and it is common to see clouds of it floating in the air and being carried by the prevailing wind to allergy suffers noses miles away.

As more American gardeners know that Goldenrod does not contribute to hay-fever, they are more receptive to add this attractive perennial to their gardens. There are now new dwarf varieties available we can plant for late summer enjoyment.

All plants – tall and short – are hardy from zones 3 to 9 and prefers to grow in full sun and moist, fertile soil.

Trifolium – Red Clover

Trifolium pratense

The more the merrier!

Native to Europe and Asia, this well-known plant grows in North and South America, Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. Growing in all these continents should not come as a sudden surprise. It's not an actual weed for this plant (and close relations) are essential crops grown for fodder – as in haymaking and being a nitrogen fixer plant to improve soil fertility.

Vast acres of land will have this plant growing and later be harvested. There is an estimate of 10 million acres of Red Clover grew in the

Northern regions of the United States during the 1940's. It's no wonder you can find a plant or two growing anywhere.

With so many plants growing, blooming, and making seed, there will be occasional escapee plants showing up in unexpected places. Many species of Clover, especially this species, also grows in old (and newly cultivated) fields, near roadsides, and in wildflower gardens.

Red Clover blooms from late spring until late summer and is a taller, more sturdy plant worthy of adding to a fragrance or butterfly garden. Growing as a short-lived perennial, this plant will not be invasive in your garden. A smaller related species, White Clover (*Trifolium repens*), is more of an invasive nuisance in lawns, but it also helps soil fertility.

The flower-heads of Red Clover are purple/red, having a lovely softly sweet (maybe unique) perfume. The stems have three leaflets, each having an attractive white "V-shape" pattern. There are few theories available about why the leaves have this strange pattern.

Hardy from zones 4 to 9, this plant thrives in full to partial sun and well-drained soil. The neighborhood bees and butterflies will love you if you grow this poor, neglected plant in a garden.

Easy to grow from seed, many companies that specialize in selling wildflowers or agricultural seeds should have this species available. I have never seen nursery plants offered to gardeners.

Verbascum – Common Mullein

Verbascum thapsus

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You need to mull this plant over before deciding to use it as bathroom tissue.

First things first – let's get the common name pronounced correctly. The "lein" part helps to misguide many people. The accurate way is to say, "mull - lin." Pronouncing Latin and common names of plants is always a tongue-twisting experience.

This species of Mullein is a European weed, a member of the Snapdragon family, that you usually see growing along roadsides or

disturbed waste-ground areas. A biennial, the greenish-gray, velvety leaves form a rosette on the ground.

The second summer forms a six to ten-foot-tall flower spike (also covered with whitish fuzz). Masses of small, bright yellow blossoms cover this spike all summer, producing a tremendous number of seeds. Then, by late fall, the plant dies. It wears itself out by nourishing all those developing flowers and seeds.

The strange thing about this plant is the flower spike is the least attractive feature. Yes, it's impressive for its height, but the flowers are not that exciting. It draws your eyes to those green-gray-whitish furry flattened leaves.

In the embarrassing event of you desperately needing to "use the bathroom" while standing near the roadside or out exploring the countryside, you can pluck a few leaves and use them to cleanse your bottom if not having a convenient roll of toilet paper handy. Don't you carry a roll in your car or pocket? No? Neither do I.

Anyway, the leaves are soft and furry, which makes a great tissue substitute. For clarification, I learned this fact while researching this plant and not by actual "emergency potty" experience. There are amazing things you can learn about camping and backpacking emergency techniques and practices.

Common Mullein grows throughout many areas of the Northern Hemisphere but is not a nuisance weed. Can you grow it in your garden? Yes, it can make a stunning attraction, but be sure to cut off the flower stalks before the seeds ripen.

Vernonia – Ironweed

Vernonia fasciculata; gigantea and other species

Having an ironclad constitution.

Common Ironweed (*Vernonia fasciculata*) and Tall Ironweed (*Vernonia gigantea*) are two closely related (and difficult to differentiate) species native from central to the eastern US and southeastern Canada. Both species are hardy from zones 3 to 9, blooming from mid to late summer with six-feet-tall-plus unbranched, dark greenish-red stems and leaves, topped with large, flattened clusters of reddish-purple small blossoms.

They are impressive perennials but can become problematic in agricultural areas, such as pasture fields or moist meadows. Called

“Ironweeds,” their stems are fibrous and resist breakage, the entire plant proves difficult and laborious to dig up.

You will not find them growing beside a road, for they prefer moist, fertile soil, especially in these uncultivated fields bordering rural roads. Here you will see hundreds of these stately plants.

Farmers dislike them, for they become a persistent and domineering pasture plant. In another perspective, some people view them not as an unwelcome weed (possibly not a weed at all) for they provide nectar and pollen for many insects and are host-plants for the larva of the American Painted Lady butterfly (*Vanessa virginiensis*).

William Vernon, an English botanist, discovered them while exploring Maryland in 1698. He later shipped specimens to England. I have not determined (as yet) if these plants are invasive in other areas of the world.

We can grow them in a garden by Autumn sown, stratified seeds. Once established, they require low maintenance but try not to allow the seeds to become ripe to prevent excessive re-seeding.

Conclusion

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Anger management via the planting of flowers — everywhere.

As I mentioned in the Introduction, there are several more flowering plants (many with beautiful flowers) that are very invasive, and we should never plant them in or near a garden. The plants listed above are "tamer" but should be monitored to prevent excessive seed formation.

It's a wonder we don't have more exotic flowers dotting the environment from all the annual and perennials plants we grow in our gardens, but they appear unable to adapt to living in the wild. And that we can be grateful.

Although I concentrated on growing these “alien” wildflowers, that survive in the most inhospitable areas near a highway, we need to focus on growing native wildflowers more often. Some wildflowers can survive and thrive in those troublesome habitats.

In 1965, signed into law by US President Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Highway Beautification Act* was the inspirational idea from his wife, First Lady, Lady Bird Johnson. Appalled by what she saw along highways, not only around Washington DC but also in their home state of Texas, she correctly assumed other states also had eye-sore looking roads. Overgrown grass, castoff flat tires, trash and litter, and humongous-sized advertising billboards stretched miles upon miles for motorists to see.

Mrs. Johnson had an epiphany – it was time to clean up and improve upon our environment, starting with roadside beautification projects. *The Beautification Act* was not an instant success, for there were other pressing problems the country had to address – such as the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, civil unrest, and rioting plus international conflicts. Beautifying roads was not high on anyone’s priority, but most First Ladies exert considerable influence, and Congress dared not go against her or her husband.

Her belief that beautiful flowers, if planted everywhere, can – no, will – improve the mental health of a society fractured by conflict and hate. That *Act* became her legacy. It all began by beautifying roadsides everywhere. *“Ugliness is so grim.”* Lady Bird Johnson once said. *“A little beauty, something that is lovely, I think, can help create harmony, which will lessen tensions.”*

This *Act* proved she was correct. It spurred activism to help improve the environment, not only near roadsides but everywhere else – in parks, urbane centers, downtowns, and extending out into the countryside.

There was a massive push to encourage people not to litter and to pick-up litter when noticed. Roadside beautification helped spark the

creation of new jobs and a sense of pride in those areas that enforced new beautification projects.

Lady Bird's vision of creating a more beautiful country and bringing citizens together instead of driving everyone apart was a success, if only for a short time.

Today, *The Beautification Act* is still active but neglected. Litter is still a significant problem, and vast stretches of roadsides continue to grow ugly grass and weed species – many being invasive. But what if we could plant something else that is colorful and pleasing to drivers?

One other consideration worth exploring, especially for roadway beautification, is saturating roadsides and verges with our common garden annual and perennial "wildflower" seed mixes. Here, they not only provide colorful vistas for drivers but also contribute food for pollinating insects. Once they self-seed, new plants will grow the following year and several years afterward.

In some areas of the world, instead of a sea of boring grass, you find miles of highways bordered by blooming sunflowers, poppies, cornflowers, daisies, zinnias, and many other favorite ornamentals. Roadside mowing can happen later in the year for these plants will remain green and bright with color for several months.

Let's say, for example, you are out driving on a country road and come across some gorgeous roadside flowers. Can you pull over and pick a bouquet of them or collect seeds? Yes, and no – depending on local laws – although most law enforcement would give you a stern warning never to do so again.

Most locations prohibit stopping by the side of a highway except for emergency reasons such as car-trouble or health problems. Stopping to admire or collect flowers is not an emergency, but, to a hard-core gardener, it is. How else could I take photos for this ebook?

Finally, we can all learn and become inspired by these forgotten beautiful plants living on the inhospitable outskirts of a roadway. Somehow, they arrived here and, even more surprising, they thrive

here. They are survivors. If they can succeed, then so can we, when times are tough and appear hopeless.

"Weeds are flowers too, once you get to know them."

– A. A. Milne; spoken by Eeyore from "*Winnie the Pooh"*

"But a weed is simply a plant that wants to grow where people want something else. In blaming nature, people mistake the culprit. Weeds are people's idea, not nature's."

— Anonymous

"Where flowers bloom so does hope."

— Lady Bird Johnson

Thank you for reading this ebook.

I hope you have enjoyed learning something new about roadside weeds that you can grow in a garden.

If you prefer a weed-free garden instead, enjoy a glance at them on your next drive in the country. They'll be there waiting for you.

Please visit my author website of https://gedwinvarner.com concerning my other gardening ebooks and contact information.

About the Author

G. Edwin Varner grew up on a farm helping his father in the crop fields and assisting his mother in the flower and vegetable gardens. This early experience and learning led him to receive a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a minor in Botany.

For twenty years he successfully owned and operated a fragrant flower mail-order nursery. Unlike most mail-order nurseries publishing colorful but expensive pictorial catalogs, his frugal catalog extensively described the flowers he grew. He once said, “I write a thousand words worth a picture in my catalogs.” Today, he has the same style of writing (thankfully with fewer words) through a variety of enjoyable and informative ebooks. This time, the ebooks include color photos of each flower.

He encourages you to cultivate something unique and beautiful in your gardens. His motto is “read about it, see it, grow it, and enjoy it!”

G. Edwin Varner lives in a rural area of northeastern Ohio, USA.