



## **Save May 14 for CLC's Annual Meeting**

Citizens for Lexington Conservation plans to hold its annual meeting on **Thursday, May 14, at 7:00 pm in the Dining Room at the Lexington Community Center, 39 Marrett Road**. Our featured speaker will be Lexington resident Sandra L. Anagnostakis, whose topic will be **New Chestnuts for Food and Timber**. Sandra is an Emeritus Agricultural Scientist at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station in New Haven, CT. She will talk about the history of chestnuts in the United States, and what she and her colleagues have done to help provide chestnut trees for timber diversity in the forests and orchard selections for superior nuts.

The meeting is open to the public. Light refreshments will be served. We look forward to having you join us.

**But please note:** At this time, it is uncertain whether the Community Center will be open and whether public meetings will be permitted come mid-May. Please check the CLC website (<https://www.clclex.org>) for updated information about the status of the meeting.

**2020 CLC dues are payable now.** The status of your dues payment can be found on the address label of snail-mailed newsletters, or near the top of the email announcing this issue. If it says Dues Paid Through April 2020 (or earlier), it is time to renew your membership for 2020.

Annual membership to CLC is \$20.00. Suggested membership levels are:

\_\_\_\_\_ \$ 20 (Twig)

\_\_\_\_\_ \$ 50 (Branch)

\_\_\_\_\_ \$100 (Tree)

\_\_\_\_\_ \$(Other)

You may pay your dues using PayPal on the CLC Website (<https://www.clclex.org>).

If you prefer to contribute by mail, please send your name and the other information requested on the form below, along with your check, to:

Citizens for Lexington Conservation  
P.O. Box 292  
Lexington, MA 02420-0003

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

New Member       Renewal

Go Green. Check here if you would like to have your newsletter in color with live links, using a download link from an email, instead of the paper snail mail.

Membership fees support our organization. CLC is a registered 501(c)(3) organization and all contributions are tax deductible.

## **What about CLC Spring 2020 Walks?**

By Eileen Entin

In response to the restrictions on public gatherings being imposed at the time of publication of this newsletter, CLC is not publishing a list of spring walks at the present time. Instead we are devoting our spring newsletter to articles offering guidance for self-directed walks focused on a variety of subjects to encourage the public to continue to enjoy Lexington's ample outdoor resources during this period of social distancing.

As of this writing, access to the Town's open space properties by individuals is permitted at their own risk, but organized events are prohibited. The situation is fluid and may change in either direction so continue to observe any changes to town policy as needed by monitoring the Town's website (<https://www.lexingtonma.gov/>).

If, as the season advances, it becomes possible to hold organized events on Town property, CLC will post a schedule of walks that have been programmed for the season. Check the CLC website (<https://www.clclex.org>) for updates through the end of May.

Spring is arriving regardless of our need to continue to practice social distancing, so read every article in the present issue and then get out and enjoy the season.

## **Thank You Walk Leaders**

CLC's walks program is entirely dependent on our walk leaders, who are all volunteers, for its continuing success. We wish to express a sincere thank you to Andrea Golden, Bobbie Hodson, Jordan McCarron, Bryan Windmiller, Keith Ohmart, Elisabeth Bornhofft, and Fran Ludwig for their leadership of our Fall 2019 walks and activities.

## A Guide to Best Birding Apps

By Marj Rines, Naturalist, Mass Audubon

If you are suffering from a little cabin fever why not get outside and do a little birding? Today's smartphones offer a wide variety of tools that can add both to the fun and to your learning.

There are a wide variety of field guide apps that are available, but let's make life simple and talk about two: *The Sibley Guide to Birds* (\$19.99) and *iBird Pro Guide to Birds* (\$14.99). Both offer "light" versions for free with a limited number of species, and it is worth downloading both to play with the app before making your choice. Both have a feature that lets you answer questions about a mystery bird to narrow down the possibilities. Both have an extensive collection of songs and calls.

It's fine to play the song of a species you already know, but what happens if you haven't any idea what it is? *Song Sleuth* (free) and *Bird Song ID USA* (\$4.99) both allow you to record a song and (supposedly) identify it. Both offer illustrations of birds as well as their songs. Both have serious limitations, but as technology is likely to improve, future updates should include these improvements.

One of the most popular apps among beginners is *Merlin* ([Merlin Bird ID app](#)) (free). If you see a bird you want to identify you are guided through a series of questions and at the end it offers you a list of possible species. This technique is only marginally useful, but if you took a photograph of the bird it is remarkably accurate. *Merlin* has the added benefit of letting you download a nice library of bird songs and calls on your smartphone at no cost.

Once you've identified the birds you've seen you might want to start recording the information you've collected. [eBird.org](#) is a citizen science database of bird sightings throughout the globe. You can enter your data online, or download the [eBird app](#) (free) and enter your data in the field. It allows you to organize your lists by location or time.

Don't overlook online resources as well. Facebook has a number of groups dedicated to helping people identify birds they have photographed. A quick search on the Facebook page such as "what bird is this" will lead you to four or five of these.

And don't forget analog resources as well – once you get serious there's nothing to replace a good old-fashioned identification book.



## Spring Update from LexFarm – Your Community Farm

By Mary Rose Scozzafava

As I sit here to update you on what is happening at LexFarm, it is a much different report than I thought I would be writing three weeks ago! Each day seems like a month in Covid-19 time. With the prospect of school and business closings for many weeks, we are adjusting to our 'new normal.'

The good news is that farming is considered an "essential activity", and we are working hard to prepare for the growing season! Our farm staff have begun our growing season,

planting seeds in the greenhouse, prepping beds for planting and planning the prebuy seedling sale. LexFarm is making sure that everyone coming on to our farm – workers, shoppers and visitors – are safe. If you visit the farm, please be aware that our farmers need to keep their workplace safe and healthy so they can continue their work. Feel free to wave hello as you walk by.

**LexFarm's online seedling sale is happening now and until April 15!** Every year at LexFarm we have a Seedling Sale to kick off the season. Our farm stand opens in May, offering a wide variety of certified organic vegetable, herb, and flower seedlings for your garden. The Pre-Buy program ensures that you will get the varieties you want for our most popular vegetables, as we sometimes run out during the busy season in May. Order online and prepay by PayPal, check or credit card, and your seedlings will be available to you for quick pickup at our farm stand at 52 Lowell Street during May pick-up weekend. Shop at <https://lexfarm.org/2020/03/20/pre-buy-seedling-sale/>.

These unprecedented times have affected everyone on many levels, and LexFarm is no exception. With the prospect of limited assembly and social interaction extending well into the summer, LexFarm has made the difficult decision to suspend our educational program for 2020. We have decided to put our efforts into food production and food safety. LexFarm remains committed to providing access to organically grown food to everyone in our community, including those experiencing food insecurity. Now, more than before, we need to make sure that those of our community, particularly those affected by COVID-19, have access to fresh local produce.

We hope that you all find the opportunity to visit the farm this season. While we would love to give you a welcoming hug, we all must keep our distance, wash our hands, respect one another and be patient. This too shall pass.

Lexington Community Farm is a non-profit working farm connecting the community to locally grown food and sustainable practices while preserving historic farmland. The farm and farm stand are located at 52 Lowell Street in Lexington, near the Arlington Reservoir.

## **A Birding Guide to Lexington Conservation Areas**

By Keith Ohmart

Mention spring birding and all thoughts typically turn to Mt. Auburn Cemetery on the Cambridge/Watertown line. But local birders knowledgeable about such things are keenly aware that acre for acre, there are several locations right here in Lexington that rival Mt. Auburn, and in the case of the Arlington Reservoir (187 species reported), actually nudge Mt. Auburn (182 species reported) out of the top spot in terms of number of species sighted over the last ten years according to the popular website [eBird](#), maintained by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

The Arlington Reservoir and the adjacent LexFarm fields hold top honors due to the wide variety of habitat ranging from the reservoir itself bordered by woodland edges and the open fields of neighboring LexFarm. Marj Rines of the Menotomy Bird Club is on record as stating that this location offers the best birding per square inch of any location in the state. While productive at any time of the year, highlights include spring migration for warblers and a wide assortment of migratory songbirds, followed by late fall for migrating ducks and other waterfowl. Parking is available in the parking lot for the Town of Arlington's swimming area on Lowell Street.

In very close competition in terms of the number of species recorded (182 species) is Dunback Meadow. Again variety of habitat is the key, ranging from expansive open marshlands and meadows to extensive forested sections. Expect to see a wide range of warblers, vireos, and flycatchers on spring migration along with the occasional raptor soaring over the open marsh. Park either along Allen Street across from Pitcairn Place or in the parking lot of the Town's Cotton Farm property on Marrett Road and walk across the street to follow the marked path into the property.

Weighing in at just over 100 species is the Lower Vine Brook property off of Grant Street. Over fifteen species of warblers in addition to tanagers, orioles, rose-breasted grosbeaks, thrushes and cuckoos can reliably be seen during the peak of spring migration on the section of the property between Vine Street, Hayes Lane and Brookwood Road off Saddle Club Drive. Best parking is on Vine Street off Woburn Street opposite 121 Vine Street.

Also in the 100-120 species range are the larger Willards Woods property (accessible from the property's parking lot on North Street between Adams and Burlington Streets), and Arlington's Great Meadows in East Lexington. Both properties offer extensive woodlands, meadows and in the case of Arlington's Great Meadows, a large peat marsh bordered by the Minuteman Bikeway. Best parking for Arlington's Great Meadows is either



the parking lot of the former nursing home located at 840 Emerson Gardens Road, or the parking lot of the Waldorf School, 739 Massachusetts Avenue, during non-school hours.

One more suggestion if you have the time and inclination, is to take a walk along the power line corridor between Grove Street and Turning Mill Road. This stretch provides excellent edge habitat and attracts species such as prairie warbler, towhees, indigo bunting and other edge habitat specialists not found on most of Lexington's other properties. Best parking is the lot on Turning Mill Road under the power lines. Walk the trails in both directions on either side of Turning Mill Road.

And as an online aid in either preparing your visit to these properties or recording your trip list of what you have seen, check out the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's [eBird](https://ebird.org/home) website (<https://ebird.org/home>). Here you will be able to look up records of what has been seen on each property as well as record your own sightings. To locate the records for any of the properties mentioned in this article click on Explore, then Explore Hotspots and type in the name of each property.

So stick close to home this spring and enjoy some of the best bird watching in eastern Massachusetts. Best times for all areas will be late April through the end of May. Trail maps for all properties may be found on the Town of Lexington's Conservation Department's web page (<https://www.lexingtonma.gov/conservation>).

## **Whipple Hill – Photography & Hiking**

By Neelakantan Sunder

We are very fortunate to have well-maintained and beautiful outdoor spaces here in Lexington. All are accessible in all four seasons.

I hike and photograph in a few of them on a regular basis. Whipple Hill is an area that is very close to my home and I go there almost 4-5 times a week throughout the year. Best parking is either on the north end where Winchester Drive changes to Johnson Road at the Winchester town line, or the southern entrance on Summer Street on the Arlington town line. I shall briefly write about some of the photographic technique and equipment I use in trying to capture the beauty of nature and some wildlife. I shall use Whipple Hill as an example of an outdoor space.

Every season the landscape changes and offers exciting possibilities of getting new images. Within Whipple Hill there are areas of wetland, pine forest, rock ledges and remnants of rock walls. There are opportunities to shoot macrophotography, wildlife, and exciting landscapes.

### **Photography- Equipment.**

I prefer a Digital SLR but with the current technology any camera will do. If you want to photograph birds, it is best to have a long lens in the range for 400mm. It is good to have



a tripod/monopod for sharper photographs. A standard 50mm lens or a wide-angle lens can be very useful for landscape photography.

### **Basic Photography Techniques.**

Light is better early or later in the day especially on sunny days. The colors of the spring and fall pop more on cloudy days and sometimes immediately after the rain. During the winter, snow and ice can be a bit tricky for exposure depending on the brightness of the sun. You may want to experiment with different settings to experience and evaluate the winter light. A tripod or monopod definitely improves the sharpness and quality of the image. In general you'll need fast shutter speed for action like the birds in flight and small apertures (increased depth of field) for landscapes.

**Spring** - This is a great season where you can see life spring into action. The early bright green on the trees, buds on the bushes, the fronds and the fiddleheads of the ferns all add color and beauty to the landscape. The pond, vernal pool and the wetland areas are home to several varieties of waterfowl including mallards, hooded mergansers, wood ducks and of course Canada geese.

Early spring also brings several small migrating birds and they are more visible before the leaf cover takes over. It is common to see several varieties of woodpeckers, warblers, common grackle and red-winged blackbirds. I have seen red-tailed hawks and great blue herons regularly.

You'll need a long lens for bird photography and tripod/monopods are very helpful. Plan on spending some time in one place if you want to photograph birds. They are very aware of movement and very easily fly away. Fast shutter speed is needed to catch them in flight.

You can also see and photograph Painted turtles sunning on the rocks and driftwood in the pond.

**Summer** - The woods get dense in the summer and the trees are full and the pond is covered with water lilies and cattails. Please watch out for ticks and mosquitoes. Insect repellent and a tick check after every hike are musts in the summer.

I am enclosing a link to Google drive where I have uploaded some of the photographs from Whipple Hill.

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1orPAGMZZtwITow5Nm4YtYN7i-HtyJDMF?usp=sharing>

Feel free to contact me at [nsunderphoto@gmail.com](mailto:nsunderphoto@gmail.com) if you have any questions/comments. Happy shooting.

## ACROSS Lexington 2020 Update

By Keith Ohmart

Are you beginning to run out of new places to walk in this time of social distancing? As you look for ways to vary and expand your walking routes, have you noticed and perhaps puzzled over the growing number of small blue rectangular trail-marking signs around Town sporting what looks at first glance to be a stylized bicycle seat but is in reality a modern rendition of a colonial tricorne hat? What you are looking at are the logo and trail marking signs for *ACROSS Lexington: The Rick Abrams Memorial Trail Network*, a 35 mile network of walking routes throughout the Town. Associated with the rectangular logo signs are round signs with arrows pointing the direction to follow as you explore an ACROSS route.

Appointed by the Select Board in 2011, the Greenways Corridor Committee has been working ever since to connect Lexington's individual open space resources with a network of walkable and bikeable trail routes utilizing streets and sidewalks to connect these separate spaces. Most of these properties have their own local trail systems but what was missing was a town-wide network of marked routes connecting them.

Inspired by similar trail systems in the neighboring communities of Wellesley and Worcester, the members of the committee realized that there was an unmet need to provide residents with a reason to occasionally leave the car in the garage in favor of longer hiking opportunities right here in Town. An additional benefit has been in introducing residents of Lexington to the numerous natural areas located throughout the Town.

The ACROSS Lexington trail system of ten different routes labeled A-L (there is no route I) now connects 15 of the Town's 26 Conservation parcels; five of the Town's schools; several of the Town's other significant open space resources including Lincoln Park and Arlington's Great Meadows; as well as the Minuteman Bikeway, the Town center, and the Minuteman National Historical Park. With the exception of Route F, each route is a loop of varying lengths between 1.7 and 5.4 miles, with most loops interconnecting with other loops. For a complete trail map visit (<https://www.lexingtonma.gov/across-lexington>). Paper maps are presently out of print but will be reprinted and made available when the danger of transmitting the COVID-19 virus has passed.

As a social distancing precaution when walking the ACROSS system, if you will be walking a complete loop returning to your starting point it is recommended to walk in a clockwise direction to reduce the incidence of meeting on-coming walkers. The ACROSS Lexington system is also a wonderful alternative to reducing congestion on the Minuteman Bikeway for those who are looking for new opportunities to walk around Town.

The Greenways Corridor Committee is in the final stages of completing Route K as this newsletter goes to press, and has plans for developing one additional new route (M) later

in 2020 bringing the network total mileage to 39.9 miles. The committee sees the opportunity for adding another 10 to 15 miles of additional routes over the next several years in its effort to continue to expand the network so that every household in Town is within a half-mile of an ACROSS route.

## **Boston Area City Nature Challenge – April 24 - 27**

This is something you can participate in during this crazy coronavirus pandemic! Your goal is to find and identify as many flora and fauna species as possible in the time allotted. This is called a *bioblitz*. You can stay in your own back yard or local green space. While it is fun to work in a team, you can do this while staying six or more feet away from others. You can even have a team that just communicates digitally!

Check out this basic information about [this year's Nature Challenge](#), which uses [iNaturalist](#), a smartphone app, to collect important data on what (besides humans) lives in our environment. iNaturalist has been sponsoring this project for five years, to coincide with Earth Day and celebrate biodiversity all over the world.

While we were hoping to have a Lexington bioblitz along with the Earth Day celebration at Cotton Farm on April 25 - it's the 50th anniversary of Earth Day this year! - the stay-at-home advisory has forced the cancellation of that event. In spite of this, it is still good to get outside and see what you can see - birds, animals, insects, plants - if it's alive, you can record it in iNaturalist.

iNaturalist is also a great tool to use for identifying things you see on any ramble, even if you are not trying to collect data. Just snap a picture of your plant, snake, bug, whatever you are curious about, and share it in the app. Very shortly you will get suggestions of what you may be looking at!

## **Your Companion in This Time of Social Distancing: iNaturalist!**

By Andrea Golden

One of the world's most popular nature apps, iNaturalist is available for most smartphones. For details on how to get started, visit the website at [www.inaturalist.org](http://www.inaturalist.org).

iNaturalist can help you identify the plants and animals around you. In addition, you will be connected to a collection of resources and a community of scientists and naturalists to help you learn more. By recording and sharing your observations, you'll contribute data for scientists working to better understand and protect nature.

Creating an "observation" in iNaturalist begins with taking a photo with your phone, or, if you have a preferred camera, importing your photos into iNaturalist via the website. For

birds and fast-moving wildlife, you will need a good camera and ideally, a telephoto lens. If you are just starting out, iNaturalist includes a built-in camera. For more control, a camera app such as “Camera Plus” (<https://camera.plus/>) which includes features for macro photos and other options can be helpful.

The key to an optimal ID of your organism is a good photo or photos showing details to aid in identification. If you are using an external app or camera, crop out any extra background or extraneous details. After you submit your observation, iNaturalist will offer a few “suggestions” for identification. Unless you know for sure what your organism is, choose the most general suggestion, or add your own. It can be helpful to check your possibilities against other resources (see below) beforehand. After you have submitted your observation, you may receive feedback from specialists agreeing (or not) with your identification.

Another benefit of iNaturalist is that it provides a built-in checklist of organisms you have found, where and when you found them, and if others agree with your identifications.

Field guides and online resources are useful for verifying your identifications and learning more about what you find. There are many online guides available for a variety of organisms. Here are a few for insects and plants:

#### **Web resources:**

Bugguide (<https://bugguide.net>)

An online resource devoted to North American insects, spiders and their kin, offering identification, images, and information. Run by Iowa State University.

NOTE: Before submitting images, consult Bugguide’s resources for your best guess. The volunteers who donate their time will appreciate it.

Go Botany (<https://gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org/>)

Run by the Native Plant Trust (formerly New England Wild flower Society).

This online resource guides you through a set of questions to arrive at an identification for your plant. Includes trees, shrubs and wild flowers.

#### **Print guides (regional guides are best):**

*Newcomb’s Wildflower Guide*

There are many field guides to local plants based on the color and structure of the flowers. Newcomb’s is based more on the structure of the plant itself, and can be combined with other field guides for additional identification aids.

*Insects of New England and New York*, by Tom Murray

This book is portable enough to be carried in a pack and has a good selection of photos of local insects organized by order and family.

Attaching a name to a plant or animal is just the beginning of a richer appreciation and understanding of the natural world. I like to say it's like attending a party as a stranger but leaving with newfound friends. Once you know the name of an organism, much more information becomes available to you. Is it rare, or invasive? Native to the region, or naturalized? Where else can it be found? How does it fit in with the ecology of the area?

**What I discovered, thanks to iNaturalist:**

1. Beetle from Arlington's Great Meadows, Lexington



*Cyrtophorus verrucosus*

This longhorn beetle is an "ant mimic". The pattern on its back and its rounded thorax resemble the contours of an ant, and at first glance when I saw it scurrying across a boulder, it was very convincing. Question: Why would a beetle want to look like an ant?

2. Orchid from the Arlington Reservoir



*Epipactis helleborine*

This pretty orchid is native to Europe and Asia and is sometimes called a "weed orchid". It can be found in wooded areas and in yards.



3. Butterfly from Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, Concord



*Lycaena hyllus*

Common name, the Bronze Copper. The caterpillar feeds on Curled Dock. The butterfly is found in open, wet areas and is becoming rare.

4. Green bug from Whipple Hill, Lexington



*Zelus luridus*

This is a larval form of the Pale Green Assassin Bug. It catches and eats other insects by either actively hunting for them, or passively waiting for a victim to come along. Some assassin bugs guard their eggs and care for young larvae.

## **Open Fields at Wright Farm on Sunday, June 7**

Open Fields will be held at Wright Farm on Sunday, June 7, 12 noon-4 pm (assuming the stay-at-home advisory has been lifted).

Come to Wright Farm, 241 Grove St, Lexington, to check out the trails (National Trails Day is Saturday, June 6) and learn about bees, other insects, goats, and Lexington conservation. Guided walks will be offered, and the opportunity to explore on your own is always available.

**“Wings at My Window”**  
**By Ada Clapham Govan**  
**and illustrated by Dorothy Bayley**  
A Review by Alex Dohan

Have you heard of the Ada Govan Bird Sanctuary behind Woodland Road in Lexington? Well, Ada Govan wrote a book that tells the story of why she protected that land. She suffered from depression and physical infirmity as well, and started watching birds since she couldn't do very much else. Eventually she became adept at identifying birds, and started banding them as well. When the land behind her house was threatened by development, she sprang into action and was able to purchase the property and save it for the birds. All this happened in the 1930s. The land is protected in perpetuity and is closed to human activity to keep it wild for the owners of the wings that came to Mrs. Govan's windows.

## **Bedford Trails Committee "Take Your Own" Trail Walks**

We have been encouraged by Bedford Town Manager, Sarah Stanton's, recommendation (during this age of social distancing) to encourage exercise by walking our trails. Therefore, the Bedford Trails Committee will now provide the trail walk description, map & directions, and you can take the trail walk at your convenience and your own pace. The first trail walk is to the new Davis Road Boardwalk—see description, photos and maps at: <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/bedfordma-trails/ZR53oCjwdHl>

Note: Correction received: Step 5 on the Map is incorrect – the “Yellow Blazed Side Trail” is an “Orange Blazed Side Trail.”

Future walks will be posted at:

<https://groups.google.com/group/bedfordma-trails>





## Photo Credits

Page 6: LexFarm, provided by Mary Rose Scozzafava

Pages 13, 14, 15, provided by Andrea Golden

Page 16: Davis Road Boardwalk, Bedford, provided by Clem Larson

Pages 17, 19, 20, 22: provided by Russ Cohen



### **Planting Edible Native Species at Willards Woods – by Russ Cohen**

*A beautiful, spring-blooming Marsh Marigold (*Caltha palustris*), one of the native species planted at Willard's Woods as part of this project.*

*[Introduction: As some of you may already know, I have been sharing my enthusiasm for connecting to nature by nibbling on it for over four decades, since my senior year at Weston High School (see my online bio @ <http://users.rcn.com/eatwild/bio.htm> for more info). I typically lead three dozen wild edible walks and talks each year for a variety of sponsors (including the CLC), throughout New England and eastern New York State. I also write about wild edibles (see, e.g., my foraging book, *Wild Plants I Have Known...and Eaten*, [http://users.rcn.com/eatwild/press\\_release.htm](http://users.rcn.com/eatwild/press_release.htm)), and that includes a couple of wild edible-themed articles for the CLC newsletter.*

*Since my retirement from the Mass. Department of Fish and Game in June of 2015, while continuing to offer walks and talks on wild edibles (see <http://users.rcn.com/eatwild/sched.htm>), I am now playing the role of “Johnny Appleseed” for edible native species, as an expression of gratitude to Mother Nature for providing me with such yummy treats I have been nibbling on for so many years (see more info at <http://www.edibleboston.com/blog/2018/6/11/russ-cohens-wild-edible-adventures> or : [https://www.ecolandscaping.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Cohen\\_the-Johnny-Appleseed-of-Native-Edible-Species-Russ-Cohen-Wild-Ones-Journal-Spring-2019.pdf](https://www.ecolandscaping.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Cohen_the-Johnny-Appleseed-of-Native-Edible-Species-Russ-Cohen-Wild-Ones-Journal-Spring-2019.pdf)). I have set up a nursery (in Weston) where I grow/keep hundreds of plants, many of which I have propagated from seed that I collected myself. I am then partnering with land trusts, cities and towns, schools and colleges, state and federal agencies, tribal groups and others to plant donated plants from my nursery in appropriate places on their properties. I have initiated over two dozen such projects in the past five years. The following article describes one of those projects.]*

The seed for this project was planted at the 2016 Massachusetts Trails Conference, at which I attended a workshop presented by Jordan McCarron on the Stewardship of Lexington's Conservation Lands. I followed up with an email telling Jordan about my post-retirement pursuit as a “Johnny Appleseed-for-edible-natives”, and offered to collaborate on a project in Lexington. Jordan, who already knew me (e.g., at his invitation, I had led a wild edibles walk as part of the 2015 Massachusetts Town Forest Conference), responded enthusiastically to say that he was definitely interested.

I then reconnoitered several Town Conservation properties, some with Jordan and some with my wife Ellen, evaluating them for their suitability for further diversification with native edibles. While several good possibilities emerged, none were obvious standouts.

Willard's Woods eventually emerged as the top candidate, especially when Jordan realized there was an excellent opportunity to incorporate native edible plants into the final phase of the stream daylighting project taking place on that property (see more info at [https://www.lexingtonma.gov/sites/lexingtonma/files/pages/willardswoodsposter\\_30x24.pdf](https://www.lexingtonma.gov/sites/lexingtonma/files/pages/willardswoodsposter_30x24.pdf)), of which the earth moving, bridge installation, and associated construction had recently been completed.

Jordan and I subsequently conducted a site visit to the daylighting project area, primarily consisting of the newly-daylighted stream, from where it runs under North Street, upstream to and including the area around the former pond (now transitioning to a wetland). I followed up that site visit with a list of recommended edible native plant species that, while I did not observe them as growing at Willard's Woods (at least not in the daylighting project area), I thought would do well if planted there in appropriate locations.

How did I decide which species to include on this list? I largely drew upon my knowledge and observations, acquired from my many decades of being out in nature, and keeping track of which plants like to grow in which habitats, and/or which species like to grow in association with one another (the technical term for that is a "natural community" – see, e.g., <https://www.mass.gov/doc/the-key-to-the-natural-communities-in-the-classification-of-natural-communities-of/download>). So, in this case, as the project area consists of riparian (streamside) habitat, and pond/wetland habitat, and adjacent sunny meadow and shady woodland areas, I picked species I have seen to naturally occur within those types of habitats in eastern Massachusetts.

It typically happens that, for my edible native planting projects, most if not all the plants deployed on those projects come from my nursery. In this case, though, Jordan had some money left over in the daylighting project budget to pay for plants. So, in an email Jordan wrote to Jonathan Gawrys of SumCo Eco-Contracting (SumCo), the consultant the Town had hired for the daylighting project, he kindly asked Jonathan to purchase the plants needed for the project, so that plants from my nursery could be saved for other projects that did not have sufficient funds.

Then, on April 14, 2017, Jordan, Jonathan and I conducted another site visit, to firm up how many plants of which species we'd need for our planting day, scheduled for two weeks later. We put flags in specific spots in the ground to indicate which plants should be planted where. In the end, what we ended up bringing to the site for the planting day were from two sources. While most were brought by Jonathan (purchased from his supplier, Pierson Nurseries, in Biddeford, Maine); I supplemented those with plants donated from my nursery.

Listed below are the species we brought to the site the morning of the planting day:  
Here is what we planted:\*

**Basswood** (*Tilia americana*)  
**Marsh Marigold** (*Caltha palustris*)  
**Sweet Fern** (*Comptonia peregrina*)  
**Hazelnut, Common** (*Corylus americana*)



**Choke Cherry** (*Prunus virginiana*)  
**Elderberry, Black** (*Sambucus nigra* spp. *canadensis*)  
**Chokeberry, Black** (*Aronia melanocarpa*)  
**Blueberry, Highbush** (*Vaccinium corymbosum*)  
**Wild Bergamot** (*Monarda fistulosa*)  
**Milkweed, Common** (*Asclepias syriaca*)  
**Spicebush** (*Lindera benzoin*)  
**Swamp or Shining Rose**, (*Rosa palustris* or *nitida*)  
**Swamp Rose Mallow** (*Hibiscus moscheutos*)  
**Wild Strawberry** (*Fragaria vesca*)  
**Sweet Goldenrod** (*Solidago odora*)\*  
**Mountain Mint** (*Pycnanthemum muticum* and *verticillatum*\*)  
**Shagbark Hickory** (*Carya ovata*)\*  
**Sweet Flag** (*Acorus americanus*)  
**Wild Raisin** (*Viburnum nudum*, aka *V. cassinoides*)  
**Nannyberry** (*Viburnum lentago*)  
**Raspberry, Flowering** (*Rubus odoratus*)

\* these were planted sometime after the original planting day, to replace plants that had died



*On 4/28/17, Lexington Conservation Lands Manager Jordan McCarron (at r.), along with Town Stewardship volunteers and workers for the Town's landscape contractor, SumCo, assisted me in putting in the edible native plants I had recommended for the project site. The plants that were planted were a combination of plants SumCo sourced from its supplier (paid for by the Town) and plants I donated from my nursery (mostly consisting of species I had in stock that SumCo was unable to obtain from its supplier).*

The planting day took place on Friday, April 28, 2017, which, appropriately enough, coincided with the local and national observance of Arbor Day. (In fact, Jordan had to leave

Willard's Woods during the middle of our planting, in order to take part in an official Arbor Day ceremony elsewhere in Town.) Thanks to the skilled volunteers and contractors crew, though, the planting went smoothly.

*So: how are the plants we planted doing, (nearly) three years later?*

Well, frankly, it is a mixed bag. About two-thirds of the plants we planted are still there, and doing well, which is an acceptably good percentage. One of the factors that helped is that many of the plants planted were located inside a fence surrounding the former pond, erected to keep dogs out of that sensitive habitat. This fence is serving as a de facto deer fence, so species planted inside the fence (e.g., Basswood, Spicebush, Swamp Rose Mallow, Nannyberry, and some of the Hazelnuts) were protected from deer browsing.

Other species that are doing well include the Flowering Raspberry, which we planted on a sloping bank near the stream, in an area with dappled sunlight: exactly the kind of habitat this species prefers to grow in in the wild. And, while some of the Marsh Marigolds we planted are no longer there (probably due to their being dislodged during high flow events), others are holding on, and appear to be happy in their new home.



*A photo of the Flowering Raspberry (Rubus odorata) plants we planted in April of 2017, as viewed last fall (note the bridge over the daylighted stream in the background). They appear to be very happy, blending right in to the landscape, and looking as if they had always been there.*

Some plants that did not do well include woody species planted in the sunny meadows, at some distance away from the former pond and daylighted brook. This is an area where vegetation is controlled by the Town's maintenance crew, primarily by seasonal mowing, and it is possible that some of the planted plants in this area (including two of the three Shagbark Hickory trees) were inadvertently cut down as a result.

Other species we planted, like the Milkweed and Swamp/Shining Rose, have died out, but I suspect that there might have been a problem with the quality of the nursery stock of those species that were brought to the site. (Fortunately, there are robust wild (not planted) populations of Milkweed growing elsewhere at Willards Woods.)

One additional possible contributing factor to some of our planted plants not thriving is the presence (in this part of Willards Woods) of a large number of mature Black Walnut



trees, which release an allelopathic chemical called Juglone that inhibits the growth of some plant species. Fortunately, though, the list of species that can tolerate growing under/near Black Walnuts is long, and includes species in the *Prunus* (Cherry, Plum), *Rubus* (Blackberry, Raspberry) *Viola* (Violets) and *Lactuca* (Lettuce) genera, both native and domesticated.

Another ongoing challenge at this site is the continuing presence of invasive species, the most prevalent and problematic of which, inside the daylighting project area, are Asiatic Bittersweet and Multiflora Rose. It would be good if these and other invasive plants could be knocked back on a periodic (at least yearly) basis, so that they do not unduly encroach upon and degrade the habitat we intended to improve with the native plantings.

A question that might have occurred to you while reading this article is: if all of the native plants we planted at Willards Woods are edible, **is it actually OK (i.e., legally permissible) to nibble on them, or other edible species, growing there?** This is, naturally, something we thought about as we planned and undertook this project.

After some discussion, here is a statement Jordan came up with this past fall: ***“While foraging for nuts, seeds, and berries is allowable on Lexington Conservation Land, the Conservation Division requests that visitors follow good conservation practices, making sure to leave plenty for wildlife.”***

In the specific case of the Town’s Willard’s Woods conservation land: the best foraging opportunity that falls within these “OK to pick, in moderation” guidelines are the **Black Walnuts**, which are produced there in profusion every October. [For more info on harvesting/processing/eating Black Walnuts, see the article I wrote on that subject in the April 2018 edition of the CLC Newsletter, pp. 15-18, viewable online at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qNpcop1popUX8eNOav7af8oqdYCd4a4W/view>.]

Other species at Willards Woods falling in the “OK to pick, in moderation” category include the fruits of **Black Raspberry** (*Rubus occidentalis*), **Black Cherry** (*Prunus serotina*), **Elderberry** (*Sambucus canadensis*) and **Juneberry/Shadbush** (*Amelanchier* spp.) [While some of the other species we planted in 2017, like Choke Cherry, Highbush Blueberry and Hazelnut, produce edible fruits and nuts, it will be several more years before the trees/shrubs we planted will be mature enough to begin fruiting in significant amounts.]

**THAT SAID:** The “OK to pick, in moderation” policy for nuts, seeds and berries **does not include other parts of plants, like leaves, flowers and roots.** The Conservation Commission’s rules and regulations for the use of Town Conservation lands under its jurisdiction, by virtue of the authority given it under Chapter 40, Section 8c of the Mass. General Laws, states that ***“Without the permission of the Conservation Commission, it is forbidden to...Remove, cut or damage any flowers, plants, shrubs, trees...”*** And, regardless of the content of this article, **the CLC wishes to remind you that, as the Conservation Commission is the ultimate authority in these matters, it is incumbent upon anyone wishing to gather wild edibles (or conduct any other activities) on Town Conservation Lands to know the current rules and regulations in**

effect, as interpreted by current Commission members and staff, and abide by them.

[By the way – it is not that unusual for the owner of a site where I have planted native edible plants to not allow the foraging for those (or, sometimes, any) edible plants on those sites. Mass Audubon properties (Drumlin Farm, e.g., another of my planting sites) are a good example. That does not deter me from planting on those sites, however, as the public can still see and learn about native plants at those sites, and the native plants are serving as good food sources for pollinators and other insects, birds and other wild-life.]



*Juneberry/Shadbush, one of the “OK to pick, in moderation” edible native plants growing in the daylighting project area at Willard’s Woods.*

You can view more photos about this project, the native plants that were planted as part of it, and what has happened to the plants since then, at this link to an online Google Photo album: <https://goo.gl/photos/22tHPzaSA1XMoVWe6>

Last but not least: I would be amiss in this article if I didn’t express a hearty “Thank You!” and a bittersweet farewell to Jordan. It was truly a pleasure to partner with him on this and other projects in Town, and I wish him the best in his new position in Westboro.

**One final note**: the original impetus for this article was to be a promotion of sorts for an edible wild plant walk I am scheduled to lead for the CLC at Willard’s Woods on **Monday, June 8, from 6-8 PM**. Unfortunately, unless an official “all clear” for group activities is issued before that date, which (at the time of writing) is unlikely, this event will need to be postponed until another date, perhaps not until the spring of 2021, or later.