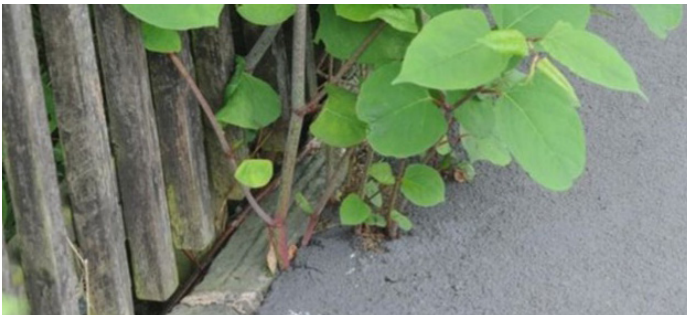


# Wilton Conservation Commission Newsletter



## KNOCKING-OUT KNOTWEED

It's that time of year again when dark red spikes emerge from the ground and practically as you watch them, add three to four inches height and dark green foliage each day to become six- to 13-foot-tall clusters of Japanese Knotweed. Also called False or Mexican Bamboo, *Fallopia japonica* came to the US in the late 1800s as an ornamental plant and for erosion control. Ironically, it not only escaped the garden, but also turned out to cause erosion!



While this almost seems laughable, it is a serious invasive species that reduces habitat for wildlife including fish, while crowding out native plants with the dense thicket of stems and foliage they develop. Because they can grow in almost any conditions – disturbed soil, stream and riverbanks, along roadsides and rights-of-way, in wet meadows and in vacant lots, this is a challenging plant to control.

The hollow stems of Knotweed look a lot like bamboo, with rings of tubular sheath where leaves are attached. The leaves grow in an alternate pattern along the stems and appear in shape like the spade on a playing card – straight across the top, rounded on the sides and coming to a sharp point at the bottom. The stems are strong and can even come up through asphalt (see photo, above)!

In the summer, Japanese Knotweed bears masses of white lacey flowers with seeds in papery fruits which, fortunately, are nearly all sterile. Those that are fertile

are borne by wind and water to new growing sites; but the significant spread of this plant is primarily the result of rhizomes (underground roots that grow horizontally) that can reach as far as 60 ft from their origin. A small fragment of a rhizome can restart a plant, so eradication is a difficult problem.



To rid a site of Japanese Knotweed requires determination and patience. Some reports of success have come from cutting the plant to the ground three times each growing season – in mid-May, mid-July and before the end of August – for three successive years. Replanting with native species is an absolute necessity to help reestablish a community of plants before the Knotweed grows back.

Other reports indicate success only by having a professional administer a top-down foliar spray of chlorpyros on a windless day after dusk when pollinators have left the area. And still others recommend cutting the plant to the lowest leaf on the stem and then painting that leaf with concentrated chlorpyros in the Fall when the plant is drawing its nutrients back into the roots.

While the Pollinator Pathway and most conservation-oriented groups are opposed to applying herbicides in general, the CT Invasive Plant Working Group (CIPWG) recommends doing what it takes to eradicate Japanese Knotweed because it is overtaking the ability of our native plants to sustain the ecology in areas where it has become established.

— Jackie Algon, Chair, Conservation Commission

## ASIATIC (ORIENTAL) BITTERSWEET

Asiatic (Oriental) Bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*) was introduced in North America as an ornamental plant in the late 1800s. Like many ornamentals, it escaped the garden and began spreading unchecked along roadsides and forest edges across the east coast of the U.S. and Canada. It is changing the American landscape as it seeks out sunlight by climbing up mature trees, often twisting around them in a snakelike manner, eventually girdling the tree and killing it. The woody vines become thick and heavy and can bring a tree down in a matter of years. The vines also spread to neighboring trees and can bring down patches of wooded areas in less than a decade. Vines spread aggressively through underground root systems and are also dispersed by birds who feast on the berries.

Asiatic Bittersweet has a cousin that is a native plant, and they do look similar, but there are some distinct differences that help tell them apart. Asiatic Bittersweet berries grow along the length of the vine where the leaves start, while American Bittersweet berry clusters are found only at the tips of the vine. In autumn the berries of Asiatic Bittersweet ripen from green to red and are surrounded by a burst of yellow skin that falls off in winter, leaving the red berry. American Bittersweet berries are orange when mature. Installing an American Bittersweet is not the answer, however; the two species have been hybridizing for several years and it is now not a reliable plant to add to your garden.

Managing this invasive will require determination. Larger vines should be cut using a hand saw or chainsaw and the stump should be treated with an herbicide in the Autumn when the plant is drawing nutrients from the foliage and stems into the roots for winter. Do not attempt to remove vines from a tree as it could result in injury to the foliage and the branches. The cut vines can remain in the canopy of the tree and will dry and fall out with a heavy windstorm. Smaller vines can be managed by using pruning tools. New growth can be managed by hand-pulling. The emerging young shoots grow vertically with the top leaves seeking a host to attach to and begin to climb. The leaves are alternate, finely toothed, and elliptical in shape. When you pull the young vine you'll see the root is orange, a diagnostic characteristic for Asiatic Bittersweet.

Learning to identify this fast-growing and destructive vine on your property and eradicating it can preserve important habitat for native species and wildlife.



— Colleen O'Brien, Conservation Commissioner





# GROW AMERICAN! – TEN GREAT NATIVE SHRUBS FOR CT YARDS

If you think native plants must look weedy and non-descript, reconsider! New England is home to many beautiful shrubs that can bring year-round beauty and color to your garden. Many are deer resistant, although nothing can be guaranteed totally deer-proof. Selected cultivars of many shrubs are now available and enable you to select for compact growth habit or more profuse flowering, and in some cases, even being more attractive to pollinators.

A cultivar is a plant selected and grown by humans - some mutations occur naturally and are selected for their particular characteristics; some cultivars are created by plant breeders and may be hybrids. Some cultivars are not as useful to pollinators as the originally occurring plant (often called the 'straight species'). According to Annie White, a PhD candidate at the University of Vermont who is studying pollinator foraging on plants and their cultivars, there is a clear trend: The more manipulated the cultivar becomes, the less attractive they become to pollinators. This seems particularly pronounced when flower fertility, and/or color is changed. Occasionally however, the opposite has proven true.

In writing this article I tried to choose cultivars that had a more acceptable size and growth habit for suburban gardens and are easily available for purchase. Home gardeners should decide if they can accommodate the characteristics of their shrub choices. In order to encourage pollinator foraging, they may want to avoid a cultivar with a flower color different from the original.

Planting native shrubs will create an inviting environment for our local birds and butterflies. Your plants will look natural, be less difficult to grow, and attract birds and butterflies to your yard! Following are descriptions of ten of the best to consider planting; starting with the source of my favorite fragrance of summer.

**1. Summersweet – *Clethra alnifolia*** – Summersweet puts forth long-lasting spikes of fragrant white flowers in July and August, has a dense rounded habit, and turns a golden yellow in the Fall. Give it moist, reasonably well-drained soil in full sun to heavy shade. It is an adaptable, deer resistant plant and a fine choice for the shrub border. The species will spread slowly, and can create attractive masses along the edge of woodlands. Summersweet grows 3' to 6' high,

depending on the cultivar.

Cultivars:

- Hummingbird and Compacta – only grow 3' to 3 ½' high. Hummingbird will form colonies; Compacta is more of a single shrub.



*Clethra alnifolia* 'Hummingbird'

**2. Sweetspire – *Itea virginica*** – Sweetspire has deliciously fragrant, profuse white flower spikes in early summer and some of the best crimson to purple fall foliage color in the entire plant kingdom. It takes heavy shade or full sun, in wet or dry soils and grows 3' to 5' high and wide. *Itea* is one of the best summer-flowering shrubs for shaded conditions and is fairly deer resistant, too! *Itea* cultivars are especially good choices.

Cultivars:

- 'Little Henry' has a compact mounded habit, staying around 3' tall.
- 'Henry's Garnet' has long stalks of flowers, a consistent brilliant fall color and grows 4' to 5' high and up to 6' wide.



*Itea virginica* 'Little Henry'

### 3. Arrowwood Viburnum – *Viburnum dentatum* –

This becomes a large, rounded, deer resistant shrub with spreading arched branches. It's white flowers of May and June are borne in attractive flat clusters, that are followed by blue-black fruits in September and October. The fruits are a great favorite of birds! Arrowwood Viburnum grows 6' to 8' high and wide and can be planted on the edge of the yard or woods, or in masses in large lawn areas if desired. Compact cultivars are available.

Cultivars:

- 'Blue Muffin' – More compact, growing to 4' to 7', and blooms heavily producing a large amount of deep blue fruit. Also called 'Christom', this cultivar has proven more attractive to pollinators than the straight species!
- 'Chicago Luster' – Glossy green foliage, blooms later, grows 8" to 10"



*Viburnum dentatum* 'Blue Muffin'

**4. Mountain Laurel – *Kalmia latifolia* –** A handsome broadleaved evergreen shrub that produces lovely clusters of elegantly formed blooms in May and June. It requires good drainage (no soggy soils!) and prefers morning sun and some afternoon shade in the winter. Once established, this is a vigorous, easily pruned spring bloomer. Mountain Laurel grows to 4' to 12' high, and may occasionally be damaged by deer. Cultivars are available in a wide variety of heights and flower colors from whites to pinks to reds. While knowledge of the pollinator appeal of the hybrids has not yet been reported by researchers, you may choose to plant the basic species and prune it back occasionally if you wish to keep it small. Given average acidic soil and afternoon shade, Mountain Laurel is a terrific evergreen for the home garden. There are scores of cultivars available. It also happens to be the CT state flower.

Cultivars:

- 'Elf' - Dwarf form w/ pink buds that open white – 2' to 3' H and W
- 'Minuet' – Dwarf, flowers white

with red throat -3' H and W

- 'Little Linda' – pink buds open to white – 3'-4' H and W
- 'Olympic Fire' – Red-pink buds open to pale pink – 5' H and W
- 'Snowdrift' – White buds and flowers with red marks – 5'-6' H and W



*Kalmia latifolia* 'Olympic Fire'

**5. Inkberry – *Ilex glabra* -** Inkberry is your basic evergreen shrub. The species can be a leggy, billowy shrub of 8' high by 8' wide, but several excellent compact cultivars are now available. Inkberry cultivars can be used for evergreen foundation plantings, in masses for screening, or for accent plantings. Inkberry is tolerant of wet or dry soils, grows in full sun or moderate shade, and is generally trouble free, although it is, on rare occasions, damaged by deer. Its small dark fruits are popular with birds.

Cultivars:

- 'Gem Box' – An excellent alternative to boxwood, this variety has small dark green leaves that are reddish when they first emerge, and it has good branching to the ground. Maintains a dense full appearance! Grows only 2'to 3' high and wide
- 'Nigra' – Similar to Gem Box
- 'Compacta' – a rounded form, dense, but tends to drop its lower foliage and may become leggy. Grows 4' to 7' high
- 'Shamrock' – a shorter, slow-growing rounded plant, grows 4'to 6' high and wide. May slowly become leggy, but can be cut back.





*Ilex glabra* 'Shamrock'

**6. Oakleaf Hydrangea** – *Hydrangea quercifolia*  
– This large, dramatic hydrangea is one of the most handsome landscape plants available, though it is often underutilized on our properties. Its full mounded form, large lobed leaves, and magnificent white flowers add terrific style to a suburban yard, and it is rarely touched by deer! In addition, its leaves turn a rich burgundy color in the Fall and hold well into November. Its flowers open in June and last for three to four weeks, often turning a pinkish color with age. Provide moist, well-drained organic soils – mix in peatmoss when planting - and then mulch it. Use Oakleaf Hydrangeas alone or in groupings, as an accent in the lawn or massed at a woodland edge. Compact cultivars are also effective in border plantings.

Cultivars:

- 'Snow Queen' – Superior branching, dense 6" upright flowers that age to rosy-red
- 'Munchkin' – A smaller variety with large, upright flowers. Grows 3' H + 3'-5' W
- 'Pee Wee' – Dwarf plant has white flowers that fade to pink, 3'-4' H+W



*Hydrangea quercifolia* 'Snow Queen'

**7. Winterberry** – *Ilex verticillata* – This informal, tall shrub is grown for its dramatic, profuse, red berries that are colorful from September into December! They are eventually feasted upon by birds when all other fruits are gone. Winterberry prefers moist, acid soils and at least a half day of sun. A great bush for the back of the border or along a stream or woodland edge. Once established, Winterberry tolerates deer browsing. Compact varieties are available, and you may need to plant a small male variety to ensure pollination of the

female, berry-producing varieties.

Female Cultivars:

- 'Winter Red' – A tremendous fruit producer, a rounded shrub growing to 7' – 8' tall and wide.
- 'Red Sprite' - A compact variety with large berries, grows 3' H and W

Male cultivars (no berries)

- 'Southern Gentleman' – Male pollinator for Winter Red 6' - 9' H and W
- 'Jim Dandy' - A male pollinator for Red Sprite, grows 3' H and W



*Ilex verticillata* 'Red Sprite'

**8. Highbush Blueberry** – *Vaccinium corymbosum*  
– This handsome, multi-stemmed, deer resistant shrub is a fine choice for the sunny border or the back of the vegetable garden. Its white flowers are an excellent source of pollen for our native pollinators in the spring, and the foliage turns a beautiful deep red in Autumn! Dozens of bird species are known to feed on the berries, and humans relish them, too. Blueberries will attract Catbirds, Robins, Eastern Bluebirds, Cedar Waxwings, and Orchard Orioles, among others. Many songbirds will nest within the foliage, as well. Highbush Blueberry will grow in partial shade but does best in full sun, on wet to moist, acidic soils. This is an easy to grow, attractive shrub for any yard.

Cultivars:

- 'Top Hat' – A cross between native Highbush and native Lowbush varieties, a dense plant, with a fiery fall color and delicious berries. Grows 2' H and 2' W



*Vaccinium corymbosum* 'Top Hat'

**9. Virginia Rose** – *Rosa virginiana* – This is an upright, hardy, salt tolerant rose with attractive dark-green leaves and 2”–3” diameter pink flowers. Its flowers are followed by bright red rose hips which will persist for several months. It has an excellent fiery fall color, and generally does not suffer from black spot fungal problems! Virginia rose is tolerant of a wide range of soil types, prefers sun or light shade, and grows to 4’ high and 6’ wide, as it spreads slowly. Beneficial insects value this shrub for nectar and nesting material, and it is somewhat deer resistant.

Cultivars:None



*Rosa virginiana*

**10. Tartarian Dogwood, or Redosier**– *Cornus alba* or *C. sericea* – Grown for its vibrant red or yellow winter stem color, this shrub dogwood grows 5’ to 6’ wide and up to 4’ to 8’ tall. In order to maximize Redosier Dogwood stem color, you can remove one third of the oldest canes each year, or just cut the whole plant back to the ground in late winter. It is a very hardy shrub that tolerates moist locations, and is rarely bothered by deer. Its white flowers in Spring are followed by clusters of whitish or blue-tinted fruit in summer. This shrub is particularly effective when grown in groups or hedges, as the mass of winter stem color is stunning!

Cultivars:

- ‘Sibirica’ – More compact than the species, it has a bright coral-red stem color.
- ‘Sibirica’ variegata – a variegated form of the above



*Cornus alba* ‘Sibirica’

– Peggy Van Acker, Tree Committee member



## MEET OUR COMMISSIONERS!

The Conservation Commission has welcomed some new members this year and would like to (re)introduce our existing members. Members serve for ten-year terms and are appointed by the Board of Selectmen. Meetings are held the first Wednesday of each month.

**Jacqueline (Jackie) Algon** moved to Wilton in 2005 after a 35+-year corporate career in New Jersey. She and her partner, Carl Andersen, rebuilt Carl's Wilton home and during that experience, Jackie had her first exposure to the importance of the wetlands on their property. To learn about land stewardship, she became an Advanced Master Gardener, and has focused her gardening on best practices to enhance habitat and nourishment for wildlife and to build healthy soil for the climate and biodiversity.

Jackie has served as a Conservation Commissioner for the past seven years and is currently Chair; she also Chairs the Tree committee, a sub-committee of the Conservation Commission. Sharing with the public what she has learned about how to care for our land and how to improve our community's ecology continues to motivate her to volunteer for public service. Collaborating with Town staff and with colleagues on the Wilton commissions, and linking to the wealth of other conservation-oriented organizations in our area has provided an opportunity to experience local government, and to work toward moving our Town's conservation agenda forward one project and one tree at a time.

**Frank Simone** has lived in Wilton for more than 40 years, mostly employed as a corporate attorney and for the last 10 years as retired. This is his second stint on Conservation, interrupted by a job move. His ten-year term will end in September 2022. Having benefitted from living and schooling their child in Wilton he chose to serve on the Conservation Commission as a way of giving back to the community. One of the things that he says makes Wilton so special is community concern for the environment, including preserving Open Space, disposing of Hazardous Waste, and participating in Townwide Clean-Up Day. These are all major ongoing projects of the Commission, and he is pleased to be involved at the ground level. He also enjoys the responsibility we have for providing assistance, guidance and expertise to Planning and Zoning and Inland Wetlands, two important town regulatory commissions. Studying plans and walking sites in order to provide the best possible conservation-related advice to these commissions is an important aspect of the job, and they do it rain or shine. He is proud

to serve as a member of the Commission, charged with responsibility for organizing, maintaining and directing conservation activities for Wilton and for developing and sponsoring educational programs that promote sound environmental practices. He encourages others to actively support conservation and environmental issues and activities at the town, state and federal levels and to get involved.

**Jeff Lapnow** has been a member of the Conservation Commission for 4 years. He joined as he was always involved in sports programs and coaching while his sons were of school age and wanted to continue to be involved with the Town. He has owned a landscape and masonry business for 43 years and has vast knowledge of this Town. His goal is to keep this wonderful country town something we can all be proud of and for the next generations to come.

**Kim Healy** was appointed the Conservation Commissioner this year. She has been a Wilton resident since 2008 when she moved here with her husband and 4 children. Their previous home had less than ¼ acre and so moving to a home with 2 acres was very exciting for them and their large active family. She is the treasurer of the Board of the Wilton Library until the end of June when her term comes to an end after six wonderful years. She has been an eight year member of the Minks to Sinks team and she has just taken on the role of Co-Chair. Reusing and recycling is what drew her to the Conservation Commission. She loves to garden as well. Her husband grew up on a small dairy farm in Ireland so as a family sustainability and conserving natural resources are important to them.

**Dave Cote** is one of our newest members starting with the Commission in January of 2021. He is an avid user of Wilton's open space, not just a consumer, but also as a volunteer. His aim is to make them better for others to enjoy so they may get out and enjoy more often, or perhaps volunteer themselves. He is ready to bring his passion and enthusiasm for the outdoors to work with the Commission, and as a hiker, snowshoer, dog walker and mountain biker, he hopes some of his ideas and vision can make our Open Spaces more fun and enjoyable for all, including himself!

**Colleen O'Brien** grew up in Norwalk (on the Wilton border) and moved to Wilton in 1995. She and her husband, John Hall, have been active volunteers in Wilton for many years and have a son in high school. Colleen has been serving on the Conservation Commission since 2016. Prior to her work on the CC, Colleen was a founding Director of Wilton's Community Emergency Response Team, or C.E.R.T. An avid cyclist, hiker, and amateur photographer, she hopes to use her time on the CC to educate the community about the town's open spaces through commission-sponsored walks, keep the town picturesque through commission-sponsored events like Town-wide Clean-Up Day and Hazardous Waste Collection Day, and continue to highlight Wilton's natural beauty through her photography and writing.

**Phil Murphy** his wife moved to Wilton in 1996 and raised three children who have all attended Wilton Public Schools. He has carefully cultivated and improved his three acres of land in North Wilton and has trekked every public trail in town with Clover, his Labrador. He joined the Conservation Commission in 2021 to ensure that Wilton's open space is accessible to current residents and preserved for the enjoyment of future ones. Phil has served on a variety of town commissions including the Wilton Energy Commission and he represented Wilton on the Southwestern Regional Planning Agency.

To reach a Conservation Commissioner, please contact the Department of Environmental Affairs Office Monday – Friday from 8am to 4pm at 203-563-0180.

## **WILTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION**



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**Jackie Algon, Chair**

**Frank Simone  
Kim Healy  
Jeff Lapnow**

**Philip Murphy  
Colleen O'Brien  
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**Mike Conklin, Director of Environmental Affairs  
Zen Herter, Environmental Analyst  
Lynne Vanderslice, First Selectwoman**