



Threatened Lilies Reach for the Sky

I was thinking the other day about an old friend, conservationist Rusty Walton, who passed away last year. To say he was quiet would be an understatement. I could rarely make a smile bend on his face no matter how hard I tried. However, as I think back on the times I spent with him it always makes me

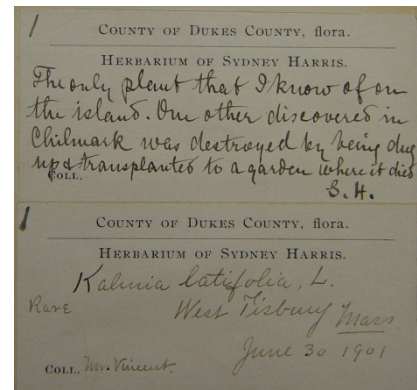
smile. He was a dedicated naturalist and an accomplished ecologist. He introduced me to my first wild patch of wood lily on the Vineyard almost ten years ago. Recently I went back to the same spot, and surprisingly the lilies, like Rusty were gone. The wood lily (*Lilium philadelphicum*) has been drastically reduced on the Vineyard by large populations of deer. Wood lily has a natural distribution range across thirty seven US states. However similar to here on the Vineyard, they are losing ground across North American due to the over population of deer.

Frequently I am asked about what it means when a plant goes extinct. On the Vineyard I am talking about “local” extinction, not the complete loss of a species from our planet. The underlying tragedy of local species extinction is the loss of the co-dependent species that have formed a mutualistic (beneficial) relationship with plants. These species include its insect pollinators that use it as a nectar source, and insects that may also feed on parts of the plant or lay their eggs on it to support their lifecycle. The dependence goes further with the birds that feed on those insects. Our local fauna (animal populations) are dependent on our local flora (plant populations). So losing a plant population creates a ripple effect, all culminating in a downward trend in biodiversity. When we lose a single species it does matter. The world becomes less diverse, less beautiful, and more and more homogenous. Overall, it means we are losing our biological heritage, and in some cases, we may not get it back.

Wood lily and its decline is just one story among many island plant species losing the battle to deer browse. Another native lily, Turks Cap Lily, *Lilium superbum* has been nearly eaten to local extinction. The problem with an overabundance of deer is a human one. That is, the loss of natural areas to development or habitat fragmentation has caused deer to seek refuge in the only spots that remain, with us! While we dislike suburbanization off-island, we have our own brand of it right here. When the choice is between charismatic species like deer and beautiful lilies, deer win every time. Can deer, humans, and lilies co-exist? Yes, within a balanced framework, where the numbers of one species does not mean the elimination of another. Deer belong on Martha’s Vineyard. They are part of the natural web of life here. However, at population densities as high as they are now, we have many rare plant species on a path to local extinction unless measures are enacted to lower the populations, not eliminate them entirely. What can a plant science institution do to protect local species? We can tell their story, and we can map their populations on the island to monitor their health. We also can grow these lilies and plant them in our fields. We can share the message of the importance of biodiversity, the sum total of life on earth.

Recording Biological Time Through Plant Collections

The Polly Hill Arboretum's herbarium collection began in 2001, with a gift of algae specimens from island resident and seaweed expert, the late Rose Treat. A herbarium is a scientific resource consisting primarily of a collection of dried, pressed plant specimens. Herbarium specimens record the past and provide users with the historic and current locations of plants over time. Arboreta and botanical gardens use these reference collections for numerous research activities, including plant identification, verification, and validation; documentation of the distribution and rarity of vulnerable plant populations; documentation of environmental changes; development of local floras and keys; genetic analysis, and the examination of plant/insect interactions.



The Arboretum has embarked on a long-term effort to catalog all the vascular plants that grow naturally or that were introduced on-island. The procedure is arduous and involves carrying a plant press out in the field, collecting plant samples, and then drying them to mount on acid free paper for long-term storage. The individual pressed dried plants are called voucher specimens. With each voucher specimen is accompanying ecological and habitat information. These specimens and the data document the physical occurrence and distribution of plants over time. The information is stored in our plant records database and shared with local, state, regional, and national conservation organizations.

Approximately 3400 herbaria exist today, with an estimated 350,000,000 specimens that document the earth's vegetation for the past 400 years. In the truest sense a pressed plant specimen captures a moment or snapshot in the history of biological time. Now, in the face of climate change and the potential calamity it may bring, pressed plant specimens help tell a story. Strong evidence of a rapidly warming earth has been assembled by several scientific institutions using the flowering times recorded from herbarium specimens dating back over the past two hundred years. Specimens typically record flowering times as flowers are the central identifying feature for most species. Two trends are strikingly evident; in general plants are flowering a week to ten days earlier than in the past, and distribution of several distinctly southern species are migrating north.

Here on the Vineyard our recent collections reveal that many more invasive plants have reached our shore and are spreading rapidly. In addition to these unwelcomed newcomers, we have added several new island records of native plants. Additional efforts are focused on historical plants, or plants that have not been recorded over the past sixty years. We are fortunate to have the help of key plant conservation partners on the Island who are contributing to this assessment. Sheriff's Meadow Foundation, the Nature Conservancy, and the MV Land Bank are all participating in this long-term project. At some point the Arboretum will have a very detailed, comprehensive herbarium collection. This will provide landowners, conservationists, and anyone interested in determining an unknown plant species a valuable reference collection to consult. This helpful service is just one positive aspect a botanical garden brings to the community that supports it.



Ancient Beauty

Its beauty is so mysterious, so rare, it stops you in your tracks. Our bigleaf magnolia, with its expansive white flowers and foot-wide leaves the size of canoe paddles, has captivated visitors to Polly Hill Arboretum for years. Polly Hill grew it from seed and was so awestruck that she named the tree after her husband, Julian Hill. Visit us in the next few weeks to encounter this natural marvel in full form.

Magnolias have been on earth for a long, long time. The fossil record dates their origins back over 100 million years. In 1984 paleobotanists David Dilcher and Peter Crane discovered a fossilized plant in central Kansas, whose preserved flower and fruit bore a striking resemblance to those of modern magnolias. They named it *Archaeanthus* (first flower). In fact, many scientists agree that the magnolia was one of the first flowering plants to appear on earth after the long domination of ferns, trees ferns, and conifer trees. While these earlier plant groups relied on wind dispersal of their spores or pollen, magnolias are one of the first documented plants to utilize insect attractive pollen.

With their large pollen-rich anthers, magnolias offer an abundant food source to beetles, another species with an ancient past: they were the first insect pollinators of flowering plants. Currently, the Arboretum's bigleaf magnolia is loaded with beetles foraging deep within the giant blooms. Each year when school children visit, gender roles inevitably reveal themselves. The girls react squeamishly; the boys pull the beetles off the flowers and place them in the girls' hair or on their necks. But soon the shouting subsides and eyes widen as their attention is drawn to the colossal blooms. The interdependence of plants and animals, a bond stretching back over 100,000 million years, dawns on them.

The bigleaf magnolia (*Magnolia macrophylla*) is native to southeastern North America. The largest tree recorded to date is found from the Daniel Boone National Forest, Tight Hollow, Kentucky. The tree stands just over 100 feet tall. Magnolias are primarily a temperate group of trees, flourishing in environments that have a distinct change of seasons. Many magnolias live a precarious life, endangered in their natural habitats due to logging, grazing, or natural resource exploitation. Our role at Polly Hill Arboretum is to be a voice for the local trees, but also for those in distant lands. The bigleaf magnolia is endangered in two southern states, the result of forest fragmentation. Sadly, they're becoming increasingly rare in other parts of their natural range.

On your next visit to the Arboretum, please seek out our bigleaf magnolia and begin your own bonding process. Bring your children along; they will marvel at the sheer size of the flower and leaves. The tree blooms from mid-June to the end of July and later in the fall immense fruits form with striking red seeds.

The Elusive Mountain Camellia

Polly Hill is well known for her love of Stewartia trees. They are greatly admired by our visitors and represent years of hard work. Through Polly's efforts and our continued devotion to these trees we now have a recognized national collection. What does that mean exactly? The primary objective for the development of a national collection is to assemble the most



comprehensive collection of plants within a particular genus. The inclusion into the North American Plant Collection Consortium (NAPCC) requires a review process which includes the examination of our plant records, a review of the health and welfare of our current collection, and consideration of our future plans. The NAPCC is administered by the American Public Garden Association (APGA) in cooperation with the USDA Agricultural Research Service and the United States National Arboretum.

Arboretums play a critical role in educating the public about tree diversity and the protection of threatened trees in their natural habitats. The mountain camellia, *Stewartia ovata*, is restricted to the southeastern US, from Florida and Virginia in the east, westwards to Mississippi. It is found along wooded stream margins just above the flood plain. My own seed collecting trips in pursuit of the mountain camellia have taken me to some of the most spectacular natural areas you could ever imagine. Sadly, many of the favorite places for Stewartias to grow are also favored places for the development of large scale retirement communities. In some southern states the mountain camellia appears as a plant of "special concern." This federal endangered status foreshadows the challenges for this beautiful species. Our efforts to map the distribution of these trees indicates that habitat fragmentation, along with the trees own inherent lack of genetic diversity, is causing them to become diminished in their numbers.

Polly Hill is believed to be one of the first private individuals to bring the mountain camellia into cultivation in a garden setting. Polly began her first mountain camellia collections in 1967. The common name indicates that these trees are direct relatives of the more well-known and popular camellia shrub. One look at the pristine summer flowers of this rare beauty and you see the resemblance. Polly had patience; the woody seeds of this tree are particularly hard to grow. She sowed the seeds directly in the ground, and in some instances they took three to five years for the seeds to sprout. When we opened our greenhouse in 2007, on Polly's 100th birthday, we had reached a long-term dream for Polly; to have a modern greenhouse to help us grow. However, we still continue the patient practice of sowing some seeds like the mountain camellia directly in the ground. Time is your friend when growing this rare but worthy southern beauty.



From the Vineyard Flora – The Noble White Oak

I noticed the oaks right away. My first visit to the Vineyard was in spring of 2002 when the abundant oak trees were raining down yellow pollen. Later, after moving to the Island while my daughter was playing at the West Tisbury school playground, I wandered off into the woods to look at the trees. I was gleeful to discover five oak species, including *Quercus*

alba, the white oak. A young mother asked why I was so excited. After I explained my love affair with oaks, and my new position at the Arboretum, she gave me some input: “I hate oaks: they’re everywhere. You should get busy planting more maples!” None the less, my exuberance for oak trees remains undiminished.

Perhaps the most noble of the oaks, the white oak is widespread not only throughout Martha’s Vineyard, but also throughout the eastern half of North America. It was used by Native Americans for food, medicine, and other uses. In the 1600s (on Cape Cod) the Wampanoag shared the knowledge that the best time to plant corn could be determined from the size of an emerging oak leaf. The first North American colonists felt a kinship with the white oak as it resembles the English oak (*Quercus robur*) of their homelands. Throughout the next two-hundred years of settlement, the white oak was put to innumerable uses: it was the preferred wood for homesteads, bridges, barns, furniture, baskets, barrels, and ships. Ships of oak stocked with oak barrels carried Vineyarders all over the world.

The light gray bark of white oak is easy to recognize in our woodlots as well as its old leaves, which are the last to shed of our native oaks in the spring. The leaves are light green and, typically, have five to seven narrow, rounded lobes. The post oak (*Quercus stellata*) is the native oak most often confused with white oak. In comparison, the shiny leaves of post oak are dark green; they have five lobes with two distinct broad lobes occurring above the middle portion of the leaf, forming a noticeable cross with the axis of the leaf. On the Vineyard, the post oak often grows in groves due to its ability to regrow after harvesting or fire. The acorns of both species provide a valuable food resource for wildlife.

Of all the oaks on island and native to North America, the white oak is one of the most long-lived oak species; some fantastic specimens survive over 400 years. Most of the Vineyard oak forest has been harvested again and again since European settlement. Occasionally, you will see an old-timer. A favorite tree of mine (and many others) is the impressive white oak at the intersection of state and north road in West Tisbury. Oaks give us much and ask little in return. The least we can do for them is to admire their strength and beauty, but we should also plant acorns for future generations. And yes, I agree, we should also plant more maples, . . . and birches, and beetlebungs, and . . .

Hydrangeas: An Island Favorite

Big, blue snowballs of hydrangeas backed by a white picket fence are a summer staple on Martha's Vineyard. While the mophead flowers of bigleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea macrophylla*) are the most popular with tourists there is a whole world of hydrangeas for gardeners to explore. On a seed collecting expedition to Japan in 2005 I encountered three other



hydrangea species that are valuable ornamentals: the panicle hydrangea, (*Hydrangea paniculata*), the mountain hydrangea (*Hydrangea serrata*), and (*Hydrangea involucrata*).

The panicle hydrangea—an old-fashioned garden classic—has undergone a revival of interest among European breeders. The new cultivars have better forms, longer blooming periods, and more beautiful flowers. In 2003 at the famed Kalmthout Arboretum in Belgium I observed many of the original plants. I was most impressed by 'Pink Diamond', 'Unique', and 'Brussels Lace'. The large, conical blooms of panicle hydrangea start out white and change to various shades of pink. These large shrubs reach 8 to 10 feet in height and prefer full sun. Pruning can alter the shrub's habit: The popular Pee Gee hydrangea is a type of panicle hydrangea that is often pruned to resemble a small tree.

In the mountains of Japan I noticed several tough plants of mountain hydrangea. I was impressed with their ability to grow in such an exposed environment. A smaller (3 to 5 feet) shrub, *H. serrata* tolerates partial shade and makes an ideal foundation plant. The mountain hydrangea is closely related to the bigleaf hydrangea; however, as it grows in the wild at higher elevations, it tends to be hardier. Many of the cultivars are thought to be hybrids between the two species. Similar to the bigleaf, the flowers of mountain hydrangea comes in two shapes: the familiar mophead and the more delicate lacecap. At the Arboretum, look for 'Tokyo Delight' in the Playpen. This durable shrub has bloomed beautifully for over thirty years.

Another wonderful hydrangea native to Japan and Taiwan is *Hydrangea involucrata*. While we found plants growing wild in Japan near the ocean, we were unable to collect seed. 'Hortensis', a beautiful double-flowered selection of this species, is uncommon in gardens yet well worth seeking out. Its striking creamy white flowers have sepals that change to a deep rose color at maturity.

While I have focused on only three hydrangeas, the diversity of garden-worthy shrubs and vines within this group is astounding. When beginning with hydrangeas be certain to mulch and provide water in the first few years of establishment. I will also add that deer frequently munch on the succulent foliage and stems of *Hydrangea*, however deer fencing and/or the use of deer repellent sprays will enable you to cultivate these plants and add summer color when few other shrubs are in bloom.

Sweeten up the Summer Season

It is often said that our strongest memories are evoked through our sense of smell. For many the delightful scent of our native summersweet, *Clethra alnifolia*, calls to mind summer on the Vineyard. At the peak of the season, summersweet's scented white flowers perfume the air with their sweet fragrance. Adapted to flowering in deep shade as well as in full sun (with sufficient moisture), large colonies of this native shrub occur in natural areas throughout the Island.

The small, white flowers form dense two- to six-inch-long spikes on the tip of each branch appearing in concert with our summer crowds in July and August. After flowering summersweet forms attractive, brown seed capsules resembling peppercorns that persist throughout the winter months. This distinctive feature in combination with its sugary scent has earned the plant another common name: sweet pepperbush.



With an extensive North American natural range from Maine to Florida to coastal Texas, this multi-stemmed shrub typically grows from four to eight feet tall with an equal or greater spread. Summersweet has a tendency to sucker. On many Vineyard Land Bank properties and along municipal roadsides near wet woods, shrubs are often mowed to the ground for safety or site-line improvements. Summersweet responds by increasing the production of underground stems to colonize a large area. Where this occurs, one single plant may occupy an area of 100 square feet or more.

A satisfying landscape and garden plant, summersweet can be used for a foundation planting or for naturalizing in a large mass. Its late summer flowers light up shady areas. In late fall its bright yellow foliage provides even more enjoyment. Plants are generally trouble-free, but avoid planting in dry, sandy soils with full sun exposure. The shrubs will become water stressed and susceptible to red spider mite that can attack the foliage and weaken the plant.

Summersweet is often found in our moist woodlands as an understory to red maple and beetlebung (*Nyssa sylvatica*), or pondside in the company of highbush blueberry and the swamp azalea (*Rhododendron viscosum*). Look for it in wet zones at ponds edge. It flourishes at Priester's and Mill Ponds in West Tisbury and dominates swampy areas along Middle Road and Tea Lane in Chilmark. *Clethra alnifolia* thrives in acidic soils and tolerates brackish water; as a result, it can be found in a wide range of Island natural areas.

Propagating summersweet is easy. Seed collected in the late fall can be stored dry in a tupperware container in a common refrigerator. Sow the seed in early April on a sunny windowsill. Seed sprouts readily. You can also grow it easily from summer cuttings. Collect stem cuttings just after flowering. The top stems can be cut into four inch lengths and placed in a 4 inch plastic pot covered with saran or plastic. With patience and a green thumb, like Polly Hill, you can grow your own!

Aromatic Native Shrubs Add Spice to the Vineyard Landscape



My Vineyard hikes take me to many beautiful sites. I enjoy seeing the diversity of landscapes, many influenced by their agricultural past. A frequent plant I encounter in abandoned farm fields is Northern Bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*) now (*Morella pensylvanica*). Quick to reclaim open pastureland, the shrubs have the unique ability to fix their own atmospheric nitrogen through specialized structures called root nodules. The nodules contain the nitrogen fixing bacteria *Frankia*. This mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship allows Bayberry to grow in the low fertility soils. Typical garden conditions produce a plant between 8 to 12 feet tall with an equal spread. In wild windswept coastal grasslands plants may reach only a foot tall. In each case plants spread underground with a strong tendency to colonize and

expand their territory. The foliage of bayberry varies from dark to pale green with a leathery tough exterior and exudes a spicy fragrance when crushed.

My own first encounter with Bayberry were the Christmas candles my mother would light each year during the holiday season. The small gray-blue fruits (a hard stony drupe) contain a resinous waxy coating. The wax, called myracin, is the source of bayberry candles. Bayberry slowly loses its leaves as hard frosts and winds gradually remove the tough foliage as winter progresses. A shrub well adapted to poor acid soils, Bayberry has many uses as a garden plant. It can be planted on hillsides or embankments to stabilize soil and makes an effective screening or hedge. In urban areas Bayberry is often used in parking lots, roadside plantings and building entryways as it is very tolerant of de-icing salts given its maritime heritage. In my home garden it hides the wellhead in our front garden bed.

Sweetgale or bog myrtle (*Myrica gale*) is yet another species in the bayberry family (*Myricaceae*) that is found on the Island, growing primarily on wet sites, frequently at ponds or creek edge. Its blue-green leaves are not as rugged as northern bayberry but they emit a pleasant fragrance when crushed. Sweetgale also has the capacity to fix nitrogen. It grows from two to four feet tall with a multi-stemmed habit. This plant has a tremendous natural distribution appearing world-wide in northern latitudes. Rarely cultivated in modern landscapes in Europe the foliage is used to sweeten beer (gale beer) also known as bog myrtle beer.

A fragrant relative of both sweetgale and northern bayberry is yet another nitrogen fixing shrub, sweetfern (*Comptonia perigrina*). Found throughout the Vineyard from roadsides, forest edge and coastal heathlands, it has a graceful appearance with soft fern-like foliage on a diminutive flat-topped shrub. In my own garden I employ it at the woods edge underneath our birdfeeder. It spreads vigorously and creates a weed free barrier that is both drought tolerant and well adapted to sand acidic soils. It can tolerate both shade and full sun and its graceful foliage and habit are appreciated in the wild as well as the home garden.

MV Wildtype: Acting Locally on the Island of Martha's Vineyard

There are many good reasons for growing native plants: Native plants are adapted to local growing conditions; they promote biodiversity and support local wildlife; and, in general, they need less maintenance. Besides, native plants are “Vineyard vernacular”: they just look right in our gardens and landscapes.

In 2006 the Polly Hill Arboretum introduced fledgling program called MV Wildtype to meet the demand for native plants in the Vineyard community. Our primary goal is the production of native plants from local wild-collected seed. Now, six years later, our program produces native plant species that we make available for sale to gardeners, homeowners, landscapers, and conservation groups, for landscaping with native plants, gardening, restoring habitat and maintaining biological corridors, and augmenting cultural landscapes.

Our program began with Arboretum staff collecting seed from principal Island habitats. We were fortunate to receive support from the Martha's Vineyard Vision Fund, an organization that funds Island students committed to sustainability issues. An intern from the program was trained on how to collect, process, store, and germinate seed in our greenhouse. While our focus was initially on charismatic natives with conspicuous blooms, like butterfly weed, in successive years we have collected less showy plants as well as grasses, sedges, and woody plants.

In addition to the production of local native plants, our MV Wildtype program encourages the greater use of native plants to facilitate the connection of fragmented habitats on-Island. On a global scale, and locally—yes, right here on Martha's Vineyard—habitat fragmentation is cited as a major factor in the extinction of species.

A key component to the success of MV Wildtype is educating the community on the role native plants play in supporting native insects in addition to overcoming the aversion some people have to insects, caterpillars, and “bugs” in general. Native insects and native plants need each other, and we need both!

Another objective of the MV Wildtype is increasing people's comfort level with native plants in their home landscapes, and defusing the argument that it is an either/or proposition. Simply not true! If you decide to use native plants, you do not have to rule out planting exotic (non-native) plants; you can plant both and have a beautiful, dynamic, *and* responsible garden.

The Arboretum is facilitating the effort to document and promote plant diversity on the Island. While our mission includes the general sharing of knowledge of plants and scientific procedure through education, research, plant conservation, and exploration, we are taking specific actions to preserve, conserve, and improve the local environment: MV Wildtype is one example.

If you want to support Island biodiversity in your garden, you should consider joining a new initiative called the MV Habitat Network. This Nature Conservancy program educates Vineyard residents on how they can get involved promoting biodiversity in their own backyard. The Arboretum is providing many of the plants for this new program.

Visit the program website at:

<http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/massachusetts/explore/vineyard-habitat-network.xml>.



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Standout Native Grasses

Plants in the grass family (Poaceae) dominate the planet by the breadth of their global coverage. They play a critical role in preventing erosion, in addition to providing forage and habitat for many animal species. The majority of the most important agricultural crops in the world are grasses, including wheat, corn, rye, oats, and sugarcane.

Here on the Vineyard many grasses occur naturally but too often their virtues and beauty are overlooked. Several are perennial grasses that have adapted to the predominantly dry soils through the development of deep fibrous root systems that allow them to survive drought periods as well as periodic fires. Many of the grass species found on the island once had extensive natural ranges in North America. Now they are considered relics of extensive prairie ecosystems that exist only as fragments today.

One of the most ubiquitous yet beautiful grasses is the little bluestem, *Schizachyrium scoparium*. Locally it is found on the sandplain grassland and in open and abandoned agricultural fields. A perennial grass reaching four feet in height, its flowers appear in late summer and progress into downy windblown seeds. In late October to mid-November little bluestem turns the Vineyard fields and meadows a burnished red while the low sun illuminates the radiant glow of their fluffy seedheads.

The six-foot-tall big bluestem, *Andropogon gerardii*, is a close relative of little bluestem. It is sometimes called turkeyfoot due to its distinctive three-part inflorescence. It can be found on both moist and dry sites, although it's not as common as the little bluestem. Big bluestem has a spotty distribution on the island where it often appears in old road cuts or as an opportunist in disturbed areas. Once established, it makes a permanent home.

The native switchgrass, *Panicum virgatum*, is a beautiful clump-forming grass that blooms in late summer with delicate flower panicles that produce an abundance of seed. The height of individual plants varies depending on soil moisture; they average between four to six feet on the Vineyard. Fall color can be a beautiful reddish orange or yellow that eventually fades midwinter to straw beige.

Despite their intrinsic beauty and adaptability, our native grasses are often overlooked for garden use. All of the grasses described above can be used effectively in the home landscape and all are perfect for a meadow planting or for use as low-maintenance garden perennials. Grasses are most impressive in mass plantings but also work well when planted in a mixed herbaceous border. With an increasing awareness of water-wise plants adapted to our free-draining Vineyard soils, consider replacing your standard lawn grasses with these prairie powerhouses. Unfazed by drought, easy to grow, and with great natural beauty, there is a grass for nearly every landscape situation.

Beach Plum: An Edible Island Favorite

Picture this: dense, twiggy colonies of dark, gnarled branches buried in sand along the barrier dunes of Lambert's Cove Beach. What is this tough plant that thrives in such a challenging environment? The answer is obvious each May when these same branches erupt with beautiful white flowers. It's our native beach plum (*Prunus maritima*). This exceptional spring display lasts a few weeks then something even better follows. Over the following months plump, tasty fruits ripen often creating a bountiful crop for harvest by the end of the summer.



As its common name implies, beach plum is found in or around beaches in sandy, exposed, full sun locations. More shrublike than a tree, its natural range extends along the Atlantic coast from New Brunswick, Canada, south to Virginia. When in bloom you'll notice it in many Island locations. A devoted group of beach plum enthusiasts reside on Martha's Vineyard, many with favorite plum trees in undisclosed locations from where to secure a harvest. Ask for a jar of beach-plum jelly, but don't ask where the fruit came from.

At one time the beach plum was thought to have great potential for commercial orchard production. A book published in 1892, *Cultivated Native Plums and Cherries* by L.H. Bailey, details efforts made to establish named varieties as well as cultural recommendations for different parts of the country. Beach plum madness caught fire here on Martha's Vineyard when summer resident Ruth Eldridge White began her attempts to commercialize the fruit in the 1930s. She describes her motivation, "The development of an industry from this native product seemed a sensible practical idea to me. A great industry has been developed on the Cape through the Cranberry...Why shouldn't the beach plum make as important an industry as the cranberry? The flavor is certainly more appealing. That sweet bitterness comes from a life of hardship, I guess." Yet this wild plum has resisted large scale domestication. Perhaps that's part of its allure.

Today there is no viable industry on the Vineyard but there are plenty of devotees who harvest the fruits in early to mid-September to make their own jams, jellies, and preserves. Attempts to improve the selection and culture of beach plum have revealed that it makes a decent orchard crop. One troubling aspect for commercial fruit production is that beach plum tends to be alternate bearing—fruiting heavily one year but not the next. The beach plum is suitable for the landscape for use as a low-branched shrub, and design-wise can be used much like dwarf ornamental crabapples. Critical components for beach plum culture include full sun, free-draining soil, and organic nitrogen at moderate levels.

Interest in local food production had led to a resurgence in efforts to domesticate this wild fruit that has thus far been difficult to tame. For additional information on beach plum culture, harvesting, and myriad fruit recipes and uses, see the Cornell University website, *Beach Plum: a new crop for new markets* (<http://www.beachplum.cornell.edu/>).

