



Cleome serrulata — captured in sparkle by Vicki Saragoussi Phillips

November 2024

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Become a member today!



Give Where You Live

“Think of your financial support as another kind of seeding. You’ll be planting a garden that feeds the whole wild world.”

Margaret Renkl said this about supporting Wild Ones with your dollars (in her guest essay, [Easing the Biodiversity Crisis One Flowerpot at a Time](#), part of the New York Times Opinion’s Giving Guide 2024). Noting that habitat loss is one of the greatest threats to biodiversity, she applauds Wild Ones for offering free resources on “how to create habitat that is every bit as beautiful as any garden full of introduced plants that feed nobody.” She goes on to say:

“Preventing habitat loss on a global scale is complicated, but there is nothing complicated about converting garden space, no matter how small, into a wildlife sanctuary.”

Well, Wild Ones Front Range has never said native plant gardening is never complicated! **But thanks to your incredible donations each year, we are able to empower more Front Range residents to transform their outdoor spaces into [Coloradoscapes](#) with native plants.** Donations enable us to educate and motivate people to take action to heal the earth, right where we live.

Click here to donate!

As a volunteer-run chapter of Wild Ones National, **Wild Ones Front Range greatly appreciates your generous donations during our annual Colorado Gives campaign between now and December 10.** Thanks to [Margaret Renkl](#) for this reminder:

“Making a discernible, measurable difference to my wild neighbors is an act of resistance, too.”



Wild winged neighbor visiting *Eutrochium maculatum* (Spotted Joe-pyeweed). Photo by Pam Schulz

WOFR is still accepting new board member nominations!

We have particular need for a new Treasurer — scroll down for more info or [email us](#) today!

A Colorado Pocket Prairie

By Deb Lebow Aal

As we approach the winter solstice, I am taking time to pull back, pull inside, reorganize, and yes, already think about my landscape for next year. We gardeners don't only find solace and joy in working in our gardens, but planning them as well, and as a respite from the tumult of the world. In fact, we find peace and profound serenity. It's time to plan, again.



Rick Brune's pocket prairie is his entire backyard in Lakewood, CO. It features a short grass prairie with low area for a rain garden. When designing your pocket prairie, start with a small area first. Photo by Linda Hellow

What I want to do next year is to plant a pocket prairie. It ticks many boxes. In a time of climate chaos and insect and bird apocalypses, how and who we garden for matters dramatically. So, I am recycling and revamping an article I wrote a few years ago on this topic.

If we are native plant advocates, often our goal is to bring the prairie back. We plant lots of native grasses, *Gaillardia* and *Zinnia grandiflora*, plants we knew were here long ago, but we really can't bring the prairie back this way. We actually can't bring the prairie back the way it was at all (more on this in the full blog post linked below). But we can do better than we are doing. We can put in pocket prairies, i.e., small areas of our landscape dedicated to emulating what the prairie looked like and did for the ecosystem. Pocket Prairie is not a new term or concept. It is about taking whatever acreage or square inches you have, and turning it wild, but with intention. So, instead of planting native plants willy nilly in the middle of your established flower beds, or just not mowing your grass, the idea is that we take a portion of our landscape, and dedicate it to prairie plants.



Liatris punctata in a suburban pocket prairie. Photo by Linda Hellow

Why do this? Well, at the risk of a highly controversial statement, gardens are already problematic. When we make a garden, we have taken plants out of their natural environment, or their culture, and plopped them into an arrangement of our making. I find this creative, and I'm guessing you do too, but I understand that I am not re-making nature. I am making something I find aesthetically pleasing and hopefully benefitting pollinators and other creatures in some way. But, nature has a lot to teach us. As Brian Vogt states in his book "[A New Garden Ethic](#)," "We barely understand a prairie's culture, a complex structure formed over countless generations where mutualism and exclusion create healthy and resilient ecosystems above and below the soil line." I highly, highly recommend this book! With pocket prairies, we are actually trying to reconstruct a tiny piece of native ecology, knowing of course that it is very hard to actually do what nature does. We are doing this to sequester carbon, and provide an area that actually benefits wildlife, among other benefits. Once established, a pocket prairie will be highly resilient and drought tolerant.

And, it is a pocket prairie, not a pocket prairie garden. The term garden implies, I think, that it is for human use. We are always looking first at what humans want – even pollinator gardens are what humans want. We want more butterflies and hummingbirds for us to see, and pollinators for our food. With the pocket prairie, we attempt (it's hard, I know) to let these plants do what they want. Native plants, as you know, will wander. You may first design this to have the smaller plants up front, and the larger in back, and the yellow with the purple, but they will go where they want to go. So, although these pocket prairies can be "designed," they should be more like what you see when you hike. More "natural," which is to say, less designed. That's actually freeing, I think. It's a different aesthetic than a garden. And, it's gorgeous (yes, that is human-centric and highly personal).

Want to know how to create a pocket prairie, as well as learn some of the downsides?

[Read the full blog post here!](#)

Chapter News



Photo by Vicki Saragoussi Phillips

Members - Please Vote!

Voting for our chapter's 2025 Board Members takes place from December 1 to December 15. Take a moment to get to know our [board members](#) — passionate, dedicated volunteers who are knowledgeable and fun to work with.

Or, go directly to the [Google form](#) now. We have a slate to vote on, which means you only need to vote Yes or No for the entire board to continue.

You need to be a member to vote, so have your member number ready. If you're not sure what it is, [log in here](#) to find it.

New Board Member Nominations

WOFR is also accepting nominations for new board members. If you'd like to nominate someone - including yourself! - to serve on our board, [email us](#). Let us know the person's name and member number, and provide a brief description about why they are interested in serving on our board of directors.

Seed Swap Recap

Wild Ones Front Range partnered to put on four native plant seed swaps in November

from Colorado Springs to Fort Collins — we had over **500** people attend and volunteer at the swaps offering upwards of **220** unique native species seeds! To everyone who attended, especially those who volunteered and donated (time, seeds, paper seed collection bags and clear plastic, wide-mouth jars of all sizes to hold and label our seed collections) — THANK YOU!

As a result of the incredible leadership of our regional teams, each swap had its own personality that reflected the partners and audience:



Pikes Peak Regional — Congrats to the team (Louise Connor, Susan Nordstrom and Sue Wright) for hosting three swap-related events (seed collection, cleaning and swap) involving around 70 people including many volunteers. Thanks to our partner, Manitou Springs Seed Library, for securing the venue at Grace & St Stephens Episcopal Church and contributing seeds to help boost our first-of-the-season swap inventory. *Photo by Vicki Phillips*



NOCO Swap — Northern Water was a new partner this year, bringing this amazing team to 10 partnering organizations. They organized several seed collection and cleaning events in addition to putting on the swap which was hosted again at the beautiful Gardens on Spring Creek and featured an expanded display area that benefitted attendees immensely. All-told, the NOCO seed swap related events involved around 300 volunteers and attendees. *Photo by Kevin Lyles*



Denver (member-only) Swap — This first member-only Native Seed Preview and Swap was a trial to see if we could give members the benefit of first dibs on seed and try to reduce the crowds at the public swap. It was a success with 65 people attending on a Friday evening. Our partner, The Table Public House re-opened its doors after a one month closure so we were able to keep our venue for the third year. The festive string lights and added amenity of the café and bar provided nice ambiance for our member community to grab a visit before or after their “shopping.” *Photo by Jessica Anderson*



Denver (Public) Swap — This public Pollinator/Native Seed Swap was held the morning after the member event at The Table Public House which was super-efficient! There were 11 seed collection events and 5 seed cleaning events leading up to the Denver swap. All-told, the events related to the Denver seed swaps involved around 365 people including 70 volunteers. *Photo by Sophie Mission*

And remember — if you nabbed seed, or plan to, make a plan for propagating them! The easiest method is sowing them outside in pots, milk jugs, plastic resealable bags or “in situ” mid-December through mid-January to winter stratify. Keep them moist with water and/or snow and watch with anticipation in the spring. Remember, not all seeds are equal — see Jan Midgley’s [germination guide](#) for species-specific information.

Plant Spotlight

Prunus virginiana

By Pam Sherman

We all know this plant, but it is super important for the Front Range ecosystem. According to the National Wildlife Native Plant Finder, it supports 261 species of moths and caterpillars, second only to Willows at 322, in this region. So, find a place in your landscape for this great plant. Here’s lots more information about it.



Chokecherry Blossoms and Leaves — *photo by Leoleobobeo (Pixabay.com)*

Origin of the name

“*Prunus*” is from the Greek word for plum tree. “*Virginiana*” indicates this plant was first given its botanical Latin name in Virginia. It’s in the Rose family. The common name “chokecherry” describes how people have felt upon eating the raw, astringent fruit.

Ecology

“Game birds, songbirds, raccoons, deer, coyotes, and bears relish the cherries, while sharp-tailed grouse depends on the buds for a winter food source. Elk, deer, and moose browse the branches during the fall and winter” Krumm p.21). Chokecherries provide habitat and cover for birds and small mammals.

The cherries ripen from early August to late September, depending on elevation. In Colorado they grow from the plains to 10,500 feet. Chokecherry’s mature height is between a shrub at 4 feet and a small tree at 15 feet. Berries are ripe when black.

The United States Forest Service tells us that chokecherry has been used as a revegetation species for wildlife habitat hedgerows, shelterbelts, mine reclamation, and soil stabilization.

And, see above for their moth and caterpillar superpower.

Human Uses

In *Foraging the Mountain West*, Thomas Elpel (author of *Botany in a Day*) says his grandmother made syrup and wine from the berries, discarding the pulp and pits. He then met Alma Snell, the Crow author of [A Taste of Heritage](#), who taught him the Crow way: “Put fresh cherries on a metate stone and mash them up, pits and all, then dry.” Being a cherry, the nut (pit) smells like almonds. He explains: “Like most members of this genus, cherry pits contain prussic acid, a form of cyanide, but the compound is unstable and easily destroyed by mild heat and oxygen. Mashing and drying ... renders them safe to eat... Alma Snell poured chocolate over her mashed chokecherries to make delicious cherry chocolates!” See p. 198 for photos of this and more chokecherry food. Indigenous people also combined this mash with animal fat and pounded dried meat into pemmican and flavored other dishes, too, with the popular pounded cherries.



[Dried Chokecherry Patties](#) — photo courtesy of *Practical Self Reliance*

[Bob Krumm](#) says his kids loved his chokecherry jelly from toddlerhood on up. He uses the juice in any recipe calling for juice. His book includes recipes from Western home cooks for chokecherry syrup, liqueur, daiquiri, pie, jelly, jam, wine, pudding, “bounce,” and more.

[Dunmire and Tierney](#) write: “Navajo weavers create a purplish-brown dye from boiled bark peeled from chokecherry roots mixed with root bark from wild plums.”

The [USFS](#) writes: “Chokecherry wood is heavy, hard and close-grained;” it has been used to make smaller items such as bows, bowls, and knife handles.

The use of chokecherry bark in cough medicine is widely known. For a medicine and chemistry discussion, see Diana Beresford-Kroeger’s book below, p. 90.

Gardening

Chokecherries are easy to encourage (they sucker!) or to plant. They need sun and a modicum of water, so plant in a prepared or natural basin that catches runoff but has good drainage. (Water as usual for the first couple of years after transplanting in early spring.) It is not drought resistant. They are fine in very acidic to moderately alkaline soils. Growing from seed? The germination rate is said to be higher after having passed through a black bear (Mitton below), but some should still sprout in your kitchen.

Pollinators and Other Insects and Birds

[Diana Beresford-Kroeger](#) writes: “The cherry produces nectar and pollen, but it also produces another exudate from glandular tissue at the base of the leaves.” Wild bees, honeybees, wasps and ants depend on all these food sources in the spring.

She explains that some butterflies use some of the chokecherry's toxic biochemicals to produce their beautiful wing colors. Two-tailed swallowtail butterflies lay their eggs in chokecherries; they are a favorite food of the two-tailed swallowtail butterfly baby caterpillars. Western Tiger and Pale Tiger Swallowtails and Monarchs, among other butterflies, beneficial insects, and songbirds also frequent the chokecherry.

Fire

Above-ground parts of chokecherry are killed in fire, but “it resprouts rapidly and prolifically from surviving root crowns and rhizomes.” (USFS FEIS below)

Cautions

Do not eat raw. Leaves and shoots in spring and summer can produce hydrocyanic acid. The [USFS](#) says, “Cattle and domestic sheep also eat chokecherry, and because of its toxicity... poisoning sometimes occurs. Livestock normally do not eat fatal quantities except when other forage is scarce.” Cook or dry thoroughly according to directions. Also, Elpel writes: “my brother cracked a tooth chewing dried chokecherry mash. Chew gently...”

Further reading:

Diana Beresford-Kroeger, *Arboretum Borealis: A lifeline of the Planet*

William W. Dunmire and Gail D. Tierney, *Wild Plants and Native Peoples of the Four Corners*

Thomas J. Elpel and Kris Reed, *Foraging the Mountain West*

Kelly Kindscher, *Edible Wild Plants of the Prairie*

Bob Krumm, *The Rocky Mountain Berry Book*

United States Forest Service: *Fire Effects Information System: Prunus virginiana*

Jeff Mitton: University of Colorado Boulder, Colorado Arts and Sciences Magazine

Archive: *Chokecherries Invite Pollinators and Frugivores, but Poison Herbivores*

Book Review

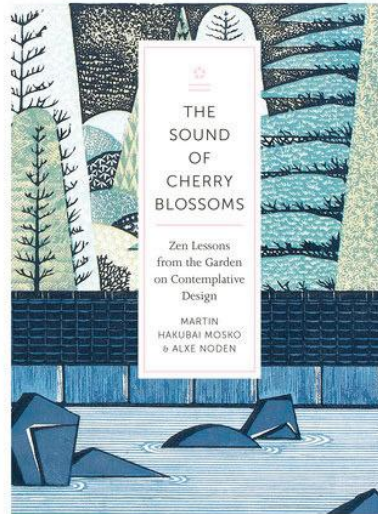
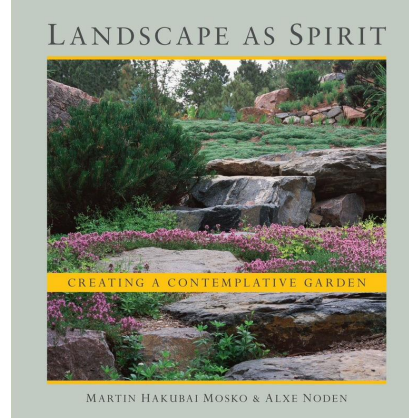
The Sound of Cherry Blossoms:

Zen Lessons from the Garden on Contemplative Design

Landscape as Spirit:

Creating a Contemplative Garden

Our native plant gardens are more than habitat for insects, birds and mammals. They are also calming and nurturing spaces for humans. As we grow in our understanding of native garden design, it is inevitable that we will move beyond creating habitat to creating intentionally well-designed habitat. A habitat that considers the five elements in harmony with the human spirit alongside the needs of native flora and fauna is a win-win. Here is a review of two books by Martin Hakubai Mosko and Alxe Noden to offer inspiration for your native plant landscape.



Review by Pam Sherman

“Design is the process of setting vision” wrote Martin Hakubai Mosko in *The Sound of Cherry Blossoms*. “We need a vision of the future so powerful it can pull us out of the morass of our habitual patterns, delusions, insecurities, and distractions.”

Mosko was a contemplative landscape designer and Zen master in Boulder, CO, influenced by Japanese Zen in both fields. He was [named](#) one of the seven top landscape architects in North America. His wife, Alxe Noden, was instrumental in writing the books with him. He died in 2023.

The Goal

“While I use traditional principles of landscape architecture in my work, I also use methods that create gardens with spirit...to me a garden is a refuge, a place of reverence...in which there is the possibility of awakening and insight....When a garden is able to live up to its true potential, it is the expression of spirit; it is the vital link between Heaven and Earth.” Heaven is “Big Mind: openness, spaciousness, a sense of the sacred without self-reference.” Earth is the ordinary: structure, mass, physicality rocks, water, air, earth. The secret to happiness is experiencing them in their unity, the extraordinary nature of the ordinary, ourselves as we truly are.

The books describe Mosko’s process from vision to implementation, construction and maintenance. He starts with a guiding view, the foundation of the rest of the process. He says that without this, everything we do is reactive and lacks coherence. At the same time being aware “that what I don’t see far exceeds what I do see, and what I don’t know far exceeds what I do know.”

He continues: “A garden is a world in itself, complete but evolving whole.” It encompasses change, birth, growth, death, decay, transformation. It is its own energetic ecosystem, with its own evolving relationships. It can lift us into quietness, balance, harmony, relaxation. It draws our attention away from self-absorption into curiosity about the present moment--the bee chasing nectar, the smell of sun-soaked rock. The garden can nurture our relationships and invite health in mind and body.



Chokecherries surrounding a labyrinth of hand-cut sandstone in a [Peace Garden](#) (Carbondale, CO). *Photo by True Nature Healing Arts*

Mosko’s designs are based on traditional forces of nature: earth, water, fire, air, and space. Landscape as Spirit details how he intentionally shapes the garden and landscape with these elements. Here is a very brief introduction:

- **Earth** is rocks and soil, powerful, solid, ancient. Mosko’s landscape construction company moved huge boulders into place from offsite, changing forever the character of the landscape. Rocks are the ground, the foundation, the structure for the rest of the design.
- **Water** “assumes the form the earth element defines.” Water is the heart, bringing life. People seek a level place and so does water. Paths and streams are linked. Clear and fresh, water reflects, cleans, purifies. Cascading water makes different sounds as it flows, meanders, laps at pond edges.
- **Fire** can be in a fire pit or fireplace. For Mosko, plants are the embodiment of the sun’s primal fire and light energy and therefore represent the fire element. Texture, form, color, shape, behavior, relationship, location awaken the design’s purpose. “Grasses are beats in the garden’s rhythm.”
- **Air/Wind** “is the flow of design via pathways. Paths are connection ... in contemplative design we emphasize slow, mindful walking with quiet places to sit along the way. Air design plays with moving and pausing, influenced by unevenly spaced stepping stones, different textures, stones of different heights, by turns in the path concealing and then revealing a view, by ascending or descending a slope, crossing a bridge, a threshold...”
- **Space** to Mosko, is potentially luminous. “We experience light as spaciousness (space.) Light shapes our experience of space. Space/light is the ultimate mystery and source of wonder.... Everything takes place in it. Western artists traditionally see it as a void that needs to be filled.” Eastern artists see space as full of aliveness. How we experience space and light is the essence of garden design. Space is the opposite of form, but without it, there would be no form. Space has no boundary, but only within a boundary can we experience

spaciousness... Without light, we could not perceive forms... The quality of light and the way it moves and falls in a garden is determined by the interplay of forms and space....”

Through these unique books, Mosko invites us to become consciously aware of the inner and outer techniques that made his work magical. Techniques that we can apply to our own gardens and landscapes of any size and challenge.

Upcoming Events

Check out our website's [Events](#) section for registration links and full event details!

Boulder Regional Seed Swap

Sunday, December 8

Denver Regional Monthly Social Hour

Sunday, December 8

Members only

Neonics & Advocacy: Protecting Pollinators and Influencing Policy

Thursday, December 12

Virtual (hosted by Wild Ones National)



Photo by Kristine Johnson

We love hearing from you!

If you would like to comment on anything in this newsletter or write an article, please [email us](#) your comments or ideas.



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