



HABITAT GARDEN TOURS

Saturday, September 14th  
9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon

## SEPTEMBER STRUCTURE

Join us for a meander in midtown.

These three gardens are still full of beauty and bloom. But they are also wonderful examples of the way the very structure of dense, layered understory plantings, shrub borders and native grasses provide cover from predators, shelter from weather hot and cold, and safe, inviting places to brood and nest.





# HABITAT HAVEN

For the first dozen years Roberta and Stan lived in this Craftsman in Squier Park, the house was surrounded by the usual mix of weed trees, invasives like bush honeysuckle, and old-fashioned garden standards like forsythia.

Like most homeowners Roberta had little time to think about the yard, but was finally forced to address the frequent flooding of the basement and below-grade garage, and a decrepit back deck that badly needed replacement.

An 1800-gallon cistern was installed below the new deck, with the remaining runoff diverted to large rain swales dug in the side yard. These were planted with moisture-loving natives like Button Bush and River Oats.

While this whole-scale solution was costly in the short term, it has meant no flooding or water damage since, and no need to irrigate or fertilize a turf lawn. Instead, the entire double lot is lush with native shrubs and perennials, not a blade of turf to be found. Just diverse, dense, and beautiful wildlife habitat.

## LOOK FOR:

- The front yard of lawn-like carex (Oak Sedge and Pennsylvania Sedge)
- Clearly defined habitat areas, like Woodland Edge shrub borders and Glade plants on the raised berms and along the driveway.
- Low-growing, neighbor-friendly perennials along the streetfront, including Cliff Goldenrod cascading gently over the stone wall.



## THAT'S THE THICKET

Plant descriptions may include words like “suckering,” “thicketing” or “thorny.” This is true of many wonderful native fruiting and berrying species like Gooseberry, Elderberry, Hazelnut\*, Black Cherry\* and Wild Plum\*.

Bird lovers should interpret those terms as inducements, not warnings. Berry thickets provide ideal habitats for birds, who seek them out not only to forage, but also because dense or thorny stems give excellent cover from predators.

The appeal of seasonal fruit is obvious, but many thicketing species (like those starred above) are also Keystones, meaning they host a lion’s share of insects and their larvae, the necessary food for baby birds to survive.

Unused back corners or hard-to-mow fence lines are perfect places for thickets, and thickets can also do double duty as a privacy hedge or screening. Wherever you grow them, your local birds will thank you.





# The Carex Index

*Why should you care about Carex?* Sedges act as “green mulch” in shady areas, absorb runoff in wet zones, and cover and stabilize soil, all while providing food and habitat for many insects, like the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail.

← Dry to Moist →



Pennsylvania Sedge (*Carex pensylvanica*)



Short's Sedge (*Carex shortiana*)



Frank's Sedge (*Carex frankii*)



Cedar Sedge (*Carex eburnea*)



James Sedge (*Carex jamesii*)



Gray's Sedge (*Carex grayii*)



Oak Sedge (*Carex albicans*)



Eastern Wood Sedge (*Carex blanda*)



Hop Sedge (*Carex lupulina*)



## Rockhill Heritage

Karen has lived in the neighborhood over 25 years, and in this house for two. Because the gardens were established by a former neighbor and friend, they were already familiar to her. Now, with thoughtful edits and a deeply personal point of view, Karen is making them her own.

In the walled front garden, for instance, she prefers clean lines and clear sight lines. She sets off exemplary specimen plants, like a stately Great Ironweed, in a frame of open space, the better to appreciate not just its blooms but its graceful height and lovely foliage.

Karen has also removed two invasive Callery Pear trees, installed backyard walkways, and added more native plants and shrubs, while accommodating practical considerations, like the rambunctious chase games of her English Springer Spaniels.

### LOOK FOR:

- Effective street screening by Redbud, Red Buckeye and Joe Pye Weed.
- Abundant and full-bodied sidewalk plantings, which are veritable glossaries of drought- and urban pollution-tolerant species for sun (Cleaver) and shade (Holmes). Standouts include Texas Green Eyes, Purple Poppy Mallow, Wild Bergamot, Common Milkweed and Culver's Root.
- The cottagey feel of the small backyard, thanks to the scale set by tall plants like Sunflower and Elderberry, and large swaths of flowers like Phlox.





## Big & Beautiful

*It's all about that Biomass.*

To the eyes of a hungry bird, our stretches of pristine lawn are tragically barren. With ever fewer sources of food and habitat, songbird populations have decreased by a third in our lifetime and are dwindling fast. How do we help? Shift your aesthetic, from *Neat* to *Replete*.

It's no accident that top keystone species like oaks, asters and goldenrod are big and abundant. Giant trees and large stands of lush-leafed, profusely blooming flowers:

- host more insects,
- sequester more carbon,
- absorb more stormwater,
- produce more food and
- provide more habitat.

In short, big is bountiful. Go home and go big!

*Jerusalem Artichoke (Helianthus tuberosus) in Christopher Leitch's garden. Photo by C. Leitch.*



# WEST PLAZA POLLINATOR

Dana and Mike moved here ten years ago from Fairway expressly for the larger, sunnier lot. Anyone would agree that they have optimized it beautifully, especially in the showcase corner, which is brilliantly designed for its wedge-shaped, sloping contours.

From the start, Dana conceived of this corner in terms of structure, building an oblong parterre with boxwoods, Baptisia and Amsonia. Other substantial perennials like Joe Pye Weed and Texas Green Eyes create bold focal points along the vista. On the corner's sunny slopes, Prairie Dropseed fountains down a diagonal path to the southwest-facing sidewalk, while an eye-catching sweep of Blue Grama shines on the east curb.

Dana has a sideline selling sustainable specialty bouquets and arrangements, so the garden's plants are grown primarily for their potential as cut flowers. Yet they include a surprising number of natives. Dana's designs make stunning use of unusual elements like Pokeweed berries and Baptisia seedpods.

## LOOK FOR:

- Mike's artful play of plant height and mass against the corner's slope
- Large perennials and large groupings of smaller perennials and grasses
- The visual grounding created by "walls" and anchors of Boxwood, Baptisia, Amsonia and other large, quiet shrubby forms

