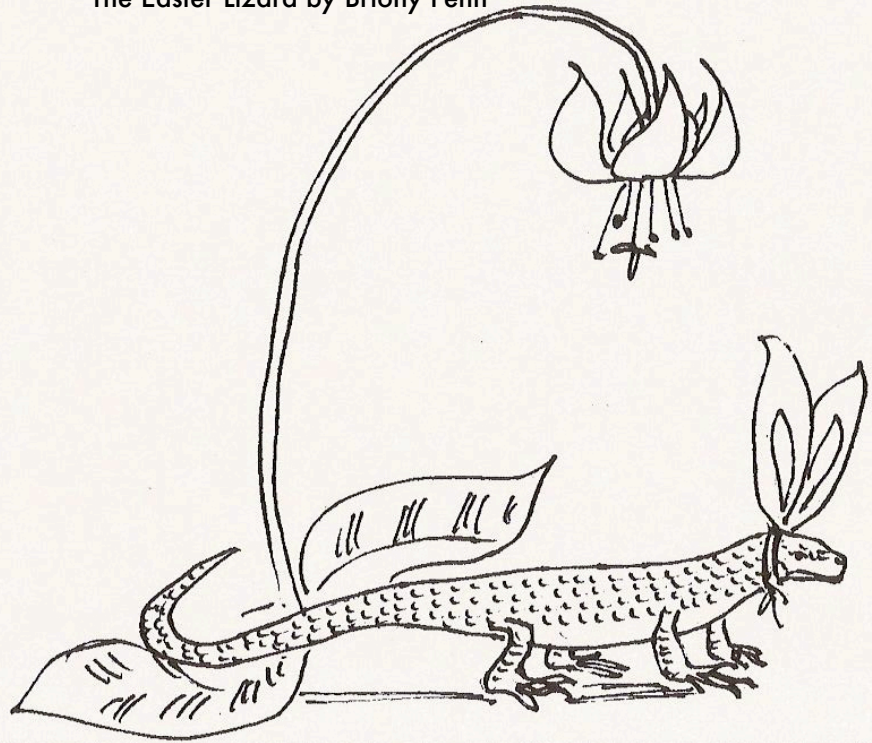


The Easter Lizard by Briony Penn



## NATIVE PLANT STUDY GROUP

**GETTING NATIVE PLANTS OFF THE SOAPBOX AND INTO SOAP OPERA**

Always passionate and enthusiastic, fired with true zeal and fearlessly stepping into Federal politics as Liberal nominee for Saanich and the Gulf Islands, Briony Penn found time to amuse and motivate through her presentation in May.

Starting the evening rolling with a comparison between *Sex in the City* (all your passion hedged in by four walls) and *Sex in the Forest* (you can also learn the names of mosses while indulging your primal urges), Briony questioned "are we losing our connections to the natural world?".

At one time humankind had to know from 300-1000 plants and animal species in order to survive, not knowing your plants was a matter of life and death, we were immersed in nature. If you didn't know the difference between a death camas and camas, you and your family were in big trouble! These days we don't have the economic need to make the connection to the living world. Many people have never held a shore crab in their hands, they don't know the

names of many native plants, they are out of touch with nature.

Out of the vast array of the 100,000 plus plants on this planet, only about 100 have been domesticated and only eight are staple crops. We don't seem to feel the imperative to learn about native plants, the minute by minute urgency of survival has left us.

There are innovative programs in school yards that encourage children to plant gardens, but they don't use native plants. Briony asked why not plant a hedgerow of salmonberry and trailing blackberry for the kids to eat and appreciate? (how about nodding onions and miner's lettuce or evergreen huckleberries for a recess snack?-ed). We want convenience and fast foods-potatoes not camas. However, in camas, we have food, nature and culture entwined in a single plant.

It is Briony's contention that Plato has a lot to account for with his separation of nature and humans, whereas Pliny the Elder is lauded as a

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“good Greek”, one of the first environmental activists. Also up for accolades, Gruffyd ab Ad-daf ap Dafydd was a tenth century monk who thought dancing round a Maypole was a pretty lame excuse for fraternizing in the forests and celebrating fertility. For further information on these and other early nature writers and activists you might want to read “The Oxford Book of Nature Writing”.

People who are advocating for nature have an obligation to educate people, we need to try to influence the media and use smart marketing strategies. We need to convey a deep love of place and add FUN! to the mix. We should build native plants into our rituals. For all those special occasions when only Hallmark will do, there should be Easter cards with native species instead of cute little voracious, invasive species (alligator lizards instead of bunnies), surely we have some greenery that can supplant “the ivy and the holly”. Our Coat of Arms could consist of whales and buffleheads rather than dragons and horses, Easter is an easy holiday to re-market with fawn lilies and band-tailed pigeons (rather than regal lilies and doves). Even Harlequin type romance novels could have heroines gasping in a field of camas or running through ancient cedar forests. The milieu is untapped and awaiting your efforts. Use native species in our designs, we have many species that could translate well into the Arts and Crafts philosophy of using local flora and fauna for design



inspiration (satinflowers, chocolate lilies, tiger lilies and tree frogs, to name a few-ed).

Time might well be running out for us, with mass extinctions, climate change and shifting economic conditions. We need to connect quickly with our natural world. Acknowledge its importance and we heal ourselves.

## MINER'S LETTUCE (*CLAYTONIA PERFOLIATA*)

My grandfather was a coal miner all his working life (from age 13!) and I think of him as I wolf down a salad of succulent miner's lettuce and nodding onion. These are truly excellent greens, nice and crispy, cute as can be in a salad and full of vitamin C, protein and carbohydrates. Apparently the common name refers to the early California gold rush miners who would develop bleeding gums and other symptoms of scurvy during the winter. The very early to germinate miner's lettuce plants would offer a significant supply of vitamin C, which would alleviate their suffering. I love the mild, slightly spinach-like flavour. We have been consuming great quantities of salad with these as the main ingredients lately. I will be sad when the final plant is gone. However, they self seed freely and many more will return next year. My largest and most robust plants grow in partial shade in rich, slightly moist soil (on the north side of my house). Try them, take a nibble when on a walk and you'll see why we love them in this family.

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## MEMBER'S PRESENTATION

### The Pleasure and the Pain of Community Gardening

Pat Boyle, accompanied by her sherpa, IT geek and invaluable partner Neil, regaled the April meeting with the trials and tribulations involved in restoration of a community space.

Many of us have experienced the pleasure of Pat's remarkable gardening skills during various garden tours. She has transformed an over-run, weedy property into a flourishing haven for many native plants. Not content with re-shaping just her little piece of paradise, she moved on to revitalizing an adjacent derelict strip of a public walkway measuring twenty by eighty feet (I guess Pat still hasn't made the "recent" change from imperial to metric). This neglected bit of Victoria public space had become the repository of a kaleidoscope of weeds including invasive grasses, docks, thistles and creeping buttercup to name a few. Beer cans added their own certain "ambiance".

Working with permission of the municipality, she has rid the area of its foreign interlopers and planted Oregon grape, Indian plum, oceanspray, flowering currant, and in 2003, three Garry oak trees. Stepping stones and rotting stumps round out the garden's structure. Pat's participation in various plant rescue events have helped supply columbine, shooting stars, camas, fawn lilies, alumroot, Roemer's fescue, California oatgrass, blue wild rye, licorice fern and chocolate lilies to the mix. The oaks must be a favoured tree for poachers, as, despite repeated plantings, not one has been able to stay in the ground.

Unfortunately, a new neighbour has not yet experienced the environmental version of the "conversion on the road to Damascus" and has filed complaints about the cleanup and restoration, believing it look messy and that it is a fire



CERASTIUM ARVENSE

hazard. No matter how much support you can garner, it seems that only one negative voice can cause weak knees among a certain level of management.

Despite these growing pains, the rest of the garden is taking shape quite nicely, bringing back a small remnant of the area's once diverse native flora.

We are looking for members to give five minute presentations at our meetings. Don't be shy, share your experience with a very accepting group. Contact Angela or Valerie at the meeting or through their emails, found at the end of the newsletter.

*The Native Plant Study Group meets on the third Thurs of the month from Sept-May except Dec at 7 pm in Rm D116, MacLaurin Building, UVic. Please join us. Membership fees are \$15.00 annually or \$2.00 for drop-in*

*Have you visited our beautiful website at [www.npsg.ca](http://www.npsg.ca)? It has been built through the talented and generous efforts of Valerie Elliot and Stephan Jacob of ID2 Communications ([www.id2.ca](http://www.id2.ca))*

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## NETTLE PESTO A SPRING RECIPE

From the Making Food Matter e-news at [www.communitycouncil.ca/crfair\\_n1crfair\\_nl\\_iss ue2\\_index.html](http://www.communitycouncil.ca/crfair_n1crfair_nl_iss ue2_index.html)

All around Vancouver Island you can find beautiful patches of nettles that can be eaten when they are young. Nettles (*Urtica dioica*) contain significant amounts of protein, chlorophyll, vitamins A, C, and D, and minerals iron, calcium, potassium, and manganese. They're a perfect spring food! Wearing gloves, harvest by picking the new growth from early spring to summer. The greens need to be dried or steamed before consuming due to their stinging hairs.

### Ingredients:

8 cups fresh nettles  
1 cup parmesan or other strong cheese  
1 cup pine nuts or walnuts, chopped fine  
4 cloves garlic, minced  
1/2 cup olive oil  
Black pepper to taste  
Juice of two lemons

\*Don't forget that nettles are the host plant for a few of our butterfly species: Satyr Comma; Milbert's Tortoiseshell; West Coast Lady and Red Admirable.

Check the plants to make sure they are not a nursery to tiny butterfly eggs and young. Nettles commonly occur on disturbed sites with rich, moist soils in sun or part shade. We have two species of nettle here, our native *Urtica dioica* and *Urtica urens* (dog nettle), which is a European introduction. The chief differences between the two species are that our native stinging nettle is a larger, rhizomatous perennial with panicles of either male or female flowers while the dog nettle is a smaller tap-rooted annual that has dense clusters of mixed male and female flowers. The plant fibres have traditionally been used by First Nations in making fish-nets and snares-ed.

## NATIVE PLANT STUDY GROUP

(Sub-group of the Victoria Horticultural Society)

**The NATIVE PLANT STUDY GROUP is a non-political group dedicated to learning about B.C. native plants, as wild populations and in garden settings, and to supporting conservation of native plants and their habitats. The group is guided by a volunteer steering committee. Members are encouraged to volunteer for this committee. Participation in outside events, by the group, or by individual members using the NPSG name, is dependent on approval of the steering committee or, where indicated, by the at-large membership. Activities requiring funding must receive approval by the general membership.**

Native Plant Study group members are required to become members of the Victoria Horticultural Society. Fees are \$25.00/yr and help pay for insurance to cover field trips. Send \$ to Box 5081 Stn. B, Victoria, V8R 6N3

The NPSG Newsletter is written and produced by Moralea Milne

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## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

THE NPSG is looking for a volunteer to coordinate the salvage program next season. This entails contacting the appropriate people and asking permission to conduct plant salvage before development begins. Please contact either Angela or Valerie if you are willing to help.

- The Hospital Rock restoration has need of volunteers, those of us who have taken the orientation course are encouraged to attend the Tues morning sessions (at 9 am) or contact Agnes to set up alternate schedules. Creative solutions to the "bunny problem" are welcomed. Contact Agnes for more information at 721-0634 or [thelynns@shaw.ca](mailto:thelynns@shaw.ca)

- The Anti-ivy League of Cadboro Bay is fighting an ongoing battle. Is your warrior spirit ready to tackle the soul-sucking expanse of this pernicious weed? Contact Agnes (above) for more information.

- Chatham Island?

- Volunteer at Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary For further details contact Joan at 479-0211 or email [volunteer@swanlake.bc.ca](mailto:volunteer@swanlake.bc.ca).

- Every Sat at 1:30 pm: Tour of Merve Wilkinson's Wildwood Forest, Ladysmith. Jay, 250-245-5540 <http://www.ecoforestry.ca/WildwoodMap.htm>

- Beacon Hill Park Ivy Pull, Saturdays (except long weekends), 9 am-Noon southeast woods near Cook and Dallas. Bring gardening gloves. No dogs. Volunteers welcomed. Call Cornelia, 920-3556 or [kacy@islandnet.com](mailto:kacy@islandnet.com)

- Oak Bay Native Plant Garden meet every Fri. morning from 9-11, weather permitting. Corner of Beach Drive and Margate Avenue. New members welcome.

- Brighton Avenue Walkway Restoration. Removal of invasives and re-planting of native species in a Garry Oak rocky outcrop situation.

Work each Sun. 9:30 - 11:30. Meet at Hampshire and Brighton, 2 blocks south of Oak Bay.

BROOMRAPE ON SPRINGOLD



## EVENTS AND OUTINGS

Check the CRD parks website for detailed information on their many programs: [www.crd.bc.ca/parks](http://www.crd.bc.ca/parks)

For all VNHS activities, please contact Agnes at 721-0634 or email her ([thelynns@shaw.ca](mailto:thelynns@shaw.ca)) if you need more information. No pets please. Bring a lunch and plenty to drink for the all day outings. Check the Victoria Natural History Society at [vicnhs.bc.ca](http://vicnhs.bc.ca)

For info on many environmental activities in our area check the Green Diary from the EcoNews website at <http://www.earthfuture.com/greendiary>

May 24, Thurs. VNHS Scramble up the back of Mount Douglas. Please note the trail is very steep and challenging but will be taken at a leisurely pace to enjoy the habitat. Meet at 6 pm in front of 1251 Pearce Cres, off Blenkinsop

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Sat, May 26, CRD Parks. Hike from Francis King to Thetis lake. 10-2 pm. Meet at Nature Centre off Munn Rd.

June 8, Fri. VNHS Cowichan River Footpath. Meet at Helmcken Park and Ride at 9:00 am to car-pool. All day outing

June 9 , Sat. VNHS We will visit an area north-west of Shawnigan Lake that needs protection for its unique habitat. It has interesting native grasses and other late wildflowers such as clarkia. Meet at Helmcken Park and Ride at 9:00 am to car-pool. An all day outing.

June 17, Sun. VNHS Rhododendron Lake. This area near Nanaimo is one of only two known sites on Van Is. where Rhododendron macrophyllum grows. Meet at Helmcken Park and Ride at 9:00 am to car-pool. An all day outing.

June 23, Sat. CRD Parks Mt Work (out!). 10-1 pm. Meet in parking lot off Durrance Rd, off Willis Point Rd. Bring lunch, water, raingear and wear appropriate footwear.

## IMPORTANT NOTICE!!

An Executive Planning Meeting is scheduled for the 3rd Thursday in June at 7:00 pm. Location to be announced or contact Angela Deering at 595-5820 [angeladeering@shaw.ca](mailto:angeladeering@shaw.ca)

## NOTES

