

Arboretum Notes



FRIENDS
of the ACTON
ARBORETUM

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Our Mission

To raise and donate funds, materials and services to the Town of Acton for the development and maintenance of the Acton Arboretum; to educate the community about the unique environmental, horticultural, geological and historical qualities of the Arboretum property, about the process of wetland and field succession, and, in an era of decreasing public funds and natural resources, about conservation, effective horticultural practice; and generally to do all the things permitted to non profit organizations under the provisions of Chapter 180 of the General Laws of Massachusetts and Section 501c3 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1984, as from time to time they are amended.

BECOME A MEMBER

FRIENDS of the ACTON
ARBORETUM, INC.

P.O. Box 2607
Acton, MA 01720



Community Service R.J. Grey Students Assist with Fall Projects



8th grade students from the Green team spend the morning assisting the Friends with fall projects

The 8th grade Green team at R.J. Grey Junior High School donated community service hours to the Acton Arboretum on the morning of Monday, October 3, 2005. Friends of the Acton Arboretum volunteers Cathy Hatfield and Dick Tavernier, with help from Town of Acton Natural Resources Director Tom Tidman, supervised a group of students working on a section of trail that has been wet in the spring. This section is located near the farm ponds, where the trail begins to go uphill, just beyond the farm pond culvert, with the Wildflower Trail boardwalk on the right. The students cleared out the logs, dug a collection hole to the left of the trail and a ditch for an 8" drainage pipe across the trail angling downhill towards the boardwalk. The pipe was reinforced with rocks collected by students, and the trail was edged with two short retaining walls. The last step involved spreading wood chips over the trail between the two rows of rock. A big thanks to Dick Tavernier and to the 8th grade students for improving a section of trail that badly needed help.

Meanwhile, Friends of the Acton Arboretum volunteers Cathy Fochtman and Bettina Abe supervised a group of students at the Arboretum tree and shrub nursery. Goldenrod had seeded itself around shrubs that were planted in the nursery and needed weeding. The team worked hard, digging the root masses and hauling the pulled plants to a burn pile several hundred yards away. Thanks to the 8th grade students for making it possible to do an inventory of the shrubs in the nursery.

The final task undertaken by the Green team that day was a beautification project. 175 King Alfred Daffodil bulbs were planted at the front entrance of the Taylor Road parking lot and surrounding the Rhododendron Collection. The Friends of the Acton Arboretum appreciate the assistance provided by the students; they accomplished a great deal of work.

Edible Fruit at the Acton Arboretum

Most of the Acton Arboretum was once an apple orchard. Apple trees in rows can be found in many areas; they flower heavily every other year and are attractive. The fruits they produce are generally gnarled, bumpy, corky, and infested with larvae of insects. The few edible ones that can be found are not recognizable varieties, and most are extremely tart. With pruning and spraying the trees could be returned to a productive state, but the fruit would have no taste appeal or market value. Another remnant of former cultivation is the European grape found on an old trellis near the herb garden/cellar hole. These vines, too, would require heavy pruning and spraying to return them to a fruitful condition. The few bunches of grapes that have developed in recent years were infected with fungi and were not edible. An escapee from former cultivation is the garden red current, represented by low shrubs in areas of pine woods. These plants were probably distributed by birds from the spot where they were once cultivated.

Throughout the grounds of the Acton Arboretum there are many native plants that produce edible fruit from early spring until after first frost. For most wild fruit, however, you are in competition with birds, squirrels, chipmunks, and field mice. In open field areas near Taylor Road there is an abundance of plants of wild strawberries, which are attractive in flower and tasty in fruit. The field mice are especially fond of the wild strawberries. The native elderberry

is a shrub of open areas, sometimes becoming ten feet tall. The bushes produce an abundance of flat-topped clusters of white flowers which develop into dark purple or black fruits. These fruits make an excellent wine or jelly but are very tart or even bitter when eaten raw.

There are three common and abundant kinds of blackberries and two kinds of raspberries, all of which are thorny or prickly plants. The large Allegheny blackberry produces an extremely sweet and juicy fruit nearly an inch long. The juice is nearly indelible on hands or clothing. For some unknown reason these fruits are not eaten by local animals but are there in quantity for the picking. The Pennsylvania blackberry has less desirable berries which are dry and very seedy. The dewberry or Enslens bramble is a trailing plant quite common in wooded areas. Since the fruit is relished by ground mammals as well as two-legged ones, it is hard to find.

The red raspberry is common in the Arboretum, forming large thickets in open areas. Birds gather these berries even before they are ripe, but the quantity available is enough for all. By contrast, the black raspberry, or black-cap raspberry is most frequently found as a single plant or scattered individuals in orchard areas. It can be recognized by the white dusty appearance of the stems.

Two kinds of blueberries are found in the wooded areas, the dryland blueberry and the lowbush blue-

berry. Most plants are less than two feet tall. The fruits are small, bluish-gray, and seedy and are generally eaten by birds. Black-fruited plants growing near the blueberries are black huckleberry, whose seedy fruits are less appealing to birds. The wet or swampy areas have many plants of the common highbush blueberry and the black highbush blueberry, which range in height from 6 to 12 feet, fruit heavily, and are most desirable juicy blue fruits. In the middle of the swamp is another type of huckleberry commonly called the dangle-berry due to its clusters of black fruit. In the sphagnum areas of the bog, visible from the boardwalk, are the delicate vines of the American cranberry. One year I was lucky enough to collect a quart of the red fruit, but most years the animals of the swamp manage to harvest them.

Two native trees related to the apple are found in dry or wooded areas. The shadbush or sarvisberry produces white flowers before the leaves appear in the early spring. The small, applelike, red to purple fruit may seem to be mostly all core, but the fruits were collected by the colonists and dried for later use in pies and tarts. The fruits of the thorn apple were similarly used, but when reconstituted, these had to be strained to remove the stony seeds. These trees can be recognized by the slender stem thorns, which may be several inches in length. The red-colored rose hips from the Virginia rose were dried and then softened when used in midwinter cooking for

The charm of a woodland road lies not only in its beauty but in anticipation.

Around each bend may be a discovery, an adventure.

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WHO ARE THE FRIENDS?

We are a group of citizens who care about the natural world and share a vision of preserving and enhancing our natural resources for educational purposes. Friends contribute time, money, plants and other gifts and talents in support of the Acton Arboretum in order to achieve these goals.

Membership benefits for Friends include: a biannual newsletter, seasonal walks, talks and workshops, and civic pride in a special gift of land used for enjoyment and education.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ I am a NEW MEMBER RETURNING MEMBER

TYPE OF MEMBERSHIP (CHECK ONE)

INDIVIDUAL | \$15 FAMILY | \$25 SUPPORTING | \$40 CORPORATE | \$100

CONTACT ME FOR VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Commemorative gifts, honoring marriages, births, deaths or other special dates, are gratefully accepted and recorded in a commemorative listing.

PLEASE DETACH AND MAIL TO: FRIENDS OF THE ACTON ARBORETUM, INC. | P.O. BOX 2607 | ACTON, MA 01720

Edible Fruit (continued)

the tart flavor they added to pastries. Today we know this to be ascorbic acid or vitamin C.

There are native trees in the Acton Arboretum that produce edible nuts. The few American chestnut trees that persist do not reach fruit-producing size due to the chestnut blight disease. However, the shagbark hickory, the pignut, and the butternut do produce fruits, and probably all nuts are gathered by the squirrels. The number of seedling trees of each scattered throughout the Arboretum indicates what efficient planters are the forgetful squirrels. A common shrub in drier areas is the American hazelnut or filbert, with its edible nut enclosed in a ruffled green husk. The squirrels prefer these nuts while they are immature and before the shell hardens, so mature nuts are infrequent.

After a heavy frost in the fall the native fox grape becomes edible and can be used to make an excellent jelly or even wine. This vine can be found in the thickets at the end of Wood Lane. Until it is frosted and the fuzzy leaves have fallen these little grapes are extremely sour.

The Acton Arboretum does have a number of plants that are edible. It also contains a number of plants that are mildly toxic to dangerously poisonous. If you don't know a fruit or are not sure then don't eat it. If the fruit is white in color it may be poison ivy. Avoid all white fruits. The red fruits of jack-in-the-pulpit, the



PHOTO: A crabapple tree, 'Snowdrift', near the Taylor Rd. parking lot on a crisp November morning. The fruit was enjoyed by goldfinches and a single cedar waxwing.

deadly nightshade, or the winterberry are dangerous while those of the buckthorn are a violent laxative or will cause vomiting. There are numerous scheduled walks through the Arboretum where the leaders will point out the edible and poisonous plants.

Dr. Richard A. Howard, 1991

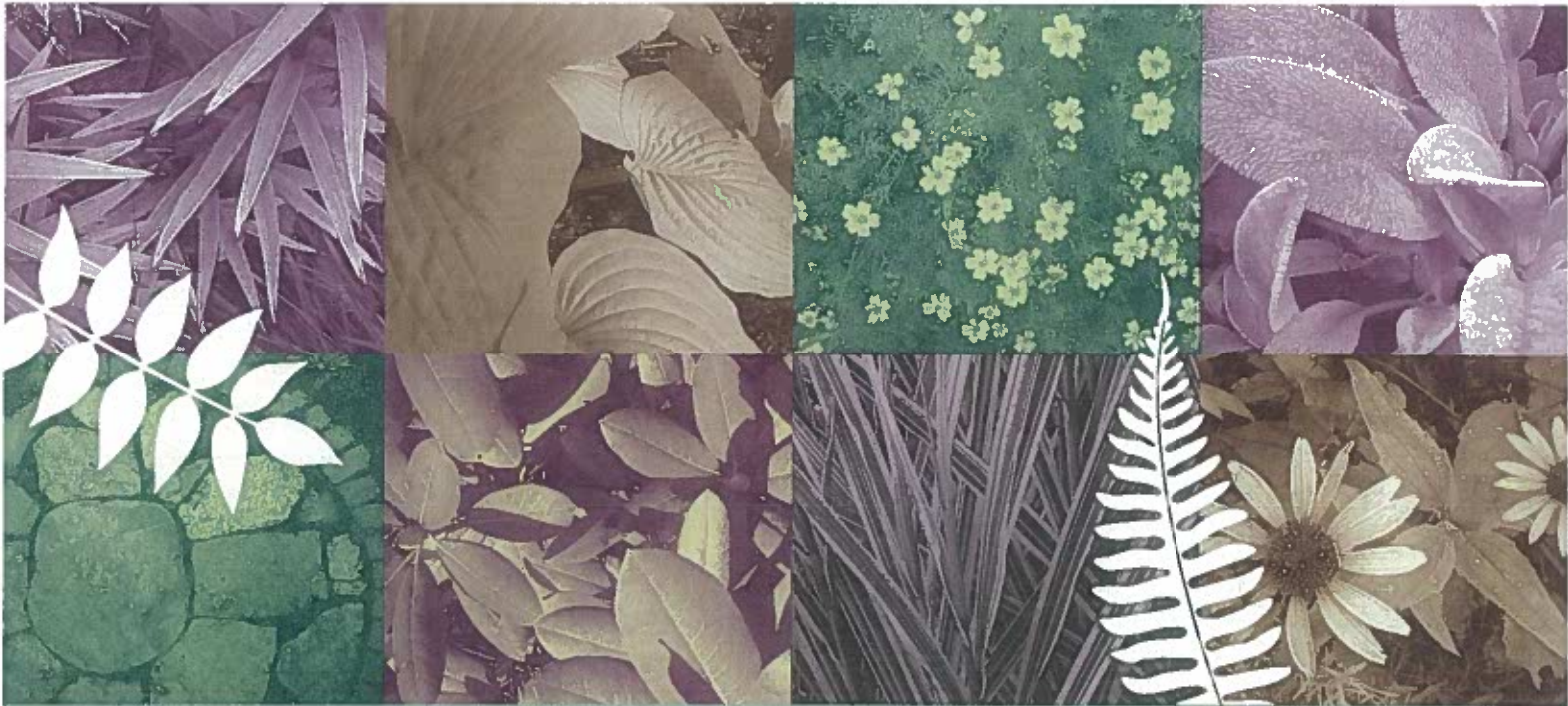
Dr. Dick Howard was Director of the Arnold Arboretum from 1954 to 1978, a professor of dendrology (study of trees) at Harvard for 50 years, an Acton resident in his retirement, and a major benefactor of the Acton Arboretum. Specimen tree labels are donated by the Friends in his memory.



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What's Happening



20th Anniversary Celebration on May 21, 2006

The Friends of the Acton Arboretum will be sponsoring "Acton Arboretum Day" at the Acton Arboretum, on Sunday, May 21, 2005. The event is in honor of the 20th anniversary of the creation of the Acton Arboretum. Details will follow.

Two eagle scouts candidates, Steven Lush and Albert Chang, have recently completed their projects extending the rhododendron trail. Eagle Scout candidate David Newey has completed the reconstruction of the trail near the fern garden.

Visit the Acton Arboretum with our Self-Guided Tour of the Upper Grounds. It can be purchased for \$1 from the Town Clerk's desk at Acton Town Hall. This pocket-sized guide identifies points of interest along the Orchard Loop and Wildflower Loop trails.