

Common Beneficial Plants Found in Wildlife Habitat Established Through CREP and Other Farm Bill Programs



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Introduction

The following visual guide was created for use by landowners with property enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) or other Farm Bill Conservation Programs. This publication should also be useful to any landowners managing grassland, old field and early successional habitat for wildlife. This document has been created to educate landowners on visual identification of some of the more common weeds/wildflowers that **naturally** occur in agricultural fields, meadows and old fields that offer a benefit to wildlife. These are **not** plants that have been seeded as part of your seed mix for your conservation planting. Some of the following plants may require some level of control during the establishment period of your conservation planting. The wildlife species benefiting from these plants can include birds, mammals and insects that utilize this habitat for any part of their life functions. This guide does not represent all beneficial plants that might naturally establish in grassland or old field habitats. For further information on plant benefits to wildlife or identification of wildflowers/weeds consult the following field guides:

Martin A.C., Zim H.S., and Nelson A.L. *American Wildlife & Plants: A Guide to Wildlife Food Habits* Dover Publications Inc., New York

Uva R.H., Neal J.C., and DiTomaso J.M. *Weeds of the Northeast* Cornell University Press

Newcomb, L. *Newcomb’s Wildflower Guide* Little, Brown & Company

Common Ragweed

- High value wildlife food and cover, common annual in fallow fields
- Seed production is high and rich in oil, leaves fern-like
- Seed persists on plant into winter providing critical winter food source
- Specifically benefits bobwhite quail, mourning dove, ring-necked pheasant, red-winged blackbird, grasshopper; song, white-crowned and white-throated sparrow
- This plant is known to be an allergen to many people



Queen Anne's Lace (Wild Carrot)

- Biennial plant producing large, showy white flower beneficial to pollinators
- Produces prickly covered seed occasionally eaten by ruffed grouse, ring-necked pheasant and small mammals
- Abundant weed attracting insect activity and increasing diversity of grassland



Common Milkweed

- Perennial plant producing purplish flower clusters late June to early August
- High value to pollinators attracting abundant insect diversity
- Plant exudes a milk-like sap when broken
- Critical to life cycle of monarch butterflies providing food to caterpillar stage
- High seed production in large tear drop shaped pods



Goldenrod

- Tall, rigid stemmed perennial often providing patches of dense winter cover
- Produces large yellow flower clusters from August through October
- Common plant of old fields, meadows and conservation plantings
- Attracts insect activity and benefits pollinators
- Benefits songbirds, ruffed grouse, ring-necked pheasant, eastern cottontail, small mammals and white-tailed deer



Ironweeds

- Showy, rigid stemmed plant found in sunny, moist to wet locations such as old fields, meadows and conservation plantings
- New York Ironweed, pictured below, most common ironweed observed in PA
- Benefits pollinators with large flower heads and retains seed during winter as source of critical winter food for songbirds, game birds and small mammals



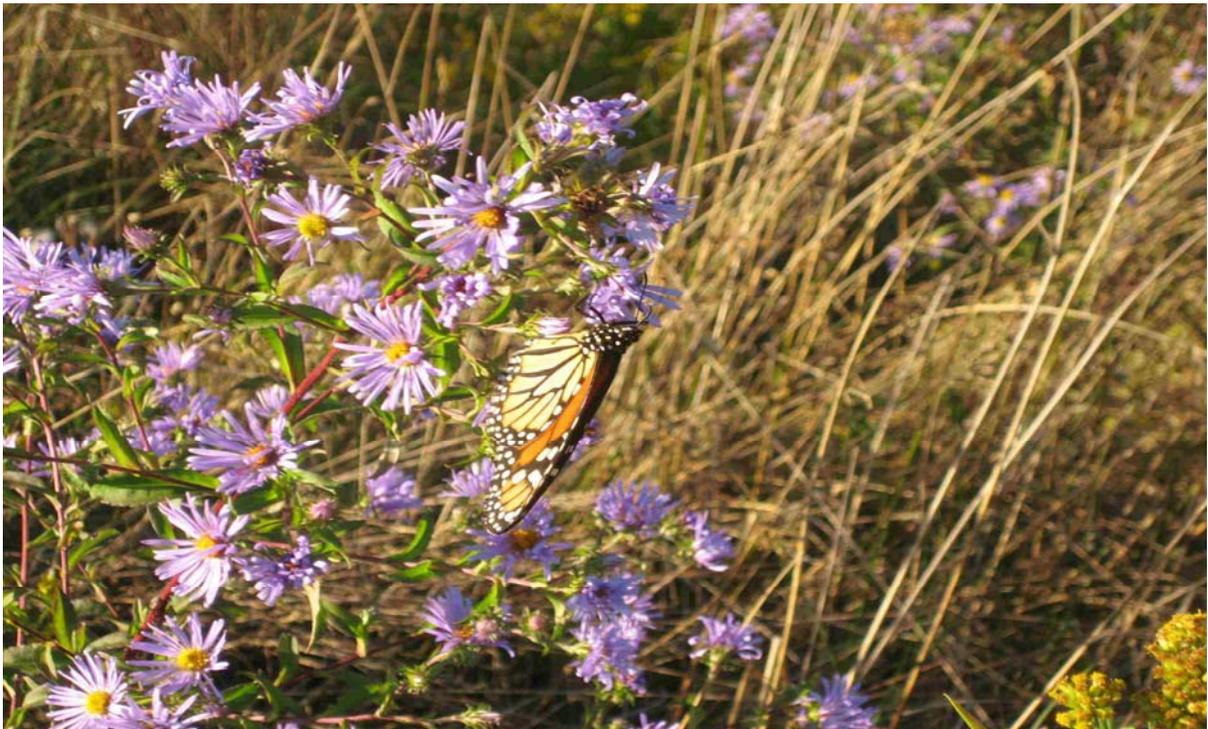
Smartweeds

- Commonly found summer annuals tolerating various soil conditions
- Found in wet areas, along edges and in uplands
- Bright pink flowers bloom July to October, form in dense clusters at end of stalk
- Large amounts of seed produced per plant
- High value waterfowl and songbird food source for fall migration
- Benefits black, mallard, pintail and wood duck; rails, bobwhite quail, red-winged blackbird, cardinal, common redpoll; fox, song, swamp, white-crowned and white-throated sparrow; muskrat and raccoon



Asters & Fleabanes

- Asters are clump forming perennial, bloom late August – October
- Fleabanes are annual and biennial, bloom in early June – September
- Fleabanes with small white flowers, Aster flowers range white to purple; both with central yellow disks
- Both plants tolerate wide range of soil, moisture, and sunlight conditions
- High value to pollinators, improve insect diversity and diversify grassland habitat
- Benefit ruffed grouse, wild turkey, songbirds, small mammals, eastern cottontail and white-tailed deer



Joe-Pye Weed

- Plant of marshes, wet meadows often growing in small colony
- Produce large, showy flower clusters, blooms August through September
- Seed is an angular nutlet providing food source to waterfowl, songbirds, gamebirds and small mammals
- Large flowers attract high insect activity and benefit pollinators
- Plants can reach 6 ft tall and provide clumps of dense winter and escape cover



Staghorn or Smooth Sumac

- Colony forming shrub with mature plants in center and small, young plants around the edges; 10-20 ft tall when mature
- Sumac has large leaves containing 9-31 serrate leaflets, serrated edge on **entire** leaf edge, not to be mistaken for tree-of-heaven (1 serrate point at top end of leaf)
- Branches with fine red hairs whereas tree-of-heaven are smooth (no hairs); sumac leaves are non-aromatic whereas tree-of-heaven has a distinctive odor
- Leaves turn orange and red in fall, then drop to expose large, cone-shaped fruit
- High value wildlife food and cover, providing critical winter food source
- Seed/fruit consumed by ruffed grouse, ring-necked pheasant, bobwhite quail, bluebirds, cardinal, robins, catbirds and brown thrashers
- Eastern cottontail, small mammals, and white-tailed deer feed on the bark and twigs and will also consume fruit



Hemp Dogbane

- Benefits pollinators through production of small white flowers
- Seed produced in long, bean shaped pod
- Attractive to song birds, game birds and small mammals
- Attracts insect activity and adds plant diversity to grass cover



Blackberries/Raspberries

- High value wildlife food and cover, includes many species of the *Rubus* family
- Berries are one of the most preferred summer foods by wildlife, utilized by ruffed grouse, ring-necked pheasant, bobwhite quail, catbirds, cardinals, grosbeaks, orioles, brown thrasher, bluebirds, cedar waxwings, raccoons, fox, squirrels, bears
- Leaves and stems eaten by cottontail rabbits and white-tailed deer
- Thorny plant when growing in patches provides excellent nesting and escape cover
- Not to be mistaken for highly invasive and noxious multiflora rose, identified by hairs located at the base of the leaflet-see photo→



Blackberries-light green in color on the underside



Raspberries-silvery color on the underside

