

## Making Ripples

by Amanda Bancroft

With all the plant personification going on recently, it's good to get to know some natives at a time when more people than ever before are thinking of forests as living things worthy of respect. Once a floral affection has been developed, the irony is that it may go towards the demise of natives. We're losing our native plant communities to invasive, non-native ones, and it becomes a question of loving plants in general (allowing natives to continue going extinct because humans accidentally or purposefully planted exotic aggressive competitors) or respecting the life of some plants over others in specific locations.

We're each allowed to choose individually which variety of plant love we foster in our hearts – all or natives – but how can anyone choose natives if they're not recognizable? It may seem almost impossible. Every spring it's a familiar landscape of alien plants which feel like home but really aren't: the lovely daffodils everywhere, the early crocus hiding in the grass pretending it belongs there, the bearded iris blocking the limelight from native irises, and so on. It's very easy to pick a random yard and feel as though you were standing in “Amerasiaropica,” or, America-Asia-Europe-Africa, all at the same time. Not one flower or tree in bloom would be native to North America or the Ozarks. Even the grass is from afar.

The stinky, structurally weak and showy Bradford/Callery Pear trees are bursting forth white blossoms everywhere. But there are native trees and shrubs which also have beautiful white blossoms: Serviceberry, American Plum, Dogwood, Arrowwood, Elderberry, and many more. Many natives provide bright, colorful berries at various times of year. Beautyberry is nearly a fantasy with its purplish pink berry clusters. American Holly doesn't disappoint with the red berries contrasting against dark green glossy leaves. Autumn color can be varied and showy on natives, too, with reds, purples, yellows and oranges.

In spring, many of the native wildflowers are like Whos in Whoville – hidden but present. It's not very useful just naming them, since common names can vary and you won't know what they look like just by reading a name. I'm also no botanist or native plant expert, so, this is more of an appeal to look beyond the familiar explosion of exotics and have a spring fling with the natives this season. The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center online listing has been immensely helpful: [www.wildflower.org](http://www.wildflower.org). Visit a native nursery (be choosy in selecting one that actually knows and offers natives) to learn more and start a native garden. Pick out a great native plant book at the library or online. Almost every reference has a combination of natives and exotics, and usually lists which are native. Or find a brochure on Arkansas Trees and Wildflowers at places like Hobbs State Park. Do you know of a great natives-only field guide for the flowers of our region? Let me know so I can spread the word! [MakeSomeRipples@Gmail.com](mailto:MakeSomeRipples@Gmail.com)

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist building an off-grid cottage for land conservation on Kessler Mountain. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer a solar-hosted online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: [www.RipplesBlog.org](http://www.RipplesBlog.org).