

For Vermont Standard
For May 26 --Sage Sassafras column on gardening

Before Bunker Hill

The traditional wedding month is around the corner, making June a good time to think about marrying culture and nature. Come to think of it, creating lasting relationships and pleasing aesthetics from the raw materials of Vermont's botanical heritage may be a lot easier than and not as thorny as shaping harmonious lives from the raw materials of humans.

Let's start with those plants said to be native to this region before Bunker Hill. They've been established in meadows, marshes and mountains for so long that they, like Byzantine stylites, require minimal sustenance. On the other hand, the typical fashionista garden plant thrives on TLC. It may come as a surprise to recall that before we were bent on creating butterfly gardens these charming creatures, like their honey-producing friends, flourished on native species that serve another purpose of discouraging the growth of invasives.

The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department's Natural Heritage Information Project maintains a list compiled as recently as February 2011 of threatened and endangered plants of Vermont. A website, www.PlantNative.org, maintains a list of trees, shrubs, ground covers, flowering perennials and ferns that while not necessarily endangered species are those native to our region. Doubtless many of the plants listed through both of these resources are applicable to permaculture, an old but now new again concept of gardening and farming that gives Mother Nature a passing shot at working her wonders for us. (Sustainable Woodstock is a good source of information on permaculture.)

Remember the Woodstock Garden Club Plant Sale is 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday May 28 in front of the Norman Williams Public Library in Woodstock.

In the meantime, happy gardening. Check www.woodstockgardenclub.org for gardening ideas and remember that Mother Nature needs all the attention we can pay her.