

# SEVEN BENDS AND FRIENDS



OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF SEVEN BENDS NURSERY



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*SOCIAL MEDIA*



*NEXT FAIR*

- GardenFest at Belle Grove Plantation: June 3

## *Letter from Lara*

Wow. It has been a busy month!

We are nearing the end of our spring fair season, and have been overjoyed to see many of your smiling faces as we beat the elements to get our plants into your hands this past month. It's been great sharing the space with other native plant nurseries who understand the challenges of running a business with an environmentally-minded mission. Each nursery is a bit different in how they approach this challenge - some are resale, some grow from seed, some focus on woody plants, others flowering perennials... ALL of us care.

It is becoming apparent that there is a movement across the US, shifting the focus of gardening from aesthetics and status to supporting ecological health. People care about our pollinators, birds, and wildlife, and more and more, we are realizing our dependence on them for our own health and well-being.

We thank you for supporting your local native-specialty nurseries so that we can continue to support your healthful gardening journey!

Dr. Lara Lacher



# Let's Set Something Straight

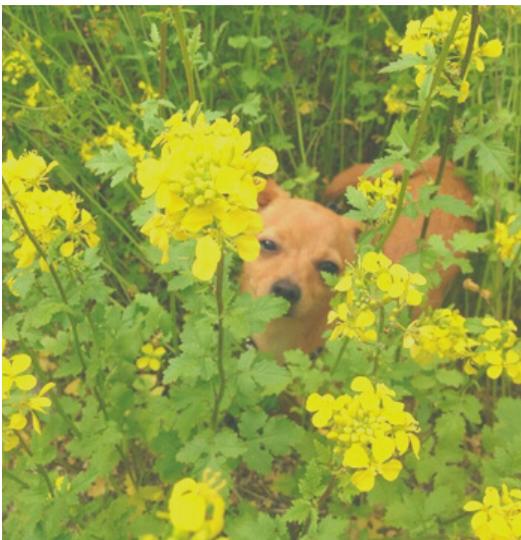


## NATIVE CULTIVARS VS. STRAIGHT SPECIES

You may have heard that here at Seven Bends Nursery we have a “straight species promise”. In other words, we not only are a native-only nursery, but we also do not carry “cultivars” or “nativars”.

Now, you may be asking “What is a straight species?” And, “Why is our promise a big deal?” If this is you, then read on!

Lately, in the native plant community, there has been a lot of confusion surrounding native cultivars also known as “nativars”. We paid a few visits to some garden centers and plant nurseries that marketed having native plants for sale just to see how widespread native cultivars are in our region. After visiting a couple of these locations over the course of two days we surprisingly didn't find a single native straight species plant. They were all cultivars. So what is a native cultivar and why are they different from a straight species?



Peek-a-boo! It's Boo in the flowers!



## Looking for Volunteers!

### COMMUNITY BUILDING EVENT!!

We are creating a native plant landscape at the Winchester Visitors Center!

And, **WE NEED YOU** to make it happen!

Sign up to help us plant almost 500 native plants on **SUNDAY, JUNE 11th.**

Click [HERE](#) to sign up. Please spread the word!

# May Flowers!

A row of several pink flowers on thin stems, arranged in a slightly wavy line. The flowers are simple in design with five petals each.



#### WHAT IS A CULTIVAR?

A "cultivar" refers to a plant that was selectively bred by humans to produce desired characteristics such as, but not limited to, a certain color, size/shape of flowers, different numbers of leaves, or a certain height. These traits are developed to increase the marketability of a species in the traditional ornamental nursery trade.

#### WHAT IS A STRAIGHT SPECIES?

Straight species on the other hand are species that have not been altered by human breeding and are direct descendants of wild species. Straight species are "open-pollinated" meaning that they are randomly pollinated by other plants of the same species as they would naturally in the wild.

Examples of a few straight species and their cultivars:

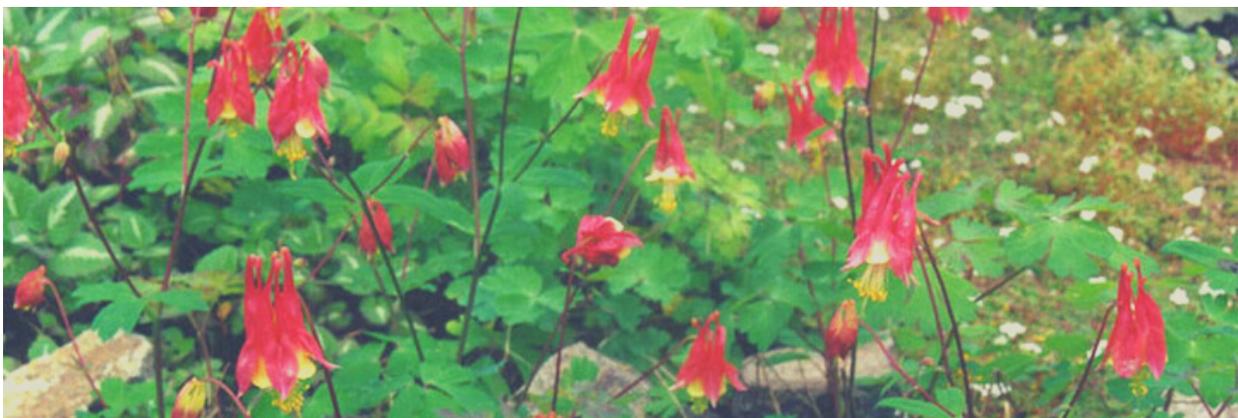
- *Achillea millefolium* → *Achillea* "Strawberry Seduction"
- *Agastache foeniculum* → *Agastache* "Golden Jubilee"
- *Asclepias tuberosa* → *Asclepias* "Hello Yellow"
- *Lobelia cardinalis* → *Lobelia* "Fried Green Tomatoes"
- *Aquilegia canadensis* → *Aquilegia* "Corbett"

#### WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?

Reason #1: Native wildlife evolved with the straight species:

Native wildlife, especially pollinators, evolved with native plants within their region. Many of our native pollinators are specialists that will only collect pollen from specific plant species. For example, bees in the Colletidae family, also known as plaster bees, collect resources from only Goldenrods and Asters. Each species of pollinator can have drastically different morphologies from each others and even different techniques to collect pollen. For example, bumble bees pollinate through buzz pollination which requires them to cling onto a flower and shake pollen out. Whereas butterflies use their elongated proboscis to reach deep into flowers. Hummingbirds collect nectar mostly from brightly colored tubular-shaped plants like columbine or foxgloves. Changes that are made to a species' flower shape or the number of petals inhibit certain pollinators from accessing their resources.

Flowers are not the only important part of a plant for our pollinators or other wildlife species. Many larvae of native insect species feed on the leaves of native plants. Cultivars that are bred to have dark red or purple leaves affect the palatability of the plant for these insects, meaning they are not attracting these larvae and thus not providing the benefits straight species could offer.





Recent research points to the conclusion that native pollinators prefer straight species over cultivars:

- Native pollinators prefer straight species:
  - Changes in leaf color of tree and shrub cultivars show a 3-5x reduction in feeding compared to their straight species counterparts:
    - <https://extension.illinois.edu/blogs/garden-scoop/2019-12-28-native-vs-nativar-do-cultivars-native-plants-have-same-benefits>
  - Some cultivars produce fewer resources than their straight species counterparts:
    - <https://pollinatorgardens.org/2013/02/08/my-research/>

Reason #2: Planting straight species promotes diverse plant genetics:

In many cases, in order to retain the traits bred into cultivars, these plants are propagated by cuttings. Propagation via cuttings results in "offspring" that are genetically identical to their parents. Therefore, planting cultivars that are propagated via this method decreases the overall genetic diversity on the landscape, which in turn also decreases the resilience of that landscape to disease or other environmental impacts. In addition, some cultivars are infertile and cannot produce seeds or fruits that feed wildlife. Not to mention they can't be harvested for seeds that you can spread in your garden! Planting straight species, particularly those that are grown from seed (as we do!!), helps to maintain or increase the genetic diversity of the landscape.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Although there is more research to be done to understand the ways that native straight species and nativars differ, we do believe that straight species are the best way to provide for wildlife and increase ecological value. As people like to say, don't fix something that isn't broken!

In short, plant straight species whenever possible. If you must select a cultivar for your landscape for whatever reason, Dr. Lacher recommends avoiding plants bred to have changes in flower shape (for example increases in petal number) and flower and leaf color.

As always, when you are shopping for native plants for your garden, we recommend you visit a nursery that specializes in native plants. You are much more likely to find straight species at these nurseries. Moreover, you will find people who are more knowledgeable about their native plants than any box store or non-native garden store. Support the nurseries that have put it all on the line to challenge the long-held traditions of the garden industry in growing and supplying plants that are good for us and our ecosystems!

