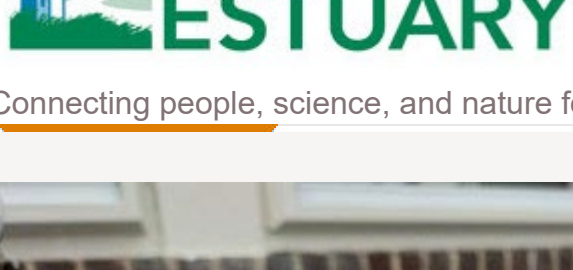


Perennial Pages

Gardens for Clean Water: A Seasonal Newsletter for Habitat Owners & Caretakers



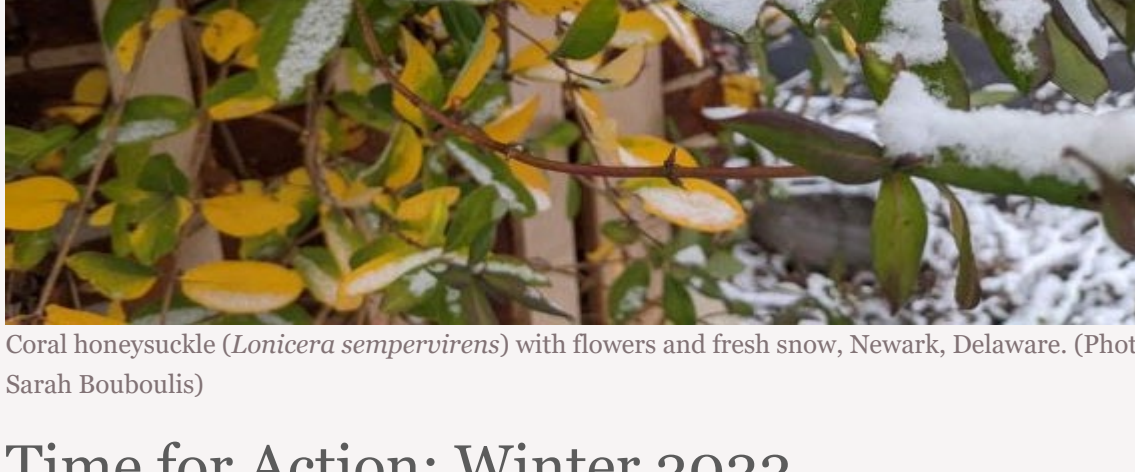
Connecting people, science, and nature for a healthy Delaware River and Bay



Purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) seed heads covered in snow, January 2022, Newark, Delaware (Photo: Sarah Bouboulis)

Winter Insights

During winter, many of us hunker down and don't spend much time in our gardens. But if you can stand the cold, our gardens still have a lot to offer. Watching birds feeding from the flower stalks you left behind can be a joy. Seeing snow cling to remaining vegetation can also bring different and interesting forms into view. So, if you have the spirit and the ability, look through your window or lace up your boots and enjoy your garden this season. In this issue we'll highlight the few garden care tasks you may want to do in winter, as well as a feature on birds in your winter garden.



Coral honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) with flowers and fresh snow, Newark, Delaware. (Photo: Sarah Bouboulis)

Time for Action: Winter 2022

Here are some of the top tips for maintaining your winter garden.

- Check on any plants you planted/transplanted in the fall. They may need additional mulch or wind protection to avoid freezing.
- After wind storms, you may want to check mulch levels of all plants, as leaves and other materials may have shifted.
- If you have a rain garden, check the inlets and outlets for any clogs and debris, which can happen more quickly in fall/winter.
- Start planning for spring! Many native seed and plant sellers have pre-order sales and catalogs available in winter! Even if you don't plan to buy from them, some native plant sellers provide a lot of useful information on native plants and their growing conditions.

Check out past winter issues of [Perennial Pages](#) for more garden tips and tricks.



American holly (*Ilex opaca*), Hockessin, Delaware (Photo: Sarah Bouboulis)

Feed the Birds with Native Plants

Native plants can feed birds all year round. However, winter is usually the time of year when nature lovers bust out bird seed and suet for our feathered friends. You can cut down that bird food bill while also still enjoying watching the birds (and supporting more of the native ecosystem) by planting native plants with winter food availability in mind.

Benefits of feeding birds with native plants instead of seed:

- Minimize invasive plant species. Commercial seed mixtures may contain unknown or even invasive species. Migrating birds can then unintentionally spread these non-native plant species through their droppings (i.e. excrement).
- Support ecosystems. Planting native plants supports the plant itself (of course), as well as insects and other wildlife that thrive with native plants.
- Provide natural shelter. Native plants provide both food and shelter for birds. Unfortunately, many standard bird feeders are out in the open and can provide easy access for predators.
- Prevent the spread of disease. Birds often congregate closely to bird feeders, which can lead to the spread of disease. In 2020-2021 bird enthusiasts in our area were encouraged to take down bird feeders to prevent the spread of a virus in birds.

What to plant for winter feeding:

- Shrubs and trees are always a great way to start, and many provide food year round. For winter, try species of *Ilex* (winterberry, or other hollies), and elderberries (*Sambucus nigra*) which can provide berries all winter long.
- A classic bird feeder seed is sunflower, and we have plenty of native sunflowers that can fill this niche. Swamp sunflower (*Helianthus angustifolius*), woodland sunflower (*Helianthus divaricatus*), and giant sunflower (*Helianthus giganteus*) are all great native options. The most common species of seed in commercial bird seed is annual sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*). This species is native to North America, but primarily the western US, not the mid-Atlantic.
- Asters are late season bloomers, which means they create seed late into the year as well. Chickadees and sparrows enjoy many of the native asters (genus *Symphyotrichum* or *Eurybia*).
- Finches, juncos, and many other birds love coneflowers (*Echinacea purpurea*) and black-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia* spp.).
- Plant as many native species as you can! The more variety of plants/seed, the more variety of birds!

You don't have to quit the traditional bird feeders cold turkey (side note: native grasses could even attract wild turkeys in winter!), just start planting. Keep your feeders as long as they still bring you joy, but maybe one day the native plants will start being the entertainment of choice!

What's "up"?

Seasonal Plant Identification



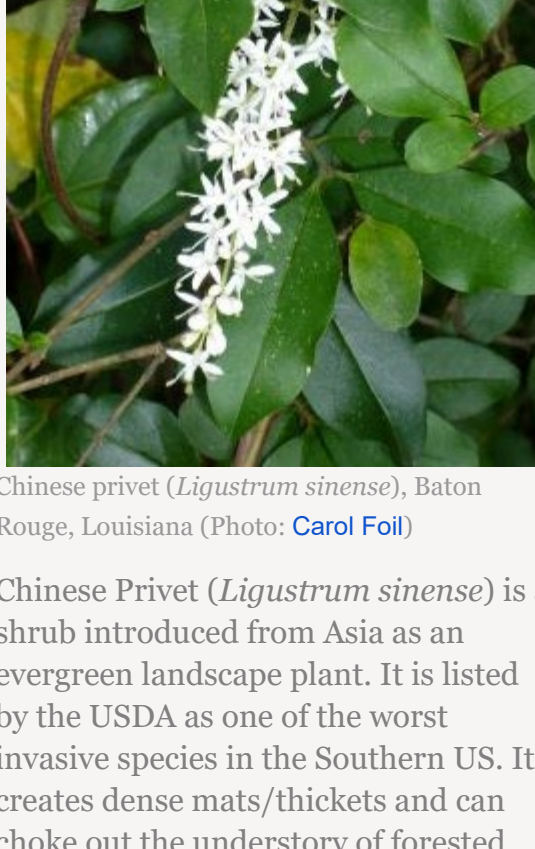
Eastern prickly pear (*Opuntia humifusa*) Newark, Delaware (spring) (Photo: Sarah Bouboulis)

The Eastern Prickly Pear (*Opuntia humifusa*) is indeed a native cactus, and one of the only ones to survive our harsh winters (they even survive into Canada)! Yes, we're talking about a cactus in winter! They create an antifreeze-like chemical that helps them survive the cold. Prickly pears don't look great in the winter, they tend to shrivel up and look deflated. However, they do generally remain green/gray and won't leave bare spots in your garden. They are also quick growers, low to the ground and do okay in a variety of soil conditions, but prefer full sun and well-draining soil. Of course, they do have spines! And some gardeners find them very difficult to weed around and keep tidy. Putting them in containers is one way to control the prickles from invading the rest of your garden. Their flowers are beautiful and bees love them!

[Read More](#)

Space Invaders

Invasive Species Spotlight



Chinese privet (*Ligustrum sinense*), Baton Rouge, Louisiana (Photo: Carol Foil)

Chinese Privet (*Ligustrum sinense*) is a shrub introduced from Asia as an evergreen landscape plant. It is listed by the USDA as one of the worst invasive species in the Southern US. It creates dense mats/thickets and can choke out the understory of forested areas. The berries it produces are also toxic to humans and some other animals. It is tolerant of nearly every soil and sun condition. It grows quickly and can often be found growing suckers quite far from the mother plant. Birds can also spread their seeds. It out competes native shrubs and other understory vegetation. It is evergreen, and this makes it easier to find and remove at any time of the year. It is most detrimental in newly disturbed areas, but can become established in even more mature locations.

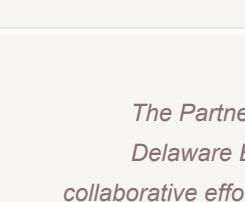
[Read More](#)

PDE News

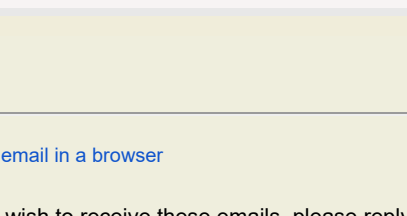
If you haven't caught one already, the final installment of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership webinar series "Envisioning Equitable & Sustainable Housing" is coming up January 25th. [Click here to learn more and register.](#)

Feel free to send any of your gardening questions or topic ideas to Perennial Pages editor, Sarah Bouboulis: sbouboulis@delawareestuary.org

Partner

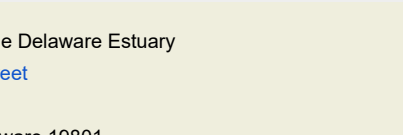


Are you interested in supporting Perennial Pages? Contact sbouboulis@delawareestuary.org to find out how you can help!



The Partnership for the Delaware Estuary, host of the Delaware Estuary Program, leads science-based and collaborative efforts to improve the tidal Delaware River and Bay, which spans Delaware, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

Copyright © 2022 [Partnership for the Delaware Estuary](#) all rights reserved. [Become a supporter.](#)



[Click to view this email in a browser](#)

If you no longer wish to receive these emails, please reply to this message with "Unsubscribe" in the subject line or simply click on the following link: [Unsubscribe](#)

Partnership for the Delaware Estuary
110 S. Poplar Street
Suite 202
Wilmington, Delaware 19801
US

[Read the VerticalResponse marketing policy.](#)

