

Benton Beach Beacon



May 2003

Spring Work Weekend Approaches

May 17th and 18th, 9:00 AM

Spring is here already and it is time to get our beloved beach ready for the summer months! There are the usual projects, including cleaning out the beach house raking the beach, painting the picnic tables and putting up the canopy. In addition, this is the year we will put the finishing touches on the beautiful new dock with the addition of a handrail and completion of the second bench on the "T". We will also be spreading 8 cu. Yards of loam and seeding to fill in an area between the beach house and outhouse. There are huge ruts and depressions since the port-a-john truck got stuck there last summer!

So come whatever day is best for you and bring gloves and a metal rake. All cleaning supplies, paints, brushes, etc. will be supplied.

There will be pizza provided both days at around 1:00 pm. Anyone who would like to bring a dessert to share, that would be lovely.

Any questions or suggestions, please contact Ellen Fales at (401) 783-2429. See you there!

Benton Beach Wildflowers In July

By Holly Whelan

1. **Crown vetch** is the vine-like low growing (1-2") plant with pea-like purple/pink flowers that grows along the wall between the beach and the meadow. The seeds and

foliate are eaten by wildlife and the plant adds nitrogen to the soil, as do all members of the pea family.

2. **Queen Anne's Lace** is surely one wildflower most of us should all know. It has a flat-topped lacy cluster, with a single small dark purple flower in the center. It is also called a wild carrot because the root smells and looks like a carrot. Queen Anne's Lace is a member of the parsley family.
3. **Autumn Wild Onion** can be recognized along the beach road by its leafless stem (rising from a cluster of grass-like leaves) and dome-like cluster of lavender flowers. The bulbs of wild onion can be eaten (I haven't tried them yet!) raw or par-boiled. They can be used to repel insects.
4. **White sweet clovers** are bushy plants growing 2-5', with long, slender, cylindrical spike-like clusters of cream-white flowers. Try crushing the flowers for the fragrance of fresh mown hay. White sweet clover is widely used as pasture crops for nitrogen enrichment of the soil.
5. **Beach peas** are particularly common around on Rogers Island, as well as around Turkey Point, and likes gravelly beach areas. It has a trailing vine with varying shades of pin-lavender pea-like flowers.
6. **Blue vervain** can be found around the edges of Rogers Island, by looking for candelabra-like spikes of blue-violet flowers at the top of a "square" stem and branches. Bumblebees are important pollinators. In ancient times, blue vervain was a cure-all among medicinal plants. The genus plant name (verbena) is Latin for sacred plant.

7. **Bittersweet Nightshade** vine (or climbing nightshade) will catch your eye between the meadow and beach, with its clusters of tiny blue or violet star-shaped flowers with a long yellow “beak” in the center. Although sometimes called deadly nightshade, the plant toxin is not fatal; however, the berries are attractive to children and can cause poisoning if eaten in quantity. This plant was once used in England to counteract witchcraft.
8. **Purple Loosestrife** is beginning to creep into Benton meadow, with its tall showy spike-like pink flower. We’ll have to watch out for this one, because despite its spectacular beauty, it is an aggressive species and tends to crowd out native aquatics valuable to waterfowl and other wildlife.
9. **Common Mullein** is one of my favorites for herbal purposes, particularly the yellow flower, which is really a center stalk of light yellow flowers, which open a few at a time. The leaves are white-wooly looking and feel like velvet. Indians lined their moccasins with the leaves to deep out the cold. The leaves and flowers are used for ear infections, as well as croup. If you get a sunburn at Benton Beach, the leaves can be applied to the skin for relief.
10. **Seaside Goldenrod** has arching branches that bear only one-sided clusters of bright yellow flowers. They can be found on the edges of saline or brackish marshes, as we have at Benton Beach.
11. **Joe Pyeweed** has fuzzy flat-topped masses of mauve pink flowers and is seen commonly along roadsides and Benton Beach in late summer and early fall. An Indian named “Joe-Pye” used this plant to cure fevers. Early American colonists used it to treat typhus.
12. **Red Clover** is one wildflower most all of us know, with its round pink flower heads dotting the meadow. The nectar that attracts the bumblebee to the red clover is at the base of each flower. To reach it, bumblebees must stick their head deep within a flower. As she hungrily laps up nectar, pollen sticks to her hairy body. This pollen will pollinate the egg of the next flower the bee lands on. It is much easier for humans to reach the nectar. Try pulling a flower out of the red clover head and suck the nectar from the bottom. It is easy to see what attracts bumblebees!
13. **Prickly Lettuce** is a wild edible Benton Beach plant. It is also called a compass plant because when sufficiently in the open, most of the leaves twist edgewise north and south at noon.
14. **Golden Alexander’s** fill the beach meadow with a golden hue, looking much like Queen Anne’s lace, but not quite as delicate. Golden Alexander’s are in the parsley family and are related to the parsnip.
15. **Catnip** is a rather hairy plant growing near the fire pit and in the meadow. It about 2 feet high, with white or whitish-lavender flowers. The stems and leaves are covered with grayish down. Catnip is in the mint family and contains a chemical called nepeta lactone, which repels insects and protects other plants. It may be this chemical that gives cats such pleasure.
16. **Curly Dock** grows 2-4 feet in the meadow, with reddish-greenish “flowers” resembling seeds clustered on stems. It flowers June-September and is in the buckwheat family.
17. **Butter and Eggs** everyone has seen at Benton Beach, whether you know it or not. These 1-inch yellow-lipped flowers look like miniature snapdragons as they are in fact in the snapdragon family. They grow about 1-2 feet high. If you look carefully on the lower flower “lip”, you will see an orange path which leads to nectar, serving as a “honey guide” for insects.
18. **Bull Thistle** grows 2-6 feet in the Benton Beach meadow and interestingly is in the sunflower family. This is a very prickly plant and should be handled only with gloves. It is a biennial, blossoming every other year. The “thistledown” or purple bristles on the fruit, serve as parachutes to carry the light seeds.
19. **Seashore Marshmallow** has light pink flowers (5 petals) with yellow stamens (center of petals), and downy leaves. I grow this herb in my herb garden, as the root is a demulcent (soother or irritated membranes). Marshmallow flowers have been used in cough syrups and as a gargle for sore throats. A poultice of fresh leaves

steeped in hot water, soothes burns and insect bites. As with any other herb, do not use without consent from your Dr. because this herb can prevent absorption of other medications.

20. **Sea Lavender** surely is a favorite salt marsh wildflower for many of us at Benton Beach. The morning of my wedding the bridal party gathered at Benton Beach to pick sprigs of this delicate beauty for the church pews. From July to October, tiny feathery purple flowers form branching clusters. Remember if you do pick, do so sparingly, and without disturbing the roots.
21. **Stagnum Sumac** frequents Rogers Island, with its branches and twigs covered with velvety hair. The reddish-brown berries are eaten by songbirds and gamebirds.

That's all for now folks. Have fun identifying and exploring Benton Beach wildflowers!

Pumpkin Steals the Show

J.E. Helander

The adventures of Pumpkin Helander have been variously presented before. Pumpkin is now eleven years old and still a beloved resident of this Sachem's Head neighborhood where he has many regular stops. It is still believed (by some) that he is the reincarnation of the late F.N. Benton or E.H. Benton. Regardless of whether you believe this, you would probably agree that Pumpkin has a persona that is half human and half feline.

On the weekend of April 26, the Benton farmhouse at 370 Vineyard Point Road was one of ten featured homes on the Guilford Keeping Society's old house tour. Despite a rainy day, the event netted \$8,000+ for the non-profit historical society. Several hundred people traipsed through the first floor of the farmhouse, donning blue disposable booties at the front entry, which is now an established practice for most historic house tours.

One of the special exhibits in the farmhouse on April 26 featured authentic memorabilia from the celebrated Sachem's Head Hotel, which burned to the ground in 1865. The quaint connection between the hotel and the farmhouse arises from the circumstance of the house going out of the family for eight years so that the owners of the hotel, the Scranton family, could

use the Benton farm for the production of all the fruits, vegetables, and dairy products that daily graced the hotel's dining tables.

Pumpkin's owner wasn't sure what he would do or where he would go during this organized invasion of guests. Typically, he would hide in the garage upon the first presentation of noise and confusion. Surprisingly, he remained curled up in his own bed in the bedroom throughout the duration of the tour. He was on display just as much as the hotel relics and truly gave the old house an added dash of domestic tranquility.

The real surprise, however, was that appreciative guests had more comments and questions over Pumpkin than they did the house! Again, Pumpkin steals the show!

Stay tuned for future adventures of Pumpkin Helander, including: Pumpkin and the Coyotes; Pumpkin and the Ox named Rock; and Pumpkin Goes to the Beach.

Notes

Calendar of Events:

Please call Donna Chemacki (203-245-2998), Benton Beach Corp. secretary, for scheduling a special beach event. This is not necessary for small, spontaneous gatherings.

It should be remembered that even when a function is in progress at the beach, the beach is still open to any who wish to use the beach.

May 17, 18 (Sat, Sun): Work Weekend, starting at 9:00 am

June 8 (Sun): Lynne -TOPPS

June 10 (Tue): Lynne - Alpha @ 4:00pm

June 23 (Mon) - June 30 (Mon): Fales/Schaefer campout

July 5 (Sat): Eliot - party with friends; @ 12:00 noon

July 13 (Sun): Holly - 12:00 pm with friends

July 20 (Sun): Lynne - Curves 2:00 pm (approx. 20 people)

Aug. 2 (Sat): Family Picnic 1:00 pm appetizers/ 3:00 pm high tide

Aug. 9 (Sat) - Aug. 17 (Sun): Whelan Family campout

Aug. 22 (Fri) - Aug. 24 (Sun): Tim and Sharon campout with friends

Content Submission

Please submit any articles or family updates to Tim Chemacki for incorporation into the next issue (*preferably by email*).

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