



Pumpkin Brook Organic Gardening, Inc.

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Volume 2, March 2012

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Greetings,

Wow, what a spring! With each hour of warm weather, new shoots are pushing up from the ground and green buds are swelling on bare woody stalks. Our Pumpkin Brook crew completed their training days this week, so I'm scheduling immediate field work. If you were hibernating or travelling in February or March, it's not too late at all to answer our spring survey and sign up for [plant health care programs](#). If all this is new to you, please [contact me](#) now and we'll get you going. We have extended the pre-season discount until April 1, but get your replies in quickly!

An Interview with Designer Julie Lisk on Habitat Gardens by Brianna Asbury

Pumpkin Brook's Design Consultant, Julie Lisk, has a passion for wildlife and designs gardens that benefit native flora and fauna. Julie recently talked to me and I have shared her insights here.

Brianna: Can you tell me a little bit about your background and how you got interested in wildlife?

Julie: I grew up in rural, central New York surrounded by forests and streams. My grandfather was a dairy farmer who also enjoyed tending to his rose garden, taking photographs of nature, and bird watching. It was likely my grandfather that instilled in me a sense of deep appreciation for nature, and I became a nature photographer because of his influence.



Julie with Wood Turtle

I would go on to study art as an undergraduate, but always maintained an interest in outdoor activities like hiking, gardening, and traveling. Much later I attended the Radcliffe Seminars Program in Landscape Design. From the get go of my studies at Radcliffe I was curious about the relationship between plants and wildlife. In my last year there I had the privilege of studying under the guidance of wildlife biologist, Bryan Windmiller.

Bryan opened my eyes to a new way of looking at landscape design in his course on wetland ecology. At this time the only information on gardening for wildlife had to do superficially with birds and butterflies, however under Bryan's guidance and my research I was introduced to a big world of nature that included turtles, salamanders, insects, mammals and other fauna.

There's still time to return your Plant Health Care Contract.

We've extended the pre-payment deadline to April 1st. If you didn't receive it, [e-mail](#) us right away.

At the time I was taking the course I had recently moved from Arlington to Groton and had a wetland in my new backyard that I wanted to learn more about. One of our assignments was to survey a natural area for wildlife species, so I jumped at the opportunity to explore the wetland behind my house.

My study consisted of comparing bird species in three distinct wetland plant communities: buttonbush swamp, shrub swamp, and red maple swamp. Each plant community differed from the other in the kinds and numbers of birds it attracted. The red maple swamp had higher individual numbers of birds of fewer species. The shrub swamp had a greater diversity of bird species and, the buttonbush swamp had the lowest numbers of both individuals and species. Each plant community supported species the others did not.

This discovery completely changed the way that I looked at the world, before that I would have thought that it was all just wetland. I realized how specific plants and plant communities can have a tremendous impact on the birds it contains.

Brianna: That's great. It sounds like that class really inspired you. How has that understanding affected your design style?

Julie: I approach design through the lens of a wildlife biologist. When I do any design geared toward wildlife enhancement, I start by carefully observing the property and its surrounding environment trying to ascertain what species are already existing in the area. I then try to find ways that I can enhance the existing habitat. This could result in a number of different approaches from planting native plant material, to maintaining and managing early successional plant communities, to creating meadows, to remediating soils, to developing an invasive species management plan. For example, if I know that turtles are known to be in the surrounding area then I would make sure that pockets of sunny, exposed, well-draining soils were present within the landscape plan to allow for ideal conditions for turtle nesting.

Brianna: You must get a lot of business from turtles. I would imagine they are very slow in paying their bills though.

Julie: (laughing) Yes, especially during nesting season.

Brianna: Do you think the average homeowner can make a difference by planting native plants and creating conditions in the landscape that are beneficial to wildlife?

Julie: While nothing can replace an intact, functioning ecosystem (and a priority on protecting them is essential) I believe that well informed modifications that homeowners make to their landscapes can be very valuable. Any time a homeowner provides natural food and water sources, creates cover or shelter, gives wildlife a place to raise their young, or practices organic gardening they are making a difference. I have seen it result in some very beautiful landscapes too. Most of my clients find the rewards to be fulfilling as they learn to interact with wildlife in new and exciting ways. Think of native plantings as a huge bird feeder that attracts and supports not only birds, but also an orchestra of plants and animals that together create a symphony.

You can [learn more](#) about our habitat garden design, including how

you can certify your yard with the National Wildlife Federation as a Certified Wildlife Habitat, on our website.

Complimentary Curb Appeal Audits

Pumpkin Brook has a new Curb Appeal Audit service for property owners looking to sell their homes. During a half hour visit, our staff will determine the aesthetic value of your property and then make recommendations. We will give you a list of "Critical," "Important," and "Value Added" improvements. As an added service, we would be happy to give your landscape a one-time spruce up to get things back in order. Please see the [our website](#) for more information on our new service.



This home has curb appeal!

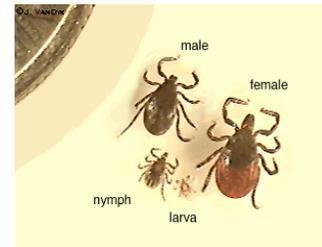
If you have friends looking to sell their home or increase its value, we greatly appreciate your referrals. Call or e-mail [Priscilla](#) to set up your curb appeal audit today.

Ticks - there is an organic solution!

Ticks are active all months of the year in our region. With this warm weather, we expect a spike in tick activity. The risk of Lyme disease is higher than ever. Find information on our [website](#) about our organic tick and mosquito control program, using a natural cedar oil. Carmine tells me he will make the first of four applications this season beginning in mid-April. That's not far off!

Think preventively, too, when it comes to ticks. Eliminate habitat where their vector, the white-footed mouse, likes to take shelter - under a prickly barberry is a perfect example! Here's yet another reason to remove this non-native, invasive plant. Replace with red-berrying winterberry, spicebush, or even highbush blueberry or red twig dogwood for a completely different look.

For personal protection, the Liquid Fence Company now sells a towelette called Liquid Net which is soaked in a natural tick repellent. This product also helps to repel mosquitoes and is safe for both children and adults. Check yourself for ticks after spending time outside, and check your pets daily if they go outdoors.



Ticks at varying stages



The landscape is just beginning to come to life!

March Is the Time for....

- Shearing down ornamental grasses to start their growth over for the season
- Pruning dormant shrubs, woody herbs and small trees (such as spiraea, butterfly bush, caryopteris, lavender, beautyberry)
- Pruning fruit trees, grapevines, blueberries and raspberries
- Cutting back winter interest perennials
- Checking shrubs and small trees for winter damage and pruning it out
- Cleaning up salt, sand and winter debris from driveways,

walkways and lawns

- Applying gypsum to counteract salt damage to beds or lawns
- Making notes about plants to divide, transplant or add in April
- Applying horticultural oil sprays to deflect snowball aphid and lacebug damage to ornamental shrubs

Quick Links

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We look forward to seeing you and your gardens very soon!

Sincerely,
Priscilla

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