

Wildflowers

Near the Charles River

Along the Greenway Path
in Watertown and Newton:
An Identification Guide For Walkers



By Carole Smith Berney and Patsy Murray

Photographs © Carole Smith Berney
Map Illustration © Gil Murray

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Dear Walker:

On a late summer afternoon walk on the Charles River pathway in Watertown, we met by chance and stopped to talk, marveling at the large variety of wildflowers unfolding during the seasons, but wishing we knew more about them.

That is how we embarked on producing this little book, with encouragement and partial funding from the Watertown Cultural Council, the Watertown Savings Bank, and the MDC (now the Department of Conservation and Recreation, DCR).

Our main purpose is to acquaint you with the wildflowers seen most commonly along the Charles River Greenway Corridor in Watertown, Newton, Waltham and elsewhere, not to provide you with a definitive horticultural field guide. For more in-depth botanical information, see our list of suggested readings at the back, and for a complete listing of native plantings restored through MDC efforts, contact the DCR (as listed below).

We feel lucky to be able to enjoy this beautiful natural resource in our back yard, and we hope you take pleasure in it too.

Carole and Patsy

Scanning and Layout by Jonathan Roper

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BUTTERCUPS

Blooming from May to September, the buttercup has petals with a waxy layer which adds brilliance to its yellow color. Its juice can be harmful to livestock and to humans if eaten. Also called Crowfoot because its leaves resemble the toes of a crow. Look for it in the more moist areas of the river banks.



BUTTER-AND-EGGS

This colorful plant grows from 1-3 feet high, with small, snapdragon-like flowers in shades of yellow and orange. The doors to its nectar are closed and can only be pushed open by the heaviest of bees. Bristly hairs which cover the stems protect the flower from invasions by ants. Also known as common toadflax (because the flowers resemble a small yellow mouth with an orange palate like the mouth of a toad), eggs and bacon, and bread-and-butter, its flowers bloom from June to October in open, dry areas. An insecticide can be made by mixing its acrid juices with milk.



CELANDINE

This hardy, 1-2 feet high bushy plant has deep yellow 4-petaled flowers and long, thin seed pods, resembling miniature string beans. It is a member of the poppy family and blooms from May through the end of the summer along the more shady sections of the path. Its bright orange-yellow sap has been used in the past to cure warts, eczema, corns, and skin disorders, but it can

stain clothing and irritate the skin. Another name for the plant is Devil's Milk.

EVENING PRIMROSE

This bright yellow flower, nearly 2 inches broad, grows on a wand-like stalk 1 to 5 feet high and opens at sunset. Pollination may happen at night by a large sphinx moth, after which the corolla wilts, hangs and drops away. Towards the end of summer, if sufficient numbers of seeds are set to insure a future, flowers may open all day for visits from bees. Its juices have been used for the treatment of migraine, eczema, and PMS (though such uses are not approved by the US FDA). Look for it along the sides of the river pathways, blooming from June through September.



BLACK-EYED SUSAN

Like the daisy, this flower also displays rays around an "eye," but the center is really more of a brown or dark purple than black, surrounded by bright yellow pollen. Other names for it are Brown-Eyed Susan, Brown Betty, or Yellow Daisy. This flower does well in dry, sunny areas; the hairs on its stems and on its leaves help reduce evaporation. It blooms from June through August.



GOLDENROD

The rod-shaped clusters of this bright yellow flower can appear in July and last through October, mostly in open, sunny areas along the sides of the path. Every flower head contains 1000 flowers. In olden days, goldenrod was used to heal wounds, and tea and dye were made from the flowers. Despite beliefs to the contrary, this lovely flower is not the cause of fall hay fever; ragweed is the culprit!



COMMON MULLEIN

This plant is found here and there along the river path from July to October. Its stout, erect stem has large, felt-like leaves and saucer-shaped yellow flowers around the top of its stalk. When blooming in July and August, only a few flowers open at a time. The first year the plant produces large, grayish-green, flannel-like leaves. The second year, it sends up a

woody leafy stem 2-7

feet tall, ending in a cylindrical flower cluster.

TANSY

The bright yellow button-like disks of tansy flowers grow in a flat-topped cluster at the top of a 2-4 foot high plant. Each yellow, strongly scented flower head is composed of tiny tubular flowers. Look for it blooming at the edges of the path from July through September. Also known as Golden Buttons or Bitter Buttons, its leaves were used for making a tea for colds, for flavoring puddings and cakes, as a dye, and for preserving meat. When consumed in large quantities, it has been known to cause death.



ST. JOHN'S-WORT

This rather bushy, 2-3 feet high plant with yellow flowers got its name because it often bloomed in mid-summer, the time of the festival of St. John the Baptist. In the 1500s the plant was regarded as holy, and believed to chase away darkness, evil, and the devil. In modern times, it is sold as a natural remedy for depression. Holding up the leaves against the light, one can see small clear dots, which legend says are pricks made by the devil with a needle.

feet tall, ending in a cylindrical flower cluster.

YELLOW FLAG or SWORD FLAG

This beautiful wild iris began as a European escape from gardens, but now grows wild in marshy areas of the river path to a height of one to three feet. Its leaves are long and stiff, like swords, with several flowers on each flower stem. Look for it blooming in July. (See also Purple Flag.)





JEWELWEED

Also known as Spotted Touch-Me-Not, Lady's Eardrops, and Horns of Plenty, this juicy-stemmed, many-branched flower blooms all summer long, from July through October, mostly in moist, shady sections along the path's boardwalks. Stems can grow from 2 to 6 feet tall, and when crushed, can provide a juice that is effective for treating poison ivy and mosquito bites! Its flowers are yellowish orange, spotted with red, one inch long, and resemble tiny jewels, dangling like earrings. After a rain, the wet leaves have a silvery shine to them (giving it the alternate name, Silverleaf). The seed pods, if touched, will pop open, shooting seeds out.

STAGHORN SUMAC

Staghorn Sumac has a soft, hairy covering on its stems and branches like the velvet stage of a stag's antlers. It is a nonpoisonous shrub related to poison sumac. The large pinnate leaves are made up of many narrow, lancelike, nearly 6 inch long leaflets. The bright pink or red flowers bloom in July and August, eventually turn into berries, and are consumed by the birds. The bush can grow to 10-15 feet tall.



RED CLOVER

This member of the pea family, with round, magenta and white flower heads, grows from 6 to 30 inches tall in open, sunny areas and blooms from May to October. A close look at each flower head reveals many little florets resembling the sweet pea. Bumblebees and butterflies enjoy its nectar supply; thus, the alternative name for this flower: Honey Suckers. Clover is a natural fertilizer; as a legume, its root nodules contain nitrogen-fixing bacteria. Look for it in the meadow area of the path on the Newton side. The design for the club suit in a deck of playing cards came from the clover leaf.

DEPTFORD PINK

The name for this tiny pink flower comes from a town in England. Related to the carnation family, it produces small (1/2 inch wide) flowers on 6-12 inch stems. Look for it in meadow-like areas. You'll need good eyes, since it's so small. But it's worth the search because it's like a miniature jewel!





HEDGE BINDWEED

This plant, which bears a white and pink, trumpet-like flower, is a close relative to the morning glory. It blooms in August and September. The pink lines in the center of the flower are nectar guides, leading insects to the holes at the flower base where nectar is stored. A twining plant, it can be found growing up hedges, around deck railings, or winding around other plants. The arrow shape of the large leaves distinguishes it from the other members of the morning glory family.

PASTURE ROSE

Also known as Carolina Rose or Wild Rose, this 5-petaled flower grows on a low shrub and is related to blackberry. Its flower is 1-1/2 to 2 inches wide, beautifully scented, and blooms in May and June. Later, bright red fruits replace the blossoms.



SMARTWEED or PINKWEED

Various varieties of this plant grow prolifically along the edges of the path, flowering from June to October. They are all members of the buckwheat family and all have pink blossoms varying in length and size, depending on the variety. One type commonly seen along the river path is called "Lady's Thumb" or, in England, "Virgin Mary's Pinch" because of the small dark smudges or blots on the leaves, resembling thumbprints.

BOUNCING BET

This flower is also known as Soapwort, since lather forms when its juice is mixed with water; in the olden days, it was used as a soap substitute. The flowers grow on 1 to 2 foot tall stalks and bloom in July and August. Another name for the plant is Washerwoman, since it was used by housewives to wash woolens and silks by making a soapy solution with the plant's leaves.





MILKWEED

The name of this native plant derives from the sticky white sap in all its parts, which oozes out and may be



a protection against insects. The light pink and white flowers which bloom in July are extremely fragrant and attract bees and butterflies, especially the monarch butterfly, which lays its eggs on the underside of the leaves.

In fall milkweed pods disperse seeds attached to light, silky filaments which are easily carried by the wind. The silk from the plant has been used for stuffing pillows and weaving cloth.

STEEPLEBUSH

The bright magenta spikes resemble a church spire on this erect shrub with woody stems, growing from 1-3 foot high in sunny areas. Blooming starts at the top of the stem, and the tuft of stamens in the center of each small flower gives the blooms a feathery appearance. Also called hardhack, presumably because farmers found them hard to cut when clearing out meadows, it blooms from July through September, after which the stiff brownish flower spikes can be dried and used in flower arrangements.



TYROL KNAPWEED

A member of the sunflower family, this pinkish-purple flower resembles a thistle and grows to a height of 1 to 3 feet in sunny areas where butterflies feed on its nectar. Its wiry-stemmed lavender heads (up to 1-1/2 inches wide) flower from June through August. Look for it in the meadow areas, especially on the Newton side of the river.



PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE

Large colonies of this tall magenta flowering plant make a stunning display along the river banks towards the end of the summer. Flowers bloom from June through September on a spike-like cluster at the top of the stem, 2-5 feet tall.

Loosestrife is an invasive, non-native plant which thrives in wet, damp, swampy habitat and tends to choke out native vegetation. Experiments are underway for controlling the plant, including importing beetles which eat the stems, buds, and leaves.



BLUE VERVAIN

Also known as wild hyssop, swamp verberna, or simpler's joy, this 3 to 7 feet tall plant had many uses in Native American culture as both food and medicine. In present-day alternative medicine, blue vervain's leaves and roots are used for relief of headaches, rheumatism, diarrhea and a variety of other ailments. The seeds are edible when roasted and are ground into a powder and used for a Native American flour called pinole. Despite its name, the flowers are a violet or a deep violet color. Look for it in damp sections.



FALSE INDIGO

This shrub with branching stems up to 15 feet tall is a member of the pea family. In May or June it develops purple, spike-like flowers an inch or more in length, with yellow pollen decorating the blossoms. You'll see it on the river side of the path near the Watertown swimming pool, and by the deck near the dam. Native Americans used the blossoms of this shrub to dye clothing.



VIRGINIA CREEPER

This native climbing vine flowers from June to August and can be found in many areas along the path, sometimes as ground

cover, sometimes twining around railings of the decks and boardwalks. In autumn the Virginia Creeper is one of the first plants to change color and its berries, which turn a beautiful shade of blue in October, are a favorite food of birds, mice, skunks, and chipmunks.. Although it is sometimes confused with poison ivy, the Virginia Creeper has five leaflets (instead of poison ivy's three) and does not cause skin irritation.



COW VETCH

This lovely violet-blue flowered plant is a member of the pea and bean family, and like peas, produces pods. When a vetch tendril comes in contact with another plant, it curls around it for support and continues to grow upward and outward. The sweet nectar of the flower is enjoyed by bees, butterflies, and cows. Cow vetch flowers from May through August. Look for it near the granite walls by the parking lot by the Watertown dam, and along the fence near the swimming pool.



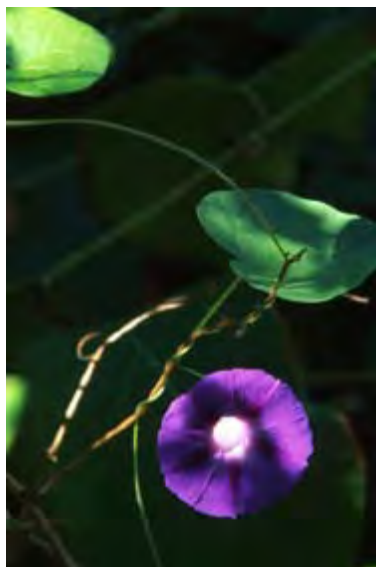
GROUND IVY

This trailing plant, a member of the mint family, grows close to the ground. Its small (1/2 inch long), light purple, trumpet-shaped blossoms and heart shaped, scalloped leaves are seen along the river path, especially in shady, moist places, in the spring. In old Europe it was known as “gill-over-the-ground,” since its leaves were used in fermenting home-brewed beer (gill comes from the Old French word for ferment or make merry).



BITTERSWEET NIGHTSHADE

This trailing plant belongs to a family which includes such common garden plants as potato, tomato, and eggplant. Also known as “Lanterns in the Thicket,” at one time it was used in England to ward off evil spirits. The stem of this plant is often as long as 6 or 8 feet. The small purple flowers with yellow, beak-like centers bloom throughout the summer and turn into egg-shaped, bright red berries in drooping clusters in the fall. Also called purple nightshade.



COMMON MORNING GLORY

Purple, pink, blue or white flowers of this plant grow on 4 to 10 foot long twining vines which can trail on the ground or climb over plants, shrubs, and hedges. The 2-inch flowers are trumpet-shaped, grow in clusters of 1 to 5, and open at dawn. Leaves are heart-shaped. Flowers bloom from July to October.

BLUE FLAG

A member of the Iris family, this plant's flowers are violet blue. The three outer parts are variegated with yellow and white and veined with purple. The stems are from 2 to 3 feet high and grow in wet areas; the individual flowers bloom in June and rarely last for more than a day or two. Louis VII of France chose the Blue Flag as the emblem of his house. Its name, “fleur-de-Louis” was later corrupted into “fleur-de-lys.” The famous writer Ruskin wrote, [it is] “the flower of chivalry with a sword for its leaf and a lily for its heart.” (See Yellow Flag.)



CHICORY

The blue flowers of Chicory, each with square-tipped petal-like rays, open at sunrise and close about noon (and remain closed on cloudy or rainy days). Blooming from June through October, Chicory grows in abundance along the river path and the local roadsides. Its roots have been dried and added to coffee for an enhanced flavor.



ASTER

The name for this flower means “star,” describing the shape of the blossom. Many varieties of aster, ranging from 2 to 6 feet in height, bloom along sunny sections of the path in late summer (August to October), varying in color from purple, to light lavender, to pink, to white. Look for butterflies which like to feed on its nectar.

POKEWEED

The coarse, reddish stems of the pokeweed slightly resemble rhubarb, especially in the spring, but pokeweed eventually grows into a tall, tree-like plant as high as 5 or 6 feet. Its flowers are white with green centers, and its



purplish-black berries have been used for purple dye. All parts of the plant are poisonous, especially the roots, seeds, and mature leaves. For humans, even handling the plant is considered dangerous. The name comes from the Algonquian word “pakon” meaning “bloody,” for the plant’s red juice; other names for it are pokeberry or inkberry.



BUR CUCUMBER

A member of the gourd family, this vine trails or climbs by branching tendrils up to 15 or 25 feet. In mid- to late summer, small and delicate greenish-white flowers appear. In the fall the vine puts out multiple, 2-inch long (inedible) light-green fruits covered with spines, which dry when mature. Look for this unusual plant along the path near the parking lot by the Watertown dam. Also called Star Cucumber.

BLADDER CAMPION

The white, veined flowers of this plant suggest the shape of a melon or bladder. It is also known as cow bell, devil's rattle box, fairy potatoes, or bird's eggs. It flowers from June to August. It is non-native, coming from Europe, but now grows throughout the United States.



Bladder Campion is a favorite of the spittle bug, which leaves a bubbly white substance on its stems. You can find this flower by the pool parking lot and by the boardwalk lookout on the Watertown side, east of Pleasant Street.



QUEEN ANNE'S LACE

This is a beautiful, delicate white flower that blooms from May to October along much of the river path. Its name possibly derives from the fact that Queen Anne, wife of James I, wore it in her hair, or in honor of St. Anne, patron saint of lace-makers. Some of its flower heads have a small, dark purple floret in the center, which attracts insects. In the fall the flower heads dry and curl a bit, resembling birds' nests. The plant is also called wild carrot, since it is in the carrot family.



FRAGRANT WATER LILY

A large (3-5 in. across) white, gold-centered flower floating on the surface of the river, surrounded with flat, platter-like, shiny green leaves (called lily pads) on which frogs and turtles like to sit, sunning themselves. Each plant has a solitary flower which opens shortly after sunrise from June through September. The large stems of this flower grow upwards to the water's surface from roots which are buried in muck. A favorite food of muskrats, look for it near the river's edge in slow-moving water, by the decks near Pleasant Street and the Watertown dam.



COMMON FLEABANE

This slender, hairy plant has flower heads less than one inch across, with many small, white-to-pink thread-like ray flowers around a yellow disk. Common in fields or open, sunny areas, it grows from 6 to 28 inches in height and blooms from June to October. In days past its dried flowers were used to repel fleas.

GARLIC MUSTARD

This is one of the first flowers to bloom in profusion in moist and shaded areas along the river path from April through June. A small white flower emerges from the garlic-smelling leaves. In the late 1700s the plant was called Sauce Alone, since poor country people ate the leaves with bread, mixed it in a salad, or used it as an herb. In those days, “sauce” meant vegetables eaten with meat. Another name for the flower was “Jack by the Hedge.”



JAPANESE KNOTWEED

An invasive plant brought here from Asia as an ornamental, this plant grows up to 10 feet tall and is prolific along the shady sections of the river bank. The mature plant has hollow stems with nodes like bamboo and large, oval leaves with pointed tips and squared-off bases. Its tiny, white flowers arranged in long, lacy clusters appear in late August or September. It belongs to the same family as rhubarb or buckwheat and is edible in the early spring only. (Check out the website www.wildmanstevebrill.com for recipes!) Although the plant has its own beauty, it tends to displace other plants as it spreads, and is hard to eradicate.



WINTERBERRY

This native shrub, planted by the MDC, is in the holly family and grows from 6 to 8 feet high. Leaves are sharply toothed and turn black in the fall.

Tiny white flowers with green centers emerge along the branches, in the leaf axils, in clusters $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch wide, from June to August. Later these develop into bright red and quite showy berries, each about the size of a pea. These are quite a favorite as food for birds and as holiday decorations in the winter. A colony of these shrubs can be found just west of the path that passes in front of the public swimming pool in Watertown. During the civil war, the Southerners, who were hard up for medicines, used winterberry bark to treat fevers and gangrene.



WHITE SWEET-CLOVER

This tall (2 to 8 feet) plant is prolific in the meadow areas by mid-summer and has a fragrance like newly mown hay. The leaves are divided into 3 narrow, clover-like leaflets and the flowers grow in numerous tapering clusters. Also found along the path is Yellow Sweet-Clover, similar to this plant except in color of flowers. Both are members of the pea family, but do not resemble the shorter, familiar red clover. They are an excellent source of clover honey.





**HIGHBUSH
CRANBERRY
VIBURNUM**

This shrub can grow to 15 feet tall, and has flowers in large white clusters, which bloom from

May to July. The edible but sour fruit is bright red and juicy, maturing and hanging down in clusters in August. It is used in making preserves and cranberry juice. This is one of the many varieties of bushes planted by the MDC when the path was developed.



**MULTIFLORA
ROSE**

This early blooming (May to June) type of wild rose is plentiful along the river path and wonderfully fragrant. It can spread rapidly, displacing and crowding out native species. Its thickets provide areas for birds' nests, and its fruits (miniature rose hips) are a popular winter food for cardinals, robins, and mockingbirds.



**SWEET
PEPPERBUSH**

Planted by the MDC, this 3 to 10 foot tall shrub has spicy, fragrant flowers appearing in August. Flowers are white, but sometimes tinged with pink. Look for it along the parts of the pathway near the Pleasant Street industrial buildings.



BUTTON BUSH

This is a shrub found in moist places, with flowers arranged in a round head one inch in diameter and emitting a lovely fragrance. Blooming in June and July, the flower head turns into a brown, ball-shaped seed pod.



OX-EYE DAISY

The name for this flower comes from two Anglo-Saxon words meaning “day’s eye.” A beloved and popular flower, it is also called “Love-Me, Love-Me-Not” for the traditional activity of pulling the petals off to evaluate one’s romantic success. A member of the sunflower family, it blooms from June through August in sunny areas along the river path, standing from one to three feet tall.

The Authors

Carole Smith Berney is a Watertown photographer and writer who has been documenting the wildlife along the Charles River for several years and has had numerous nature-related exhibits and slideshows locally. As a naturalist-educator, she is available to do slide presentations for community groups of all ages. For more information about bookings, or greeting cards featuring the flowers along the greenway path, contact her at csberney@rcn.com.

Patsy Murray has been co-owner of Attic Studios in Watertown. Her business experience spans 15 years of publishing, marketing, and selling greeting cards, prints and related products throughout New England. She is now a life coach.

Both authors are avid walkers along the river path and have been actively developing this guidebook for more than two years.

Guidelines for Using the Paths

1. This corridor is designed as a self-sustaining, natural environment. Please enjoy and respect the plants and animals that live out here. Nesting animals in the spring are particularly sensitive. Feeding of wild animals is not encouraged.
2. Please take your trash home with you or dispose of it in proper trash bins. Volunteer help with trash cleanup is always appreciated.
3. Beware of the poison ivy, which grows prolifically along the edges of the path (see photo below).
4. When biking or skating, please call out or ring your bell to signal walkers before you pass them.
5. When walking dogs, please keep them on a leash and clean up after them .
6. Please do not feed any waterfowl except during the winter, and then preferably whole grain feed. Otherwise, they may learn to depend on humans, and will not be able to find their own food.
7. Enjoy this wonderful river greenway path!



HISTORY OF THE RIVER PATH

The wildflowers in this book were all photographed along the two-mile Greenway Path in Watertown and Newton. We are extremely grateful to Senior Planner Dan Driscoll of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (formerly the MDC) for his decade-long leadership and drive to initiate, sustain, and complete the Upper Charles River Reservation Restoration Project, which has made this wonderful natural resource both accessible to people and friendly to wildlife.

The Project began in 1990, and in 1994 an MDC master plan and design were developed by Carol R. Johnson & Associates to provide metropolitan Boston with one of the finest and longest urban river greenway corridors in the country. Numerous native species of plants were planted throughout this corridor by the MDC to restore the ecosystem.

With federal grants and matching state funds, three key sections of the river greenway have been completed, including the one mile stretch in Watertown and Newton from the Galen Street bridge to Bridge Street featured in this guidebook. The project represents a success story in reconnecting the public to the River and its natural resources.

Additional segments will include a new Greenway entrance and path through the park off California Street, restoration of the footbridge by the Watertown dam, and creation of a new one-mile path through the wooded area from Bridge Street in Newton to Farwell Street in Waltham, featuring a new 140 foot footbridge connecting the banks of the River between Newton and Watertown, and full restoration of the Woerd Ave. boat launch in Waltham. All work will be complete by spring of 2005.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are grateful to Senior Planner Dan Driscoll, both for his years of energetic advocacy for the development of the Watertown/Newton/Waltham greenway paths, and for his support of our project. It was through his efforts that the DCR provided funds to underwrite the printing of this publication. Thanks also to Watertown Savings Bank for providing partial funding to enable publication of this material for community distribution. And we want to acknowledge the enthusiasm of the members of the Watertown Cultural Council and the staff of the Watertown Public Library, without which we would never have embarked on this project two years ago.

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www.cnr.vt.edu (College of Natural Resources, VATEch)
www3.pei.sympatico.ca (Macphail Woods Ecological Forestry Project)

Index of Flowers

Aster	20
Bittersweet Nightshade	19
Black Eyed Susan	5
Bladder Campion	22
Blue Flag	19
Blue Vervain	14
Bouncing Bet	11
Bur Cucumber	21
Butter and Eggs	3
Buttercup	3
Button Bush	27
Celandine	4
Chicory	20
Common Fleabane	23
Common Morning Glory	16
Common Mullein	6
Cow Vetch	15
Deptford Pink	9
Evening Primrose	4
False Indigo	15
Fragrant Water Lily	23
Garlic Mustard	24
Goldenrod	5
Ground Ivy	16
Hedge Bindweed	10
Japanese Knotweed	24
Jewelweed	8
Milkweed	12
Multiflora Rose	27
Ox-Eye Daisy	28
Pasture Rose	10
Pokeweed	21
Queen Anne's Lace	22
Purple Loosestrife	13
Red Clover	9
Smartweed (Pinkweed)	11
St. John's Wort	7
Staghorn Sumac	8
Steeplebush	12
Sweet Pepperbush	26
Tansy	6
Tyrol Knapweed	13
Viburnum, Highbush Cranberry	26
Virginia Creeper	14
White Sweet-Clover	25
Winterberry	25
Yellow Flag	7

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