

## Plant Lovers Almanac

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Last week I traveled for meetings and then vacation to central and northern Michigan and for my first time ever into extreme northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula (UP). As ever when traveling, plants mattered. Some were different, but many were not totally unknown to my buck-eye, yet often long forgotten. Let's take a look.

**Bunchberry** (*Cornus canadensis*). This groundcover is a delightful member of the *Cornus* genus, which also brings us such horticulturally popular species as flowering dogwood (*C. florida*), Chinese dogwood (*C. kousa*), and many shrub dogwoods such as gray dogwood (*C. racemosa*), and red-osier dogwood (*C. sericea*). The showy part of the inflorescence of bunchberry is the familiar four creamy-white bracts we are used to seeing on larger dogwood tree and shrub species. But it seems especially graceful when viewed from above.

Cool, moist soils are typically needed for bunchberry culture which means it is not easy to grow in many Ohio sites or wildflower gardens, especially further south, but in the sandy UP soils we saw clonal masses of bunchberries in many red pine forests and sandy beach-like areas near the truly wonderful Pictured Rocks State Park. If you have a camera capable of taking, say 10,000 frames per second, you can capture one of the most spectacular and rapid natural movements in plantdom, the flinging of bunchberry pollen from filament sacs after triggering by the tiny flexible petals. Instamatic camera owners need not apply.

**Beauty bush** (*Kolkwitzia amabilis*) is a plant we do not grow much in Ohio, but that has great ornamental appeal for its tubular soft pink flowers with yellow throats and graceful arching branches. This shrub grows to about 8 feet tall and wide. The fuzzy hairs on the flower stems are an attractive up-close feature, but the overall floral affect is a spectacular landscape asset. This plant grows well at Secrest Arboretum in Wooster and although I thought of it as more of a southern plant it is obviously very hardy and we saw it in many gardens in full flower in northern Michigan along Lake Michigan in the town of Leland. It flowers in May in Ohio but was at its peak in Leland on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

**Showy lady's slipper** (*Cypripedium reginae*). This is a spectacular woodland orchid seen in Ohio, and little did I know when I worked at Geneva Hills Summer Camp southeast of Lancaster in the early 1970s, that I would not see it again until this July. We saw its' cousin, the pink lady's slipper (*Cypripedium acaule*) along the beaches of Pictured Rocks State Park along Lake Superior growing amidst the blueberries that bears and humans will dine on come August. Then near Lake Leelanau in the northern part of lower Michigan a few days later along a swampy road, there were the large white and pink bubbled blossoms of this regal Queen lady's slipper.

There are three white sepals and three petals, the most prominent of which is a rosy-pink moccasin or bootie like pouch (*cypripedium* means "the shoes of Venus" in the original Greek). This neutral to alkaline loving, but mildly acid tolerant orchid is rare, so do not pick. And if you do not listen to that admonition, beware: this orchid should not be handled since it causes a photo dermatitis reaction for unheeding humans.

**Paperbark birch** (*Betula papyrifera*). As you go northward from Ohio, this birch becomes more prominent, although it is present, not only in Ohio landscapes but in natural stands, as you will learn if you drive with OSU entomologist Dan Herms up I-71 as far south as the Mansfield area. In Michigan it is a prominent tree with its white bark studded with black scars and marks. Paperbark birch bark is whiter than the off white and even

greenish-white bark of aspens that it comingles with, but the slightest wisp of wind will tell the plant ID difference as the wedge leaves of birch do not quake or tremble with the slightest wisp of wind like the aspen (and poplar) leaves and their aerodynamic nature of flat leaf stalks (petioles) perpendicular to the flat leaf blades.

What of bronze birch borer (*Agilus anxius*) and paperbark birch? As it turns out, this is not a big deal on healthy native birches. Bronze birch borer is a native insect and long ago has equilibrated with native hosts and is more of a secondary stress-related pest.

**Striped maple** (*Acer pensylvanicum*). In the northern Michigan dune environments on the Leelanau Peninsula there are sugar maples with wide canopies and numerous red maple seedlings edging their way in with bright red new growth leaves, but one of the great viewing pleasures is the backlit views of the large leaves of striped maples in the understory. This native maple is common in the highlands of Pennsylvania and West Virginia overlooks and can be found in Ohio woodlands and landscapes, as long as you provide some protection from hot, dry landscape sites. The striped maple added to *Acer tegmentosum* ‘White Tigress’ one of the many Asian snakebark maples with their arching branches and outstanding foliar details of stipules and foliar color changes is the highlight of the Chatscape, through no conscious help from us.

So, when you take a Plant lover’s holiday, including to that land up north, enjoy the plants you encounter, in Michigan from the edible sweet and sour cherries and the hard cider they enhance to the weeping cherries in landscapes. In the north woods, the eastern arborvitae takes on another of its monikers: the northern white cedar. Peonies are sold in bunches in the farmer’s markets. Bracken ferns become a big player in the layered woodscape. Smokebush and horsechestnut adorn the streetscape and vineyardscapes. Lichens, and mosses, and ferns and fungi fill up the forest scenes. All are plants that remind us of and grow in certain buckeyeland sites as well, but provide *déjà vu* and *jamais vu* experiences in their different contexts.

Final note:

One thing though is different up in the North Woods and the UP. There is a strange flying six-legged Dipteran insect that hardly ever comes to notice down home in our land of Aescularian paradise! (I am lying, of course!) It is a fly, but a curious type of fly, bearing two wings of course [“di” (two); “pter” wing)], but with scales on the wings. It bites. And bites. And bites. And it arrives in great, great numbers in the Land Up North. As comedian Tom Wilson noted, this insect “reminds us that we are not as high up on the food chain as we think.” Another wag noted: “Trivial things do matter...more people are killed each year by the bite of [this insect] than are stepped upon by charging elephants.” What?

Yes, I speak of the “musketas”, of “zancudos”, of “les mouchérons” or as some Germans call them “Stechmuchen” or better yet “Schnacke”, which resonates deeply with those who have been made a “schnacke” of by these beasts. Bearer of bad tidings in the form of pathogens that cause malaria, yellow fever, dengue, various encephalitis diseases and of course carrier of the West Nile virus. Save a Michigander – Eat a Mosquito!