



Pondside Planting

I picked the first daffodils today. Walked around the garden, noticing the swelling buds on the lilacs, the grass already starting to green up, the sadly depleted woodpile, the vivid new growth pushing up from underneath last year's perennials' bleached-out stems. All signs of spring, but none so convincing, or so welcome, as the peepers' chorus. I've hardly ever seen the little frogs—they measure only about an inch long, with muted coloring designed to blend in with the vegetation—but their songs echo from the hillside and meet across Someday Pond. I rejoice at their music every spring, and am reassured to know that their conservation status is "Least Concern," meaning they are still abundant and thriving. The larger frogs are out of hibernation, too, and have placed cloudy clumps of their eggs in the shallows.

Since the pond is awake, it's time to start thinking about spring planting around it. I'm starting with the Wild Ones native garden plant list, comparing it to what's already there and what's in my seed trays. When I moved in five years ago I found Joe-pye weed, swamp milkweed, and sedges, all of which are on the Wild Ones list, and lots of goldenrod and asters, which are not. Joe-pye weed is one of those plants that are only appreciated *in situ*. I'd pass right by its dull purplish blooms if seen in a catalog, but next to the pond the flowers are somehow brighter and at home. Goldenrod and asters admittedly are rambunctious and a bit messy, and that's probably why they're omitted from the plan, but I love their glorious abundance when late summer starts to turn to fall. Anywhere else, that gold-yellow-almost-mustard is one of my least favorite colors, but mixed with the white and pale lavender of native asters, it becomes a favorite for casual bouquets.

I know there are sedges and rushes around and even extending into the pond, but haven't yet studied them enough to be able to name any. I was especially intrigued by one named "lurid sedge," wondering what could possibly earn such an over-the-top name for a mild-mannered plant. My skepticism was justified; it's only called "lurid" to distinguish its bright chartreuse bottlebrush-shaped culm (hollow stem bearing the flower) from the less conspicuous ordinary green of other varieties. Mine seem happy to stand in water when the pond is full, to wait patiently when the water level is down a foot or two during summer droughts, and even to survive near-drowning once or twice a year when the overflow pipe gets clogged and the banks are overflowing.

To this existing mix I added a river birch, red and yellow twig dogwoods, and flame willows. I chose the birch for its peeling tan bark, which is not as dramatic as white birch but more resistant to birch borer, and the rest for their dramatic winter color. Late-afternoon January sun lights up the red, yellow, and bright orange stems, provided I remember to cut them back every spring, because their

bark is most brightly colored on new growth. Since I planted them before finding the Wild Ones plan, placement is a bit random. The river birch has grown too large to move, but maybe I can find a better arrangement for the dogwoods and willow. I planted several winterberry, and those too I will leave alone, hoping they will form a large clump to act as backdrop to the shorter plants.

The plan calls for lobelia cardinalis, which is bright red, but I think I'll opt for blue lobelia siphilitica instead, despite its awful name, which derives from a mistaken belief that it could cure syphilis. It will blend well with a patch of blue flag iris, desperately in need of dividing, the soft violet spikes of liatris, and some white boneset, provided the latter germinates. There's an entire tray of native seeds chilling in my refrigerator, trying to duplicate the winter cold they need, and my garden calendar says I must wait another week before I can take them out and see what sprouts. If successful, I'll have beardtongue foxglove and some swamp mallow, both white, and more pale-pink milkweed. I'd like to add some sturdy white chelone. You can picture the shape of its flowers from its two common names: turtlehead or false snapdragon.

I confess that, in my ignorance, I added one pink waterlily. It's decidedly not native, but after three years in the pond, it has multiplied. The flowers are not quite the clear pink I'd envisioned, but little frogs like to sun themselves on the lily pads, which makes up for any disappointment. Still, I'd willingly trade it for our native white waterlily, with a sweet fragrance that takes me back to childhood, picking the flowers from our canoe on Cedar Lake in North Branford.

My pond got its name from my often-repeated wish, "Someday I'm going to have a pond." Someday, will the planting be complete, the colors balanced, the proportions perfected, the mix just right for birds and pollinators? Probably not, as long as every year brings new plants, new garden styles, new science. Even so, "Someday" is every gardener's watchword. It is the place where all gardens are created.