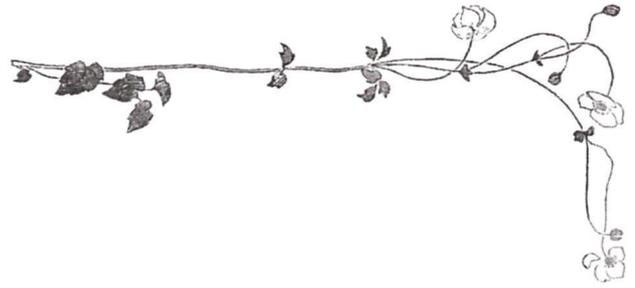


Educator Tip

Common Volunteer Plants

By Helen Ross Russell



Take a survey of your family and friends familiarity with common plants in the lawns and along the streets.

The objective of this activity is to increase peoples' awareness and interest in everyday plants. Try to get several kids, adults, or better yet, families interested in sharing their discoveries. If it turns out that few, if any, people can tell you even six common "volunteer plants," the kids and adults can form a neighborhood teach-in task force. Why would you want to do this? You will not miss what you do not see, and often you will not see until someone starts you on the road to discovering the important ecology and fascinating processes that are going on around you. Does it really matter? You bet it does. This is not a frivolous activity. You can neither enjoy nor protect an environment that you haven't made friends with.

You will probably know one and discover many more. Knowing a few common volunteer plants will give you some old friends to look for in any state of the country you travel to. This could be a scavenger hunt, with a sample of each of two or three plants given to each team.

- Does any animal use them for food?
- Were they once cultivated?
- Who plants these plants?
- Where do they come from?

Here is a possible list to start with:
common dandelion

(everyone needs to have at least one success)

broad leaf plantain

pepper grass

burdock

hawk weed

daisies (How many kinds? Look closely.)

common mullein

teasel

chicory

mustard (How many kinds?)

I wish someone had started me on such an adventure of discovery before the age of five or even fifteen. It didn't happen until I was 23 years old. And it could well not have happened at all if my several thousand graduate students are a fair sample. (Try this with your kids or students.)

