

HELLSTRIP CONVERSION ON HIGH

By Andrea Roth Kimmich

Hellstrip (as per Urban Dictionary): A strip of dirt between the sidewalk and the street, notoriously hard to grow plants of any kind in due to lack of water, heat reflected from paved surfaces, [foot traffic](#), trash, dog crap, and salt from winter snowmelt. Also called a [tree lawn](#), inferno strip, [devil strip](#) and verge.

Native Plant (as per USDA): A plant that is a part of the balance of nature that has developed over hundreds or thousands of years in a particular region or ecosystem. Note: “Native” should always be used with a geographic qualifier (that is, “native to New England” for example).

For someone passionate about wilding and the benefits of “going native”, living on a road with hellstrips can be a day-in, day-out downer.

Enter Lisa Pagano with the Planeteers of Southern Maine.

A teacher of Marine Sciences by day, into old house restoration at night, and one who spends weekends volunteering in a variety of science projects and explorations, whether with the Planeteers of Southern Maine, including their work with Maine’s Sea Grant Beach Monitoring, or phenology efforts and research in her role as Education Advisory Committee Member at the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve.

Much inspired by workshops led by the likes of the Wild Seed Project, and less formal conversations with a variety of “seed keepers”, and those involved in “seed exchanges”, Lisa has developed a passion and commitment to “wilding” and “going native”. And she’s learned the Latin to go with it! - a practice she honed as marine biologist.

When the Planeteers of Southern Maine first gathered in person following the Covid pandemic, mapping out emerging interests and areas of priority, Lisa suggested the conversion of Hellstrips as a way of bringing community members together following recent years of separation, while attending to other neglected aspects of “community”. So this project is as much about connecting with neighbors as it is connecting with natives, with major objectives being:

- 1) Pollinator Protection & Proliferation
- 2) Public Awareness and Education about the virtues of going native
- 3) Area Beautification/De-desertification/Deterrent to Littering
- 4) Community-building



High Street hellstrip, Kennebunk ME



Left: Tough, low maintenance native plants like Mountain mint and Coneflower enhance a hellstrip.

Right: Native plants like Common milkweed and Anise Hyssop mix harmoniously with existing street trees. Annuals like zinnias and salvia have been added to extend the bloom time.



Project Status

Lisa has:

- 1) Connected with other local area native plant enthusiasts and has found in Lee Sullivan (Arundel) someone eager to serve as “Johnny Appleseed” when it comes to sharing knowledge and technique involved in winter sowing, and in maintaining a Facebook page for related “cross-pollination” with others. And with Master Gardener Ginger Lauritz for generous guidance on plants and procedures.
- 2) Conducted project outreach via visits to each property owner abutting the High Street hellstrips in Kennebunk, Maine, where she is herself a homeowner having restored two older colonials there.
- 3) Coordinated work parties to move from one hellstrip to the next, preparing each for planting.
- 4) With Planeteer Founding member, Andrea Kimmich, negotiated with local Garden Center, Wallingford Farm, a donation of mulch satisfying the needs along the High Street Hellstrip.
- 5) Created signage to be placed on each portion of what we’ve learned now officially constitutes a Pollinator Pathway!
- 6) With others comprising the Planeteers’ steering committee, Lisa has identified subsequent project phases with target pathways and property sites along with parties agreeable to these - notably another 2 rows of hellstrips, which include businesses, 2 alternative school groups, a housing trust, land trust, and municipal park property too, all of which have been visited by Andrea. A Seed Sow & Swap event is scheduled this Winter and a schedule of Native Garden Tour Days is soon forthcoming.

The moral of this story is this: Yes, it sure takes a village, but it also takes grassroots organizing and the vision and chutzpah of any one person, and that in this case, we are lucky to benefit from Lisa Pagano’s!

Epilogue: The Conservation Commission in neighboring Kennebunkport has officially voted to develop a pollinator pathway too, with related conversations taking place in area town halls, schools, parks, and on the streets, among neighbors. The Buzz is alive!

High Street Hellstrip Plant List

Butterfly Milkweed *Asclepias tuberosa*
Common Milkweed *Asclepias syriaca*
Anise Hyssop *Agastache foeniculum*
Spike Gayfeather *Liatris spicata* ‘Kobald’
Northern Blazing Star *Liatris Novae-Angliae*
Wild Bergamot *Monarda fistulosa*
Horsemint *Monarda punctata*
Foxglove Beardtongue *Penstemon digitalis*
Three-Toothed Cinquefoil *Sibboldiopsis tridentata*
Broad-leaved Mountain mint *Pycnanthemum muticum*
Obedient Plant *Physostegia virginiana*
Seaside Goldenrod *Solidago sempervirens*
Moss Phlox *Phlox subulata*
‘October Skies’ Aromatic Aster *Symphyotrichum oblongifolium*
Smooth Aster *Symphyotrichum laeve*
Thimbleweed *Anemone virginiana*
Sundial Lupine *Lupinus perennis*
Common Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*
Nodding Onion *Allium cernuum*
Plantain-leaved Pussytoes *Antennaria plantaginifolia*
Hyssop-leaved Boneset *Eupatorium hyssopifolium*
Black-eyed Susan *Rudbeckia hirta*



Top: Monarch butterfly caterpillars feed on their Butterfly Milkweed host plant.