

FROM THE GARDEN

Dinghy Planters Showcase Native Species

By Cynthia Gibson

The old adage that “clothes make the man” supports the notion that image, whether good or bad, is often determined by appearance. To that end, there are many Newporters who care about how the city looks and want residents to feel good about living here and tourists to feel welcome when they visit.

Beyond the glamorous mansions, there are people working to make a lovely difference along the water’s edge. The Harbor Walk Planter Project, begun last summer by Friends of the Waterfront, is a cleverly-conceived initiative that combines a passion for gardening with Newport’s international image as a sailing capital. The effort is focused on recycling used dinghies as garden planters.

Three were installed in June of 2015; this year, FOW President Johanna Vietry told *Newport This Week* that the group is collaborating with the URI Master Gardener Program to add two more. Plantings are native to Rhode Island, said Vietry, and are intended to attract native pollinators and Monarch butterflies, a species that is increasingly endangered.

“These two boats are being planted,” she said, “to help deliver the message that planting a variety of Rhode Island native plants in yards and in community spaces will help provide biodiversity to many beneficial insects, which are currently endangered.”

Hope Leeson, URI botanist and coordinator of the Rhode Island Native Initiative, is advising the group. “Growing all native Rhode Island plants in these large dinghy planters offers all kinds of challenges for us,” Leeson said.

This is a first for FOW and the URI Horticulture Department, and the entire experiment is being filmed. FOW has received permission from the City of Newport through the Adopt-a-Spot Program for a planter and bench to be placed at the Maritime Center and Ann Street Pier. The new planter will be located on the harbor side next to the building, set on a wooden cradle in the sand. A bench will be provided by the city to encourage people to stop, relax and enjoy the waterfront. The second is planned for Spring Wharf on the city’s right of way. The adjacent private land-



owner, Bill Casey from Casey’s Marina, has given his blessing. Both of these planters will be highly visible to the public.

As with all Master Gardener projects, there is also an educational benefit: Each dinghy creates its own green space in an urban setting. Volunteers will maintain the five planters year-round. In addition, plants are labeled and include instructions on how to go to a blog to find out how they will change throughout the seasons.

This effort is a labor of love that starts in Vietry’s living room. “We have more than 600 seedlings that were started two weeks ago in my front room,” she explained.

Also helping in the effort is the Seaside Garden Club of Newport and Aquidneck Island’s many Daffodillionaires. Bulbs planted as part of the Daffodillion Project will soon be blooming at the dinghies in King Park, Scotts Wharf, and Perrotti Park.

Volunteers are always welcome. Their next meeting is on Thursday, April 14 at 5 p.m. at the Newport Public Library.

Another way people can help is by donating a dinghy. Even if the fiberglass dinghy may be past its prime, not only will it have a second life as a rather unusual planter, it will also become a teaching tool. Another plus: Dinghy donations are tax deductible.

For more information on volunteering or to donate a dinghy, contact Vietry at info@newportwaterfront.org.

“The goal is to place dinghy planters along the whole Harbor Walk to bring attention to all the public rights of way to the water,” said Vietry. “If we don’t use them, we might lose them, and we hope that never happens. The city, the citizens of Newport and the other island communities, as well as visitors, would lose a treasure.”

Cynthia Gibson is a gardener, food writer and painter. She gardens and tends her miniature orchard in Newport.



Wish list for the butterfly garden dinghies:

- Asclepias tuberosa*
Orange butterfly weed
- Symphiotrichum novi-belgii*
New York aster
- Asclepias incarnata*
Swamp milkweed
- Eutrochium dubium*
Baby Joe pye weed
- Aster novae-angliae*
New England aster
- Liatrix novae-angliae*
New England blazing star
- Vernonia noveboracensis*
New York ironweed
- Solidago sempervirens*
Seaside goldenrod
- Solidago nemoralis*
Old Field goldenrod
- Helenium flexuosum*
Purple-headed sneezeweed
- Verbena hastata*
Blue vervain

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Monarch Butterfly Boat Planter

URI Master Gardener Harbor Walk Garden Project

1. *Asclepias tuberosa*
Orange Butterfly Weed
1. *Asclepias tuberosa*
Hello Yellow Butterfly Weed
2. *Symphiotrichum nova-belgii*
New England Aster
3. *Asclepias incarnata* -White
4. *Asclepias incarnata*
Rose Milkweed - Swamp Milkweed
5. *Eutrochium dubium*
Baby Joe'
6. *Aster novae-angliae*
New England Aster
7. *Liatrix novae-angliae*
Northern blazing star
8. *Vernonia noveboracensis*
New York ironweed
9. *Solidago sempervirens*
Seaside golden rod
10. *Solidago nemoralis*
Old Field Goldenrod
11. *Helenium flexuosum*
Purple-headed Sneezeweed
12. *Verbena hastata*
Blue Vervain