

THIS ISSUE

Around the State in August

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Reading for Concerned Citizens

Summer Chicory Blooms on Roadside, Patioside, Poolside



A Chicory blossom's hours are numbered.

A Chicory bush grows on the lawn at the edge of our patio. Facing east from the vantage out the nature center's back door, it dwells, grows - and grows more - exactly between and slightly behind two pools on the patio that hold an array of our swimming and basking Michigan turtles. You could get the impression the placement was by design. Its bright blue morning blossoms match the hue of the plastic kiddie swimming pools almost to a T. Currently, the perennial stands about three feet tall. Very atypical for the species, it is also just as wide.



*Left: An old stalk laden with buds in all stages.
Right: A few tiny buds emerge from a new stalk
freshly sprouted from the same leafy rosette.*

After viewing countless thousands of wild-growing Chicories, I can attest that this herbaceous but toughly-stalked perennial in the Composite Family does not grow naturally in bush form. Rather, each plant consists of a ground-bound rosette of dark green, slightly wavy leaves with toothed edges reminiscent of those of a Dandelion. From its center, one to a few basically leafless stalks arise from about one to four feet above the rosette. Not to say that a stalk is completely bare; a few small branchlets may emerge along its length.

Along the stalk and branchlets little, green, ovate flower buds emerge alternately, frequently in bunches, all the way to the tips. Though liberally stippled with buds, when not in bloom the part of a Chicory that stretches above ground level looks closer to skeletal than bushy.

No doubt, this stark growth strategy is necessary if it is to thrive in the harsh, linear micro-habitat that it seems to purposely occupy: stony, nutrient-bereft, scorchingly sunny roadside

shoulders. This several-foot wide strip between the pavement and the abruptly lush growth that occupies the ditches on the other side of it gets as baked as a desert on a typical summer afternoon. Competition from other plant life is limited. Only the heartiest grasses, and similarly tough non-native wildflowers like lacy white Wild Carrot, bright yellow Dandelion-like Common Sow-thistle, and pale pinkish-hued Bouncing Bet, can eke out an existence beside it.

I'm generally not fond of alien plants, however, most by far are not what most of us would call 'invasive,' whereby they crowd out and displace species that once thrived there. The Chicory, among the others just listed and along with many more, has occupied this hemisphere for hundreds of years going back to the onset of the continent's European hominid invasion. It has had plenty of time to become 'naturalized,' - coexisting and even contributing in various ways to energy-transfer processes among other living elements of present-day natural communities.

Wikipedia's Chicory account is incredibly copious if you care to delve into the plant's deep historical roots as a cultivar on various continents for medicinal, culinary and other purposes, many of which are still in practical use today: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicory>



Rural Haslett Road circa 9am.

At this latitude the peak bloom of wild roadside Chicories occurs between mid-July and late August. However, interestingly and quite uniquely, a Chicory is *not* in bloom over most of any given twenty-four-hour period. On a typical, sunny early August day the bright blue blossoms are present for only about a quarter of a day. Among other qualities that set it apart, a Chicory blossom's uber-fleeting existence lends to a sense of endearment toward it. Awareness that this showy blossom, just 'born' in the morning, will be dead by mid-afternoon practically demands that it be acknowledged and appreciated before it is gone.

Caught up in their day to day concerns I suppose most commuters carry enough baggage in their heads on the morning drive that any roadside vegetation goes unnoticed. May I suggest a mindful gaze at the azure-edged roadside through your windshield tomorrow morning? Purposefully *see* the living blue stripe composed of overlapping blossoms; over miles, they're as countless as the stars. If you take note of its presence in the morning, you won't be able to ignore its absence from the same roadside on the commute home.

Water held within a thin leaf evaporates quickly in hot, dry conditions, so producing few of them is beneficial to the plant's water conservation. However, successful reproduction is the end game for any life form, and flower parts can be even thinner and more susceptible to evaporation in extreme heat than the leaves. Here's where Chicory excels in a unique way.

Through the summer months on most days a given number of buds are ripe to open along the branching stalk. A Chicory blossom's anatomy is common to all members of the family - a showy ring of petals or rays encircling the reproductive parts of many tiny, tightly-packed flowers at the hub.

On a rainless morning, individual flower buds begin to open at around five a.m. and reach full bloom by about nine a.m. The frilly-tipped blue rays attain a diameter barely over an inch. Then, only a couple hours later on a sunny day, the hot rays of the sun begin to take their toll. The blue hue begins to fade. The filamentous anthers and pistils in the center begin to shrivel, as well. By three p.m. the beautiful burst of

blue rays on a blossom have been reduced to a pale, limp and formless blob of drying tissue. The higher the temperature, the faster the process toward blossom-death. Conversely, on cooler or overcast days the ephemeral life of the flowers may last virtually all day.

A host of specific pollinating insects seem innately-conditioned to home in on the bloom's brevity. They begin arriving when the sun comes up. If you have the opportunity, stop along a dense row of blooming Chicories at around nine a.m. If the temperature is right (upper sixties to seventies) you'll witness an abundance and diversity of flower flies and busy bees flitting from blossom to blossom, scrambling then probing into the flowers' hubs in search of nectar. With each new Chicory visited, they transfer sticky pollen from a previously-foraged blossom.



For a couple of months through the summer Chicories manage to produce new flower buds one day after the next in pace with those that mature, bloom and die. It is not worth lamenting the uber-brief life of a single, beautiful Chicory flower. Our perspective of its beauty is an inconsequential sideshow. The insects do the serious lifting, ensuring that the purpose for the blossom's being is fulfilled. Beneath the ghostly shriveled remains, the embryonic progression of freshly-fertilized ovules has begun. They will mature into seeds before first frost.

While searching online before writing, it took longer than expected to find a detailed account of the intimate, brief life of a single Chicory blossom. The majority of columns and blogs focused either on historical propagation of the plant for human purposes and/or on current uses, gardening tips, etc., for those interested in purchasing Chicory seeds to propagate.

Then I found *The Nature Institute* column by Craig Holdrege, dated Spring 2016. I've often wished I had the time to sit and observe the process by which a Chicory bud blossoms, becomes pollinated and dies over the course of mere hours, but time is in short supply these days. The upkeep of our 'living' nature center and an intense schedule of educational gigs necessarily take priority. I'm therefore thankful to have found someone who did find the time, then wrote about it:

<https://www.natureinstitute.org/article/craig-holdrege/a-day-in-the-life-of-a-chicory-flower>

Getting back to our patio-side Chicory bush...

We mow our lawn with a discerning eye that most homeowners would consider odd. I call it the 'mow-around,' and it can occur on a whim at any pass of our walk-behind, solar-charged electric mower. When I spy a plant of a known species, I may decide on-the-spot to allow it to grow and bloom as nature intended. I carefully circumvent it with the mower and do so again each ensuing week. A month or two later a mature flowering plant juts above the lawn in a quite random, totally-unplanned location.

For instance, we will routinely mow around a Bull Thistle (Showy, magenta, early-August flowers



The good life! Our patioside, turtle poolside Chicory bush has it all.

attract butterflies en masse.), a Common Mullein (producing a seven-foot stalk of yellow blossoms), a bed of Bird's-eye Speedwell (tiny but showy pale blue blossoms), a patch of Sheep Sorrell (larval food plant of the American Copper butterfly), and others.

Several springs ago I spotted a tiny start-up rosette of a Chicory growing only inches from the edge of our patio, and on a whim mowed around it. A couple weeks later a reproductive stalk began to grow. That first summer it produced several blue blossoms.

The east edge of our patio enjoys full sunshine until about seven to eight p.m. through most of the summer so this plant was gathering energy from all the rays it could hope for. Additionally, though, its proximity to our turtle pools yielded a bonus that would make any *roadside* Chicory green with envy. More water... *Much* more water. Here's why.

The turtles are taken out to swim and bask in the patio pools nearly every day, late spring through early fall. Since the sun's summer rays heat such shallow depths so quickly, we need to routinely dump several gallons from them every couple of hours, more frequently when the sun is near its zenith. We then re-cool them by topping-off with cold water from the tap or garden hose.

Turtles poop where they live, so all this extra water is also very nutrient-rich. It gets dispensed onto the lawn directly off the edge of the patio immediately to the left or right of the lucky Chicory. I recently counted over thirty branching stalks arising from its densely-layered rosette. One morning last week I counted sixty-five blossoms!

I don't suppose Ingham County Fair has a prize Chicory competition...

- Jim McGrath



The morning's blue blossoms mingle among yesterday's news.

Around the State in August

- ❖ ***Thursday, August 6: 10am. MI Summer Sampler Presentation; AuGres Library, AuGres.***
- ❖ ***Thursday, August 6: 1pm. MI Summer Sampler Presentation; Dahlem Environmental Center, Jackson.***
- ❖ ***Friday, August 7: 12:30-4:30pm. MI Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit; Troy Public Library, Troy.***
- ❖ ***Saturday, August 8: 10am-2pm. MI Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit; Dahlem Environmental Center, Jackson.***
- ❖ ***Sunday, August 9: 10am-2pm. Michigan Snakes Exhibit; Williamston Farm & Artisan Market.***
- ❖ ***Saturday, August 15: 7pm. Feeding Frenzy Presentation; Hartwick Pines State Park, Grayling.***
- ❖ ***Sunday, August 16: 1pm. MI Snakes Presentation; Hartwick Pines State Park, Grayling.***
- ❖ ***Saturday, August 22: 10:30am. MI Snakes Presentation; Huron County Nature Center, Hume Township.***
- ❖ ***Saturday, August 29: 11am to 2pm. Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit; Riverfest, Middlebury, IN.***



Nature Discovery

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Visit Our Nature Center by Appointment

**Suggested Minimum
Donation: \$5/person/hour**



See and even hold our native Walkingstick.

The sky's the limit for natural science learning here – with a Michigan twist! Adults, couples and individual families are welcome to schedule an intimate indoor or outdoor visit to what we call “The Biggest Little Nature Center in Michigan,” and “Home to the Largest Zoo of Michigan-native Reptiles and Amphibians.” The unique, in-person, hands-on experiences here are unrivaled at any other nature center or zoo! We will bring snakes, turtles, frogs and salamanders out of tanks to interact with adults or students of any age or grade-level.

Identify and feed “the grand slam of Michigan turtles” - all ten species native to our state as they swim and bask in pools on the patio! Meet, pet and feed “Milberta”, our hungry Red-footed tortoise.



Our Wood Turtle enjoys the dense growth in our outdoor tortoise pen. Hand-feed her lettuce or a juicy worm.

Handle any or all of our outgoing garter snakes while learning how to tell them apart, then watch them gobble up worms and frogs. Hold or “wear” a gentle 6-foot Black Ratsnake – the largest in the state!

Many more snakes, turtles, frogs and salamanders to identify and feed. Identify birds at the feeders. Take a guided walk on our trails to identify birds, insects and plant life.

See our ‘caterpillar farm’ featuring an array of impressive butterfly and moth larvae. Arrange now to take Luna Moth caterpillars to raise at home or in school.

Ask about special guided birding outings and nature walks at a natural area of your or our choosing!

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Raise LUNA MOTH Caterpillars Now!



All you need is access to **WALNUT or **HICKORY** leaves!**

EDUCATORS: What a great way to kick off the school year! This is so much better than raising Painted Ladies in the classroom - on a number of levels. Caterpillars feed on leaves for four weeks before spinning cocoons by late September. Moths emerge in early June just before the end of the school year. A valuable addition to middle school and high school science/biology classes too. Contact us to schedule a special presentation - featuring Powerpoint images and live specimens - covering the life cycle, behavior and ecology of this beautiful but seldom seen moth.

PARENTS: Raise Luna larvae with children right at home. There is so much to be learned through daily nurturing and observation of your growing subjects.

LEPIDOPTERA ENTHUSIASTS OF ALL AGES: Hey, this is hardly just kid stuff! Any adult with an interest in the natural world or a desire to reconnect with it in an engaging way scan take advantage of this unusual opportunity.

FIVE FERTILE EGGS or YOUNG LARVAE FOR \$15 includes complete, detailed care instructions. Inquire about reduced rates for larger quantities while they last.

NO NEED TO PURCHASE ANY EXTRA SUPPLIES. All you need is a clean, dry jar to get started.

Contact us to make a purchase and pick up arrangements (Shipping not available).



More Reading/Watching for Concerned Citizens

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/podcasts/horizons-with-pbs-news/the-alarming-decline-of-bird-populations-and-why-humans-should-care>

https://insideclimatenews.org/news/07082026/commercial-fishing-in-protected-pacific-marine-national-monuments/?utm_campaign=weekly-planet&utm_content=20260810&utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&lctg=6050e55c4953a53f1483d5b5

https://www.nytimes.com/2026/08/07/us/politics/reflecting-pool-trump-administration.html?campaign_id=54&emc=edit_clim_20260809&instance_id=180079&nl=climate-forward®i_id=97652655&segment_id=224441&user_id=e2b8dd8c9b543fb8c35d5dd30658067e

https://www.nytimes.com/2026/08/03/climate/trump-bears-ears-monument-recreation.html?campaign_id=54&emc=edit_clim_20260809&instance_id=180079&nl=climate-forward®i_id=97652655&segment_id=224441&user_id=e2b8dd8c9b543fb8c35d5dd30658067e

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-026-02213-0>

The next generation would be justified in looking back at us and asking, “What were you thinking? Couldn’t you hear what the scientists were saying? Couldn’t you hear what Mother Nature was screaming at you?” – Al Gore

I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. I want you to act. I want you to act like you would in a crisis. I want you to act like your house is on fire, because it is. – Greta Thunberg

The personal actions that cut climate pollution fast are to go flight-, car-, and meat-free. Start with the one that feels most feasible for you; if you can’t totally go without, aim to cut your consumption today at least in half. – Kimberly Nicholas, Under the Sky We Make

What if we had storytelling mechanisms that said it is important that you know about the well-being of wildlife in your neighborhood? – Robin Wall Kimmerer

Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature. It will never fail you. – Frank Lloyd Wright



Statewideindivisiblemi.com



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