

## Living with Thugs

**M**y dance instructor, partner and friend told me yesterday about a plant present he had gotten for his garden from family. Money Plant, *Lunaria annua*. No, unfortunately money doesn't grow on trees. This biennial known for its translucent silver dollar seedpods is going to join his gooseneck *lysmachia*, *Lysmachia clethroides* out in a bed we mutually designed years ago. When they added the gooseneck, I flapped my wings warning of the perils of runaway plants. They were made so terrified by my dire warnings; they manage its sprawl each year by setting limits with their edger. (Until they fall asleep at the wheel and the plant runs amok.)



I told my friend about an article appearing years ago in *Green Scene Magazine*, a publication of the Pennsylvania Horticultural

Society, which warned folks to beware of presents of plants from your friends (?) Sometimes their generosity is inspired by a rampaging plant in their own garden and being the kind hearted soul that they are, they can't just throw away the pieces they dug out of their gardens.

This discussion set my mind to thinking about the pros and cons of highly expansive plants. I invited my friend to come to my garden and observe my own mistakes made over the years. God forbid you put *Mertsensia virginica* amongst more demure plants. I have it all over my yard having planted it twenty years ago. It is not so attractive in its phase of decline when the leaves seem to expand and turn yellow and flop all over anything within its reach. A happy accident has occurred though in that same garden. The *phlox paniculata* has gone on a rampage and in fact came up in time to hide the declining leaves of the Virginia bluebells. I've threatened to roundup the whole garden but enjoy the hummingbirds that come to the phlox and have added different color phlox to get all sorts of colors to take my mind off having let these plants do their own thing. (Common ginger, *Asarum canadense*, is another highly prolific space hog here.)



Geranium phaeum Samobor  
(Mourning Widow) & Campanula  
takesimana Elizabeth

Not having much time for gardening because of tending so many landscapes for others, I have begun to see the glass as half full. The Geranium phaeum Samobor (Mourning Widow) with its purple-black center (shown in photo) has appeared 20 feet beyond its original spot, but where it grows no weed dare survive. In the same photo Campanula takesimana Elizabeth is edging her way in amongst the Mourning Widow. She may be promiscuous but she sure is pretty.

My golden star, native geraniums, snakeroot, Kirengeshoma have expanded tremendously. Though none of

them are as piggy as the aforementioned about space, their growth has woven a ground cover that disallows too many weeds, though some enterprising individuals manage to find their niche.

So there are some benefits to some plants running amok. I would never never never add Aegopodium the green species form. Saw it take over a property in Lunenburg and Frederick Law Olmsted's own garden at Fairsted. When I was in the Landscape Garden History Program at Radcliffe years ago, the U.S. Government had done a study on how to eradicate it at Fairsted. Love to know if they ever succeeded. Ultimately, a word of caution as some of these thugs are tough customers, not to mention there is a list of invasives that one should become familiar with so as not to promote their further spread across the countryside and their sale is prohibited.



© Wheat Landscaping 2010