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 Jo- hanna Vietry told Newport This Week that the group is collaborat- ing with the URI Master Gardener Program to add two more. Plant- ings are native to Rhode Island, said Vietry, and are intended to at- tract native pollinators and Mon- arch butterflies, a species that is in- cressingly endangered.

“These two boats are being planted,” she said, “to help deliver the message that planting a vari- ety of Rhode Island native plants in yards and in community spaces will help provide biodiversity to many beneficial insects, which are cur- rently 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 challeng- es 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 plant- er and bench to be placed at the Maritime Center and Ann Street Pier. The new planter will be locat- ed on the harbor side next to the building, set on a wooden cradle in the sand. A bench will be pro- vided 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 side. The planter will be ready for the public.

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 an- other life as a rather unusual planter, it will also become a teaching tool. Another plus: Dinghy donations are tax deductible.

For more information on volun- teering or to donate a dinghy, con- tact Vietry at info@newportwaterfront.org.

Wish list for the butterfly garden dinghies:

- Asclepias tuberosa
  - Orange butterfly weed
- Symphyotrichum novi-belgii
  - New England aster
- Vernonia noveboracensis
  - Swamp milkweed
- Solidago sempervirens
  - Baby Joe pye weed
- Solidago virgaurea
  - Yellow-stemmed Big Bud
- Helenium flexuosum
  - Old Field goldenrod
- Liatris novae-angliae
  - New England blazing star
- Symphiotrichum novi-belgii
  - New England aster
- Asclepias incarnata
  - Rose milkweed
- Liatris novae-angliae
  - Northern blazing star
- Phlox paniculata
  - Swamp milkweed
- Verbena hastata
  - Purple-headed sneezeweed
- Verbena bonariensis
  - Blue vervain

“Monarch Butterfly Boat Planter”

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 visi- tors, would lose a treasure.”

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

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