

JANUARY 15-31, 2016 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EAST VIEW

By Dick Harlow

BAYBERRY

If you have walked along the shore of Cape Cod or along a peat bog you might very well have been introduced to Bayberry, *Myrica gale*, a 3-foot deciduous shrub. Or also along the seashore *Myrica pensylvanica*, a salt tolerant form of Bayberry that has gray waxy fruit that birds like. Some say that *M. gale* will grow to 6 feet, but I have not seen a wild species grow more than 2 feet. And, I have not seen *M. pensylvanica* grow any taller than 4-5 feet, mostly quite low to around 3 feet. That doesn't mean it can't or won't grow higher, just that I have not personally seen it grow as tall as the literature projects it. Dependent on the species, and there are 30-40 of them, their height can vary. My recommendation would be *M. pensylvanica* since this plant can grow in a variety of soils including clay and tolerate a number of weather conditions.



Bayberry, *Myrica pensylvanica*
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The reason I like this plant and feel some should be planted around EastView, is that it has evolved the bacteria that fixes nitrogen to its roots and produces fruit that is preferred by some birds. Tree Swallows, Gray Catbirds and woodpeckers like the berries as well as the Eastern Meadowlark. Top that off with the fact that having several plants would also make good nesting sites for songbirds. The fruit is also favored in the fall by Yellow-rumped Warblers. Yellow-rumps will linger in an area that has a mass of bayberry. That means we might see this warbler stay longer in the fall as it moves to its winter quarters further south along the MA or RI coastline. I think it would be exciting to have warblers flitting about our Bayberry bushes.

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Bayberry berries, *Myrica pensylvanica*
© Moonshine Designs Nursery

Bayberry plants can be pruned periodically and respond well to this manipulation. Along with being pruned, bayberry does not have any serious insect or disease problems.

Since bayberry is a dioecious plant, meaning that there are two distinct sexes. Only the female plants produce berries; a male plant will be needed to ensure pollination.

SLIME MOLDS

Ever walked in the woods, along a garden path or through a garden? After the second or third time, in a spot you did not see before, you see something that looks strange, fungus-like. If you did you might think it was interesting, Right? Then, when you see it the next day it looks as if it has grown, spread slightly. Maybe by the next day your curiosity gets the better of you and you take another look. It has enlarged, again being slightly larger, almost like it is growing in slow motion! Now you might be concerned, so you tap it with a stick. As soon as you tap it several times a brown dust appears, bursting out from this yellow, pink, brownish or red blob on the ground. That dust almost looks similar to the dust emitted when you hit a Puffball, which is a fungus. Therefore, it must be a fungus. Really? A fungus that is so colorful that it grows in 24 hours and again in 48 hours and is weird looking, too weird to touch. If that is the case you are probably looking at a slime mold.

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Physarum polycephalum Dog Vomit Slime Mold
POSTED IN [NATURE ARTICLES, MISC](#)

Oh, so a slime mold is a fungus that moves? No, it is not. It used to be considered part of the fungi family, but it is not today. Science now groups them as an aggregate of independent single celled organisms; each cell can live independently, but as a group they band together and can develop independent reproductive structures. However, within the 900 plus species most slime molds are only a few centimeters in size, but some species can achieve a size up to a square meter and have a weight of close to 30 grams. For slime molds to be seen and to flourish they need wet soil that doesn't easily dry out.



Trichia varia Eigenes Werk, Copyleft
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Because slime molds are an aggregate of single independent organisms they are classed as protists. But, once the single cells become an aggregate the group then

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needs to look for food, for organic matter that they can consume. The interesting fact that I previously mentioned is that before these single cells come together they can exist well as independent single cells, like amoebas do, as long as the food source is plentiful. But, when the food source becomes scarce these single cells band together and move as a single mass of material. Maybe working as a team works better than competing with each other.

Slime molds will feed on dead plant matter, on microorganisms, on organic matter that is on the ground or in the soil. **Scary** if they fed on anything other than dead decomposing vegetation, on other fungi or bacteria! Slime molds become a necessary part of the ecosystem and a contributor to organic decomposition.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Relative to the article I wrote in November 15-30, 2015 concerning various farm fields and the use and disuse of cover crops, I thought this article from the Addison Independent would be of interest to those of you who are interested in the agriculture of Vermont.

Local farms go for cover crops Published on December 17, 2015

By [Addison Independent](#), [Middlebury](#)

MIDDLEBURY — Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition (CVFC) members planted 6,735 acres of winter cover crops on farmland in Addison, Chittenden and Rutland counties to help protect water quality, improve soil health and increase next year's crop yields.

That included 5,587 acres on 31 farms in Addison County.

A cover crop is a crop that is planted for the primary purpose of covering the soil to protect fields from erosion and nutrient loss while building soil health when a cash crop is not growing. These cover crops will hold the soil and reduce nutrient runoff and leaching through the fall, winter and spring, when soil and water quality is most vulnerable. The 36 CVFC farms that reported growing cover crops this year planted acreage that ranged from eight acres to 800 acres from as far north as Milton to as far south as Danby.

These cover crops were planted many different ways and included a diversity of plant species such as winter cereal rye, annual ryegrass, oats, clover, vetch and even radish and turnip.

Many CVFC farms also participated in ongoing research and demonstration projects in conjunction with the UVM Extension Champlain Valley Crop, Soil & Pasture Team based out of Middlebury, and hosted field days on their farms to help other farmers learn more about the art of cover cropping on different soil types, in different cropping systems and with different equipment. This fall, CVFC member Foster

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Brothers Farm of Middlebury were the host site for a UVM Extension Soil Health Workshop and Field Day that welcomed nationally renowned soil health advocate Ray Archuleta to share exciting soil health concepts followed by a field day in one of the Foster's corn fields to show 16 different combinations of cover crops. More than 80 people, including 40 farmers from around the region, attended the event.

There are many resources available to farmers interested in planting and learning more about cover crops. UVM Extension, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets all have technical and/or financial resources available to people who want to implement this best management practice on their farms.

Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition is a nonprofit corporation made up of Vermont farmers of all kinds (dairy, beef, field crops, vegetables) and supporting organizations and individuals. They are committed to working together to protect water quality in Lake Champlain and to support a thriving agricultural economy in Vermont. With more than 50 members that include farmers, agricultural businesses and support organizations, they demonstrate the many ways farms can accomplish both goals and share that with other farmers, the public and policy makers.

Weather Tidbits

JANUARY 15-31, 2016

All Measurements taken at solar noon (1130 EST).

PRECIPITATION

Precipitation was: 19.6 mm or 0.9 inches.

Overcast Days: 17

WIND

Highest wind: 38 MPH, 10 JAN.

Direction: North

Average Wind speed: 3.2 mph,

Dominate Wind Direction: South

Days w/wind gusts 20-29 MPH: 16

Days w/wind gusts 30 MPH: 3

TEMPERATURE

Mean Temp: -5.2C⁰ 22.6 °F

High Temp: 15.3 C⁰ 59.5 °F

Low Temp: -20.4 C⁰ -4.7 °F

0.0 C⁰ - Temperature Days: (32°F)

MIN <0.0 = 14

MAX <0.0 = 28