

There is a Swedish folk song that begins its refrain with the advice to “look at all the flowers that are already blooming in the meadow.” That is pretty good advice for all summer long. As the spring flowers give way to summer and even fall blooms, there is always plenty to see in our Michigan meadows.

We took a walk through the meadows today, partly to look up the cattle. We had not seen them for several days, as they presently are on eighty acres of woods, brush, and open ground. Portioning this old homestead that is owned by a cousin would make more sense, but for several reasons is not an option just now, so when the cattle are there, they have free range to roam.

Now, toward the end of July, the meadows are filled with flowers, and just walking across this acreage, partly on our place and partly on my cousin’s, one can’t help but be impressed with Nature’s diversity and unconscious beauty.

Nobody has told Mother Nature that certain colors or shapes are not esthetically pleasing in proximity to one another. The profusion of blooms, grasses, so-called weeds, and pasture legumes seem in harmony.

Common yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) makes patches of white on one dry hillside. This is a native or, sometimes, introduced perennial that is common throughout the state. The genus name *Achillea* comes from a legend that Achilles used it to treat bleeding wounds during the Trojan War. And, many cultures do use yarrow as a medicinal plant. The dried plant is often prepared in a tea to treat winter colds.

Heal-all (*Prunella vulgaris*) is scattered all over the meadows. The blue flowers and physical characteristics that are common to the mints make it easy to identify. Although it is used medically, some question its effectiveness in dealing with sore throats or other ailments.

The pasture legumes—white, red, and alsike clovers, bird’s foot trefoil—the grasses, both native and introduced—and the “weeds,” those forbs that a general prejudice has designated as less than useful are all consumed by our sheep and cattle. There isn’t much that they avoid, and even eat thistles when they are young and tender.

So, a dry hillside of spotted knapweed (*Centaurea stoebe*) produces no dismay. Although considered a noxious weed by many agricultural agencies, partly because of its ability to crowd out other

plants in addition to a possible chemical influence on soil that keeps other plants from growing, our cattle and sheep eat knapweed, too. But, right now, while it is in full bloom, we will leave it to the bees. Spotted knapweed makes wonderful light, mild honey. Today, we watched the honey bees gathering nectar from the plants. And, standing near the bee yard, there was a constant stream of workers flying out from the hives and back with nectar.

In other meadows on our walk, away from the pastures, we saw common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) in bloom, as well as swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*.) Canada hawkweed (*Hieracium kalmii*), and orange hawkweed (*Hieracium aurantiacum*), the one that we always called devil's paintbrush, are blooming now, as are many of the cinquefoils, St. John's wort, Queen Anne's Lace, and countless others. Black-eyed Susans are in full flower now, and there are still Ox-eye Daisies.

But, though it is still July, it is evident that fall is not far away. The various species of goldenrods are budded, and the asters, too, are beginning to show flowering. We scarcely have time to enjoy Nature's offerings for one season before it has passed and we begin to see the flora of another time of year.