

Eco-Friendly Native Plant of the Month

FEBRUARY 2017

NC NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

REEDY CREEK NATURE PRESERVE



Photos by Will Stuart

Alnus serrulata Tag Alder

Stream's Edge

Tag Alder is the native plant you don't know you love...but think about it...those miniature "cones," the swaying 4" male catkins that appear in February, the glossy undulating green leaves, the babbling brook or shiny pond that is usually nearby.... when you see Tag Alder, you just want to smile and say, ahhhh, there it is.

Admiring the close-up beauty of the reddish winter leaf buds, sitting on a distinctive stalk, is a great treat of Tag Alder. Interestingly, last year's "cones" remain on the twig for up to a year for a unique and beautiful display. The "cones" are really the female catkin and native plant enthusiasts have been known to use them for jewelry and art projects.

Landscape Uses

Tag Alder would be an excellent choice for a challenging wet location. The multi-stemmed trunks create a

tenacious thicket that becomes an effective choice for erosion control. Tag Alder is also known as a nitrogen fixer, allowing it to build up the soil in a stream area.

Eco-benefits

According to
D o u g
T a l l a m y,
A l d e r s
support 255
species of

caterpillars as well as many sawfly larvae. This allows a grove of Alder to provide food and shelter for wintering birds, breeding birds, and migrant birds. Beavers seek out the twigs.

William Cullina reports the alder aphid is the "primary source of food for our only carnivorous butterfly, the harvester (*Feniseca tarquinius*), whose larvae prey on aphids much as

ladybugs and lacewings do." In addition Alder leaves are caterpillar food for tiger and pallid tiger swallowtails, white admiral, green comma and morning cloak butterflies.

Planting Alder

Also known as Common Alder, or Hazel Alder, Tag Alder should be available this spring at the UNCC Botanical Garden plant sale, April 14-16 or can be found at online nurseries.

A full sun location is best, but it can tolerate some shade.

Another similar plant with catkins for moist-to-upland sites is *Corylus americana* (Hazelnut). Companion plants for a moist location include Buttonbush, Possumhaw and River Birch.

For more Eco and Bird Friendly pages visit:
ncwildflower.org
ncnpsouthern piedmont.wordpress.com

©2017 North Carolina Native Plant Society

