

Garden Logue: February 5<sup>th</sup>  
William Moss

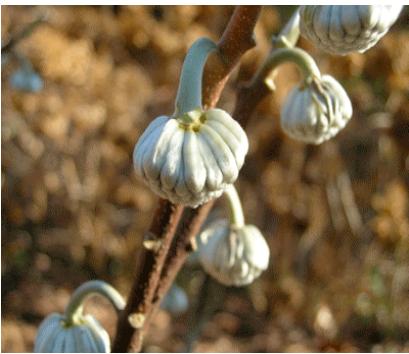
What a winter! Temperatures are moderate enough for bike rides and light jackets. I don't even know where my long johns are! At my garden, witch hazels and snowdrops are blooming five weeks earlier than normal, and I am easily harvesting sun-chokes from the loose ground. The tubers are normally dormant until Spring, but this crop is already sprouting lively white roots.



The animals are just as active as the plants. Fat nightcrawlers can be found wriggling beneath the leaf litter. Voles, normally hidden by snowcover, scuttle through the garden debris. Geese are brazenly grazing in open fields.

Most surprisingly, there are lots of ants. I have never seen ants active in winter. Little brownish ones swarmed a spill in my garage and large black ones scamper across my friend's back porch.

So what's going on? The warm days are nice. Sunny afternoon walks in the middle of winter are a treat. Flowers and food from the garden in this season are truly remarkable. Is this just an anomaly or the jumpstart to global warming? Will winters continue to moderate?



Will Chicago have nearly continuous gardening, like Atlanta. Will I be able to plant winter-blooming *Edgeworthia* and colorful crepe myrtles here?!



Okay, okay. Calm down. It is just too early to tell. February could still unleash a brutal assault of teens, snow, and general miserable-ness that squashes our enthusiasm and forces us to retrieve our long johns. Besides, we need cold winters. They are an essential part of our climate that helps maintain our local ecosystem.

Without frigid temperatures there would be a proliferation of pests. We count on winter exposure to reduce a portion of our marauding insects. This state depends on corn and soybean crops. More pests would either mean less crops or more pesticides. Either way there is an increase in economic and environmental costs for the consumers. The same applies for mosquitoes. Chicagoland is currently battling the virulent west Nile mosquito (*Culex pipiens*). If our winters moderate to those of Atlanta, then the yellow fever mosquito (*Aedes aegypti*) would be added to the mix. More mosquito abatement programs and the potential of yellow fever would raise costs and fear levels.



Warmer winters would also increase the type and number of invasive plants. Currently, honeysuckles, buckthorns, and barberries are serious threats to our native ecosystem's flora and fauna. Warmer winters would invite others, like: Chinese privet, English ivy, and the notorious kudzu. These plants have wreaked havoc on southern habitats.

A climate shift along with its accompanying host of invasive plants and animals could forever change Illinois' landscape. The remnant prairies and oak savannas, that once defined Illinois, could be regulated to Nature Museum exhibits.

Gardening puts you in touch with nature, literally bringing you closer to the Earth. You are able to notice connections and events that others don't. That stated, I hope this winter season as just an anomaly. I'll continue to enjoy afternoon walks and early blooms. But for the sake of our unique habitats and gardens, I expect to get lots of use from my heavy coat next year or even next week. Skilling is saying this mildness might end soon. Just in case, let me find my long johns.