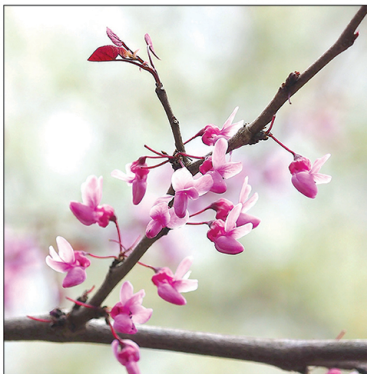




Staff photo by Kim Hawks

The Japanese Jack in the Pulpit, a perennial plant, is originally from the Island of Shikoku in Japan.



Staff photo by Kim Hawks

The Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), a North Carolina native plant, is one of the first trees to flower in the Spring.



Staff photo by Kim Hawks

A breeze blows a cloud of pine pollen.



Staff photo by Kim Hawks

Wild Woodland Phlox (*Phlox divaricatus*) is one of Chatham's native wildflowers. Its flowers attract hummingbirds, butterflies, and bees.

Hawk's Nest keeps gardener 'grounded and happy'

CN+R STAFF REPORT

"I need plants in my life," says Kim Hawks, and for many years she's surrounded herself with them.

She's been gardening "a very long time." Hawks earned a BS degree in Horticultural Science at N.C. State University in the Seventies and began nurturing a dream to create a wildflower nursery.

"At that time, many growers were just going to the woods, the mountains, the swamps, and digging up the wild plants and selling them," she said. "This reduced populations significantly, and disturbed the habitat. My goal was to figure out how to propagate perennial wildflowers and not steal from their native habitat."

Hawks worked closely with the staff at the North Carolina Botanical Gardens in Raleigh and is a staff photographer for the Chatham News + Record.

"My nursery, Niche Gardens, opened in 1985 from a handful of seeds I got from the N.C. Botanical Gardens and sowed in pots, along with some plants I'd been propagating. Little by little, it grew into what I called my 'boutique nursery.'"

Hawks designed and created display gardens to show her customers how to use "these lovely plants," she said.

"I invited local artists to bring and install their art in the garden, to sell," said Hawks. "It was a win/win situation. In 2000, due to health concerns, I sold the nursery to one of my employees. Niche Gardens continues to offer native wildflowers."

Hawks moved to north Chatham County after selling the nursery and started a new garden from scratch at her home.

"It was a house in the woods," Hawks said. "Not a lot of landscaping had been done. After thinning some trees and collecting rocks on the land to loosely lay out beds, I made sure to include some of my favorite plants that I grew at Niche, among others."

Said Hawks, "With so much land clearing going on around me and in the area, I wanted to create a green chlorophyll paradise to offset some lands being scraped clean."

Calling her home garden "loose and naturalistic," neither overly-manicured or fussed over, Hawks said plants keep her "grounded and happy."

"I garden to attract birds, butterflies and humming birds," she said. "While I have humming bird feeders, I also grow plants they love to nectar on; salvia is one example."

She calls it her Hawk's Nest.



Staff photo by Kim Hawks

This Pond Cypress is coming alive after a long winter.



Staff photo by Kim Hawks

A Tiger Swallowtail butterfly nips on the nectar of a pink azalea.



Staff photo by Kim Hawks

Much of the yellow dusting Chatham each spring is Pine pollen.