The bloom that always catches my eye this time of the year is the purple of the Tall Ironweed (Vernonia gigantean). According to the Ohio Perennial and Biennial Weed Guide, Tall Ironweed is in the Sunflower Family (Asteraceae), and is a native of North America. Its present range is generally confined to the eastern half of the U.S. and includes all of Ohio. The plant prefers to grow in areas such as meadows and pastures where the soil is fertile and conditions are moderately damp.

Tall Ironweed is an upright perennial with a highly visible dark red stem that grows over 7 feet tall and is widely branched at the top. At the ends of branches in loose clusters are saucer-shaped, $\frac{1}{4}$-inch-wide flower heads consisting of 30 or fewer purple disk flowers. Attached to the stem are 10-inch-long, lance-shaped, pointed leaves that have short downy hairs on the lower surface. Reproduction is primarily by way of seeds, but new shoots sometimes arise from the large root crown. Tall Ironweed attracts Bees, Birds and butterflies, and is a prized plant in my Perennial bed. It stands back from the edge of the bed and is protected from the wrath of the mower and string-trimmer (so far).

You might have noticed that all my information came from the Ohio Perennial and Biennial Weed Guide (www.oardc.ohio-state.edu/weedguide), but in my book, I count this plant on my Wildflower list!

Robert Henn’s wildflower list for the months of August, September and October includes: Asters, Fringed Gentian, Goldenrod, Tall Ironweed, Jerusalem Artichoke, Prairie-dock, Common Ragweed, Tickseed Sunflower, and Wingstem.

During mid-to late summer and early autumn, large unusually shaped, colorful caterpillars are often seen. According to Factsheet HYG-2015-11, Giant Caterpillars, these caterpillars, larvae of moths and butterflies, feed on leaves of various trees, shrubs, and other plants. The exact host plant or plants vary with each species of caterpillar. Most giant caterpillars are discovered when wandering across lawns, driveways, etc.

These caterpillars are fully grown and they are on their way to pupation (transformation into adults) sites. They have finished eating and will cause little or no further plant damage. Therefore, controls are generally not recommended.

Moths and butterflies develop by complete metamorphosis characterized by four distinct growth stages. The egg hatches into a larva (caterpillar) which grows and molts (shedds its skin) several times before transforming into a pupa from which a winged adult emerges later.

The tobacco hornworm, also known as the Carolina Sphinx Moth larva, has seven diagonal white stripes on each side of the body and a curved red horn at the rear. The tomato hornworm, also known as the Five Spotted Hawk Moth larva, has eight curved white stripes on each side of the body and a straight black horn at the rear. Both caterpillars are green, occasionally with a brown or black tinge, and will reach a length of four inches. Food plants of both larvae include tobacco, tomato, eggplant, pepper, potato, and related weeds. The larval period ranges from 28 to 36 days, after which the larva burrows into the soil three to four inches deep to pupate and overwinter.
In May or June, the adult emerges. These sphinx moths are powerful fliers, and are sometimes called hawk moths or hummingbird moths because they hover while feeding on flowers.

Caterpillars can be controlled through hand-picking; however, both caterpillars are also subject to the depredations of several predators and parasitoids. Paper wasps, yellow jackets, and other wasps will grab them, chew them up, and take the remains to their nests to feed their larvae. The tiny parasitoid wasp, *Cotesia congregata* (Family Braconidae) inserts its eggs into the caterpillars and the resulting wasp larvae consume the hornworms from the inside out! Have you ever come upon a hornworm on your tomato plant and noticed rows of white cocoons “sprouting” on its back? A wise gardener will leave it alone, knowing that the wasp cocoons represent the potential future demise of numerous other hornworms.

We are enjoying the fruits of our labor in the garden. Green Beans, tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, kale, summer squash, and cabbage are on the menu daily. The Fall Garden seeds are going in the raised beds this weekend!