

# THE FABULOUS REAPPEARANCE OF SWAMP ROSE MALLOW

BY TERRY BONACE, ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION GROUP



When did you first notice the giant, pink hibiscus flowers growing in Beverly Shores? They first began showing up in a wet meadow on the west side of Broadway, south of the Great Marsh a few years ago. This population greatly expanded and now they are on the east side of Broadway too, near the entrance to the Great Marsh Trail. Had they escaped from a tropical garden or could they possibly be native plants to the region?

The great majority of hibiscus species are of tropical or subtropical origin. Still you may often find them in gardens in temperate regions, in a wide range of colors and sizes. They are placed in the ground or in containers, but these cold-sensitive, tropical species are usually used as annuals or kept in a greenhouse during the winter. We happen to be lucky enough to have two, winter-hardy, native species of hibiscus in the dunes

region: the swamp rose mallow (*Hibiscus moscheutos*) and the halberd-leaved rose mallow (*H. laevis*). I have seen the halberd-leaved (so-named because of the sharply-pointed leaves presumably like the tip of a halberd) growing in the State Park near trail 2. It is almost as showy but much less numerous.

It turns out our hibiscus is the native swamp rose mallow. The plant had been in hiding for years, according to Dan Mason, Botanist with the Indiana Dunes National Park. A small colony of these plants was languishing east of Broadway and north of the Great Marsh restoration project. The plants were carefully examined by the National Park and several botanists, in order to determine if the plants were indeed the native variety and not a cultivar. Then some seeds were collected and raised in 2005 and 2006. About 5 plants were placed on the west side of Broadway. There they have flourished and multiplied to provide the magnificent show we see each year. A very successful reintroduction, indeed, and a glorious display in August!

If you would like to purchase this native hibiscus for your wet and sunny garden, look carefully at the description. Because these hardy hibiscus are so beautiful, many horticultural varieties have been developed from them in a range of colors and shades. Also, there is some discrepancy with the scientific name. I usually direct gardeners interested in the native form to check the scientific name but as swamp rose mallow goes by both *H. moscheutos* and *H. palustris*, it is more complicated. Our species is pink with a red center. That description along with one of these two scientific names should direct you to the native species. It is also helpful to buy them from a reputable native plant vendor.

The Environmental Restoration Group (ERG) will be glad to help identify plants for you and make suggestions for removal and for native replacements. Don't hesitate to contact Terry Bonace ([tbonace@gmail.com](mailto:tbonace@gmail.com)), Candice Smith ([cmsmith2@umail.iu.edu](mailto:cmsmith2@umail.iu.edu)), or Bill Schaudt ([blschaudt2@gmail.com](mailto:blschaudt2@gmail.com)) for assistance. Also, please visit our website at [www.bserg.org](http://www.bserg.org) for further information on invasive plants and native replacements.