Reading Responses

Roberto Burle Marx- Garden as Form of Art
Michael Pollan- Weeds are Us
Olivia Miethke
LA2121L- Ecology + Design Lab

Andy Wilcox
Burle Marx said in his lecture the most important factor in a garden is light. He says “Light is a thing that cannot be calculated, cannot be contrived. The use of light, when well thought-out, can bring surprising results. “ Light is a constantly changing, dynamic quality of our environment that feeds and influences the earth. A landscape can be experienced in so many different ways based on the qualities of light that are present when one visits. The early morning, for example, can have a soft, filtered blue light from the morning fog or moisture in the air and low solar orientation. Mid day is often harsh, vibrant, with short shadows that differ from the golden, warm hues and long crisp shadows of late afternoon. It is some of these characteristics that illuminate the landscape in ways we, as designers, can study as best as possible, but can never really understand fully until it is experienced firsthand.

A place I have seen that is brought to life by light is the Yosemite Valley. Although it may not be what Burle Marx was thinking of as a garden, it’s a landscape where light can change the experience of it completely. The late afternoon is, in my opinion, the most magical. The granite faces become lit by the sun, giving off bright golden light to the valley floor. The forests transform from a solid mass of pines into illuminated, needle-covered candlesticks, that glow from every direction. In the summertime, the golden grasses that cover the meadows shine, and everything about the place is just unreal. Then, the sun goes down and the show begins again the next day. The Getty Museum is also pretty spectacular at different times of day, again, late afternoon is particularly striking. But morning at the Getty is also great, where the travertine is exceptionally bright and white, and the plants come to life with the morning sun.
Michael Pollan- Weeds are Us

Michael Pollan shares an anecdotal story as he explores the concept of plants that are ‘weeds’ as he plants his first flower bed. We, as humans, are the curators of the plant palettes are surrounded by. Value of plants, or distaste of them, are a human construct. Our perceptions of what is worth of being grown vs a being considered a weed are often influenced by our idea of nativity. When we talk about native plants, there has to be a baseline of where to draw the line on which plants we consider as being native to a region, or exotic, or invasive. The baseline is typically informed by historic events, such as pre-European settlement, or pre-human timelines. However, the baselines we choose are up to human choice, and our biases and beliefs can play a role in what we decide to include or exclude as native plants. The plants that are excluded then have a negative connotation, as troublesome, as threatening, as chaotic. Besides the physical implications of this view, in the form of eradication, there are arguments for social and political messages embedded in the growth of weeds.

The lowly, easy to grow, abundant plants have often been compared to the common man, to the immigrant, to people that have been placed at the bottom of the hierarchy in society. Color, as well as level of cultivation, influence a plants place within this hierarchy, and it is societal values that determine where they fall. Changing the narrative associated with weeds can influence how people view these plants aesthetically, culturally, ecologically, and transform their existence into one of value and appreciation. Whether we focus on their sculptural character, texture, color, fragrance, or ability to thrive with low inputs and in disturbed areas, how these ‘weeds’ are placed within the garden affects how we interpret their presence. While we continue to discuss the ever-changing variety of plants in our own ‘nature’, how we choose and what we choose to grow should be a question at the front of our minds. But as for now, as human influence continues to spread, so will the plants that follow us. As one of the Romantics in the 19th century, Gerald Manley Hopkins stated, “Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet”.
**CYPERUS ESCULENTIS - DWARF PAPYRUS**  
Height x Spread: 3’ x 3’  
Water Filtration, Yellow Flowers, Soft Texture

**FOeniculum vulgare - Wild Fennel**  
Height x Spread: 6’ x 3’  
Fragrance, Yellow Flowers, Soft Texture, Host Plant (Anise Swallowtail), Edible

**Brassica rapa - Wild Mustard**  
Height x Spread: 3’ x 2’  
Edible, Pollinator Plant, Yellow Flower