



Here are some **highlights from our November 11, 2021, chapter meeting on zoom:**

- **Chapter Business:**
  - Chapter membership now stands at 80. Membership ranges across southeastern Pennsylvania and into Delaware, Maryland, and New Jersey, all part of the same ecoregion.
  - Recordings of past meetings are available on our youtube channel. Search for Wild Ones of Southeastern Pennsylvania. We also have a chapter Instagram account and a facebook page.
  - **Board and Officer Elections** – 23 members were present. The Board of Directors slate was approved with no abstentions. The Board of Officers slate was approved with no abstentions.
  - **Treasurer's Report** – No Treasurer's Report was submitted. Chapter funds are available for projects that partner with other nonprofit organizations to get more native plants in the ground. Email [wildonesofsepa@gmail.com](mailto:wildonesofsepa@gmail.com) with ideas for projects.
- **Thought of the Month:** This month we're thinking about nativars, which are cultivars of native species. Wild Ones has developed a statement on nativars, here: <https://wildones.org/revised-nativar-statement-2021/>

Wild Ones encourages the use of native plants to promote biodiversity and ecosystem health in gardens and landscapes, so where do nativars fit in? Do these cultivars of native plants have the same ecological value as straight-species plants?

A native plant is one belonging to a species that was present in a region, habitat, or ecosystem prior to European settlement. These plants have held an ecological niche in our landscape for centuries and reproduce primarily through open pollination. These plants are sometimes referred to as straight-species or wild-type natives.

Cultivars are plants that are developed or selected for their desirable characteristics and maintained by propagation. Cultivars are reproduced through cloning methods such as grafting, cutting, root divisions, layering, tissue culture, etc.

A nativar is a cultivar of a straight-species native plant. Nativars are propagated for many reasons: flower colors or forms, compact size, insect or disease resistance, tolerance of certain environmental conditions, and more. Nativars might be a genetic variant found in nature, or they can be bred for certain desirable characteristics.

Do nativars provide the same ecological return as a straight-species native? One way in which these plants are more limited is their lack of genetic diversity; another limitation may be in their delivery of ecosystem services. Research is ongoing to determine whether nativars serve the

same ecological function in the landscape with the same degree of effectiveness as straight-species plants.

Native plants grown from seed carry the wealth of their native gene pool. They perpetuate this diversity as they grow and participate in successful pollination. This genetic diversity helps whole species to survive and adapt when confronted by environmental stress.

Most cultivars, including nativars, are propagated by cloning, so each plant has the same genetic makeup as the parent plant. Sometimes these clones go on to participate in the natural reproductive cycle by cross-pollinating with other true natives; sometimes they do not.

If only a small percentage of the plants being planted in gardens and landscapes were nativars, there would be no concern. However, the mass production and increased use of nativars over straight species native plants is a concern for ecologists, environmentally friendly gardeners, horticulturists, and native plant professionals. Straight species open-pollinated plants, and the genetic diversity they contain, are the foundation of both nature and horticulture. They are the building blocks of future horticultural selections as well as the key to ecological preservation.

There is much yet to be discovered about the differences between specific nativars and straight species in regard to their particular usefulness to pollinators, as well as their ability to provide other ecological services, such as food sources for insects.

Dr. Douglas Tallamy, Wild Ones Honorary Director and University of Delaware entomologist, advises: "It is a bad idea to load the landscape with cultivars that have no genetic variability... I think the safest policy right now is to encourage the use of straight species. Ask for them at your local nursery; encourage nurserymen to start stocking more straight species. The nursery industry has not embraced the message that native plants are more about ecosystem function than about looks. We have to convince them that there is a market for plants with high function."

While a nativar will most likely be a better ecological fit for North American gardens than an exotic species from Asia or Europe, it remains to be seen to what extent it can fill the ecological niche and provide the genetic richness of a native plant. It is the mission of the Wild Ones organization to promote environmentally sound landscaping practices to preserve biodiversity, through the preservation, restoration and establishment of native plant communities.

References:

<https://wildones.org/revised-nativar-statement-2021/>

<https://grownativemass.org/Great-Resources/experts-videos/How-Native-Plant-Cultivars-Affect-Pollinators>

<https://www.humanegardener.com/flower-power-a-qa-with-annie-white/>

<https://www.nwf.org/Magazines/National-Wildlife/2016/JuneJuly/Gardening/Cultivars>

<https://transitiontownmedia.org/choosing-native-plants-three-mistakes-to-avoid/>

- **Presentation – Making Maple Syrup.** Chapter member Jethro Heiko shared information on tapping various species of trees in his backyard and at other sites to make syrup. Over 25 species of hardwood can be tapped, including red maple, silver maple, sycamore, beech, birch, and black walnut. Jethro creates tree-tapping programs in southeast Pennsylvania and NJ, including tree identification and collaboration with other groups.

One gallon of syrup requires 30 to 40 gallons of sap. Processing sap is more efficient in a cooperative setting, so he is concentrating on creating community programs. The program is great for connecting people with trees and with a process that dates back thousands of years in North America. He is planning to set up community sugar processing this winter (February 2022). Contact Jethro at [jethroheiko@gmail.com](mailto:jethroheiko@gmail.com) if you have trees you are interested in tapping or would like to participate in the community sugar shack. Find out more at <https://oaklanemaple.com>

- Presentation – Dividing Perennials. Medha Pai, a Chester County Master Gardener since 2015, presented information on how and when to divide perennials.
  - Many perennials need to be divided every few years to invigorate them. As a bonus, you get more plants.
  - Here are some criteria for when to divide:
    - while the plant still looks vigorous, not after it starts to decline
    - when the plant is NOT in bloom; right after bloom is often a good time
    - spring and fall are good times; don't divide less than 6 to 8 weeks before the ground freezes because new roots are especially susceptible to damage from freeze-thaw cycles
    - choose a day with cool, wet weather, including damp soil
  - How often to divide plants? It depends on the species. When the center dies out and the plant sprawls, it's time to divide. Some species don't need to be divided unless you want more plants.
  - How to divide:
    - water the plant ahead of time
    - decide on locations for the transplants before dividing, or pot them up
    - plant or pot up divisions as soon as possible
    - keep new plants watered and protected from hot sun
    - avoid nitrogen-based fertilizer until transplants are established
    - mulch well if transplanting in fall to protect new roots from freeze-thaw damage
  - Tools and techniques
    - For plants with spreading root systems (coreopsis, lady fern), use two dividing forks to separate clumps
    - For clumping root systems (ornamental grasses), cut the mother plant into sections with a spade or machete
    - For rhizomatous plants (crested iris, creeping phlox), separate new plants using a sharp knife so each piece has some root and a growing point
  - Some plants should not be divided: shrub-like perennials (lavender), plants with single taproot (asclepias, baptisia, lupine, clematis)
  - Here are links with tips for dividing plants:
    - <http://chemung.cce.cornell.edu/resources/dividing-perennials>
    - <https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/dividing-perennials/>
    - <https://extension.umn.edu/planting-and-growing-guides/dividing-perennials>
- Upcoming Opportunities:
  - **Nov 16**: Wild Ones presents “The Self-Perpetuating Landscape” by Larry Weaner, register of the Wild Ones website.

- **Nov. 19-20:** Tree planting at French & Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust nature preserve in Glenmoore. <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/9040b4eaba62ca0fe3-tree>
  - **Dec 8: Wild Ones SEPA chapter meeting** (Winter Seed Sowing)
  - **Dec. 11:** Volunteer Opportunity – Help residents of Friends Village in Newtown rehabilitate their wildflower meadow. 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., lunch will be provided. Call 215-968-9222 or email [info@fhvpa.org](mailto:info@fhvpa.org) to volunteer.
  - **Ohio State University Bee Lab** – various programs for pollinator enthusiasts. <https://u.osu.edu/beelab/courses/>
  - **DCNR Lawn Conversion program** – get help converting your lawn to native plants. <https://www.dcnr.pa.gov/Conservation/Water/LawnConversion/Pages/default.aspx>
  - **Chapter T-shirts**—send us your ideas for a design for this project
  - **Growing from seed** – members can start seeds this winter, provide some seedlings to the chapter for our projects, and keep the rest. Email [wildonesofsepa@gmail.com](mailto:wildonesofsepa@gmail.com) if interested.
  - **School curriculum partnerships** – send us your ideas for after-school clubs, home schoolers
  - **Book club** – Email [wildonesofsepa@gmail.com](mailto:wildonesofsepa@gmail.com) to join our winter book club with a focus on native plants.
  - **Member seed swap** – Email [wildonesofsepa@gmail.com](mailto:wildonesofsepa@gmail.com) if interested in participating, either in person or by mail.
- **View the recording of the meeting** on our Youtube channel: <https://youtu.be/wdpqv2uwD3s>

**Follow us on Facebook and Instagram** for updates on planting natives in southeastern PA.