



NATIVE PLANTS, NATURAL LANDSCAPES

SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA CHAPTER

August 2022 Newsletter

sepa.wildones.org

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August Meeting Highlights

Chapter Business.

- Chapter membership stands at 168.
- We are still looking for a Community Projects Committee Chair so we can get more native plants in the ground by working with parks, HOAs, schools, and other community groups.

Last month Wild Ones' Pennsylvania chapters and the Pennsylvania Native Plant Society (PNPS) teamed up on an email campaign to ask our members to help ban more invasive ornamental plants from sale in Pennsylvania. Last fall, Pennsylvania banned its first invasive ornamental plants -- Japanese barberry and callery pear. The support of members of Wild Ones, PNPS, and like-minded organizations across the state was critical to the success of the addition of these nonnative invasive ornamentals to the list of banned plants. Thanks to everyone who sent comments to the committee about this important process!

Native Plant Guilds for Four-Season Interest

Presented by Anna Fialkoff, [Wild Seed Project](#)

Talking about plant guilds is a way to consider how plants grow together in nature. In the forest, the tall canopy plants -- trees -- shade and cool the ground, and intercept rain to slow down volume and promote infiltration. The understory -- shrubs and smaller trees -- provide another layer of shade,

along with cover and forage for wildlife. The ground layer is composed of taller perennials, ferns, and true groundcovers, like wild strawberry and creeping phlox. The intertwined roots of guild plants exchange nutrients via a mycorrhizal network that is destroyed if the soil is cultivated.

Native Americans practiced growing plants in certain compatible groupings to maximize productivity. Corn, beans, and squash are known as the Three Sisters because when planted together, they support each other structurally as well as nutritionally. Corn is a heavy feeder, but beans return nitrogen to the soil. Squash leaves shade the ground to keep roots cool.

Another native American agricultural guild planting is American groundnut (*Apios americana*), wild strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*), and sunchoke (*Helianthus tuberosus*). A forest-inspired guild might consist of flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*), pink-shell azalea (*Rhododendron vaseyi*), and Mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*).

Build Your Guild

To create your own guild planting, start by assessing your site conditions. Rather than cutting down trees to create more sun or adding soil amendments, work with the conditions you have. Native plants span a wide range of habitats. Gather inspiration from natural habitats by visiting local nature preserves.

When thinking about the plants you want, fill all the vertical layers. If your site won't allow tall canopy trees, start with understory trees and tall shrubs. If you're planting a meadow, shrubs and tall perennials will form your canopy layer.

Group plant with similar growth habits so your slow growers aren't overwhelmed by plants that spread quickly. Plan for seasonal interest -- fruits, seeds, fall foliage, and winter bark can be just as varied and

WO-SEPA 2022 Meeting Schedule

Sept. 7: Native Trees for Your Home Landscape

Oct. 13: To be announced

Nov. 9: Native Shrubs for Four-Season Interest

Dec. 1: Collecting and Saving Native Seeds

View recordings of past meetings on our [Youtube channel](#).

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colorful as flowers. A spreadsheet or timeline of bloom times, heights, and sun and moisture requirements can be helpful.

Include some [keystone plants](#) in each layer. These are natives that are essential to our ecosystems because they support 90% of the caterpillar species that enable our terrestrial birds to reproduce, as well as all of our specialist native bee species.

Plants for Sunny Dry Conditions

Canopy Trees: Hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*), scarlet oak (*Quercus coccinea*)

Understory Trees: Eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), grey birch (*Betula populifolia*), Bear oak (*Quercus ilicifolia*), beach plum (*Prunus maritima*)

Shrubs: Bayberry (*Morella caroliniensis*), New Jersey tea (*Ceanothus americanus*), red bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*)

Ground Layer: downy goldenrod (*Solidago puberula*), butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), sundial lupine (*L. perennis*), downy beardtongue (*Penstemon hirsutus*), flax-leaved aster (*Ionactis linariifolia*), plantain-leaved pussytoes (*Antennaria plantaginifolia*)

For sites where you've removed invasives, or on a slope that's prone to erosion, plants that will fill in quickly and cover the ground to prevent resprouting of nonnatives include partridge pea (*Chamaecrista fasciculata* -- a good annual groundcover for the first year after invasive removal), aromatic sumac (*Rhus aromatica*), pearly everlasting (*Anaphalis margaritacea*, another annual), and wild strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*).

Plants for Sunny Medium-Moisture Conditions

Canopy Trees: tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), red oak (*Quercus rubra*)

Understory Trees: black cherry (*Prunus serotina*), sourwood (*Oxydendrum arboreum*), serviceberry (*Amelanchier* spp.), white dogwood (*Cornus florida*)

Shrubs: black chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*), witherod (*Viburnum nudum* var. *cassinoides*), American hazelnut (*Corylus americana*)

Ground Layer: New England aster (*Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*), clustered mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum muticum*), licorice goldenrod (*Solidago odora*), foxglove beardtongue (*Penstemon digitalis*), columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*), running groundsel (*Packera obovata*)

Plants for Sunny, Medium to Wet Conditions

Canopy Trees: swamp white oak (*Quercus bicolor*), sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*)

Understory Trees: black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*), arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis*), blackhaw (*Viburnum prunifolia*

um), sweetbay magnolia (*M. virginiana*)

Shrubs: buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), winterberry holly (*Ilex verticillata*), pussywillow (*Salix discolor*)

Ground Layer: New York aster (*Symphyotrichum novibelgii*), swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*), blue iris (*I. versicolor*), white turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*), bottle gentian (*Gentiana chausa*), cranberry (*Vaccinium macrocarpon*)

Plants for Part to Full Shade, Medium to Dry

Canopy Trees: white oak (*Quercus alba*), shagbark hickory (*Carya ovata*)

Understory Trees: American holly (*Ilex opaca*), hophornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*), redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*)

Shrubs: bush honeysuckle (*Diervilla lonicera*), mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), maple-leaved viburnum (*V. acerifolium*)

Ground Layer: black cohosh (*Actaea racemosa*), bowmans' root (*Porteranthus trifoliata*), bluestem goldenrod (*Solidago caesia*), Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*), white wood aster (*Eurybia divericata*), Pennsylvania sedge (*Carex pennsylvanica*)

For Acid Soils: white pine (*Pinus strobus*), Canada mayflower (*Maianthemum canadense*), Pennsylvania sedge (*Carex pennsylvanica*), wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*), bunchberry (*Chamaepericlymenum canadense*)

Plants for Part to Full Shade, Medium Moisture

Canopy Trees: basswood (*Tilia americana*), sweet birch (*Betula lenta*)

Understory Trees: striped maple (*Acer pennsylvanicum*), hophornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*), pagoda dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia*), redbud (*Cercis canadensis*)

Shrubs: spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*), sweet pepperbush (*Clethra alnifolia*), raspberry (*Rubus odoratus*)

Ground Layer: poke milkweed (*Asclepias exaltata*), blue wood aster (*Symphyotrichum cordifolium*), northern lady fern (*Athyrium angustum*), zig zag goldenrod (*Solidago flexicaulis*), spotted cranesbill (*Geranium maculatum*), foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*)

Plants for Part to Full Shade, Medium to Wet

Canopy Trees: swamp white oak (*Quercus bicolor*), red maple (*Acer rubrum*)

Understory Trees: black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*), American holly (*Ilex opaca*), sweetbay magnolia (*M. virginiana*), musclewood (*Carpinus caroliniana*)

Shrubs: sweet pepperbush (*Clethra alnifolia*), witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*), spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*)

Ground Layer: cinnamon fern (*Osmundastrum cinnamomeum*), tall white aster (*Doellingeria umbellata*), blue lobelia (*L. siphilicata*), jack in the pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*), pale jewelweed (*Impatiens pallida*), marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*)

Thought of the Month -- Dealing with Drought

Weather patterns are becoming increasingly extreme and erratic. As our climate changes, we will need to adapt our gardening practices. One of these predicted challenges is more intense and longer lasting drought.

The U.S. Forest Service says, "Native plants are adapted to the local climate and soil conditions where they naturally occur. These important plant species provide nectar, pollen, and seeds that serve as food for native butterflies, insects, birds and other animals."

Even the toughest, drought tolerant plants need a chance to adapt. With good selection and placement, along with an appropriate establishment period, natives can grow in your landscape with little or no irrigation.

Native plants are *not* drought proof. You cannot plant any native in any situation and expect it to thrive without irrigation. For drought-tolerant landscaping to work, you need the right plant in the right place, with the correct initial care.

Planting drought-tolerant plants in spring or fall, when water is plentiful, gives the plants a chance to build up their root system for times when water is harder to come by.

Many drought-tolerant plants have specific characteristics that help them minimize water loss and maximize water uptake:

- Reduced leaf area means less water loss. Some drought-tolerant plants have small or needle-like leaves. Large leaves may have deep indentations between lobes to reduce the total leaf area exposed to sun and wind.
- Deep roots enable drought-tolerant natives to pull moisture from deeper under the soil surface.
- Waxy stems and leaves slow water loss from transpiration.
- Fine hairs on the leaves trap moisture at the leaf surface and reduce loss through evaporation.

Once plants are established, gardeners can help them develop their drought tolerance through proper management. There are two important rules to foster drought tolerance.

1. Irrigate deeply, so the water penetrates down through the root system and hopefully meets a stable moisture supply below. Water at the soil level, not overhead, and water in the morning or evening to reduce evaporation.

2. Irrigate as infrequently as possible. Carefully monitor your plants for stress, such as wilted leaves, poor color, etc.

You might be tempted to water two or three times per week, especially during the summer. The regular and frequent irrigation used with conventional landscaping is not appropriate for drought-tolerant landscaping. If you water often, the plants will appear very healthy and vigorous, but they will be dependent on continued irrigation, because they will not develop a deep root system to cope with drought. They will decline as soon as you stop watering.

Plants native to our area often are incredibly adaptable to local weather changes and extremes. For many plants, this includes drought as well. Finding out about plants native to our area is a great way to start. Many of the best drought-resistant plants for our area may already be familiar to you:

- Purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) is a summer bloomer that prefers full sun and grows in most soil types with good drainage.
- Juniper (*Juniper* spp.) are known for versatility in the landscape as well as toughness and drought tolerance.
- Beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) is a shrub with clusters of purple berries in fall. It grows best in sun or light shade and can reach 6 feet.
- Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*) is a showy biennial that self-sows on open soil. It has a long bloom season and attracts birds and pollinators.
- Columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*) grows in rocky woodlands and produces delicate red and yellow flowers loved by bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds.
- Butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) is a relatively short, showy orange milkweed that provides food and habitat for monarch caterpillars and nectar for adults.
- Fragrant sumac (*Rhus aromatica*) is a low growing, spreading shrub with glossy green leaves that is adaptable to many soil types.
- Many goldenrods (*Solidago* spp.) are drought tolerant once established. These late summer bloomers are invaluable for pollinators as they fuel up to migrate south.
- Tickseed (*Coreopsis verticillata*) grows in dense bushy clumps. It has attractive thread-like leaves and yellow flowers all summer. It can self-seed.
- Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*) is a dainty but tough perennial with blue flowers over a long bloom period. It prefers dry sandy soils, self seeds, and is deer resistant.
- Sweetfern (*Comptonia peregrina*) is a medium-height deciduous shrub – not a fern -- with feathery leaves. It thrives in full sun in dry, infertile soils.

Tree of the Month -- Swamp White Oak

Quercus bicolor, swamp white oak, is a lowland tree found in the eastern and central US. It is a relatively large deciduous tree with a broad, open, rounded crown and a short trunk, making it a good shade tree for large areas.



The bark is gray to gray-brown and exfoliating on the branches and trunk. Leaves are 3-7" long, dark, shiny green above and silvery white (tomentose) beneath, with 5 to 10 rounded shallow lobes along each side. Fall color is usually yellow, but may sometimes be bronze or reddish purple.



It typically grows at a moderate rate to a height of 60 to 80 feet. This is one of the faster growing oaks. It has a long life span and may live up to 300-years.

Swamp White Oak can survive in a number of habitats. This is a good tree for wetter or low sites. It prefers moist to wet acidic soil with a high mineral content but is adaptable to drier sites. Due to the root system, it is tolerant of areas that have spring flooding and fairly dry summers.

It has surprisingly good heat and drought resistance, but is sensitive to soil compaction, salt, and air pollution. It can experience chlorosis (yellowing of leaves while the veins remain green) if the soil is not acidic enough.

Oak trees do not produce acorns until they are 20 to 30 years old. The swamp white oak will produce a shiny light brown acorn crop in early fall every 3 to 5 years. Acorns are oblong, growing in pairs and distinguishable by their long 2" to 4" stalks.



The acorns of swamp white oak are nondormant, meaning they germinate right after falling. The acorns should be planted as soon as they are collected.

The acorns are eaten by woodpeckers, blue jays, songbirds, wild turkeys, ducks, and geese as well as small mammals and black bears. Oak trees also support a wide variety of Lepidoptera.

This tree is mildly resistant to damage by deer.

Traditionally, the inner bark was used in the leather tanning industry and to produce an important yellow dye. Native Americans used it to treat a wide variety of ailments. Native Americans and colonists used the nuts for food after the tannins were removed. Roasted acorns have been ground and used as a coffee substitute.

This is one of the more important white oaks for lumber production.

In recent years, the swamp white oak has become a popular landscaping tree due to its relative ease of transplanting.

Pledge To Rewild -- Add Wildlife-Friendly Features to Your Site

In January, we invited readers to start off 2022 with a [pledge to rewild](#). This initiative by the [Wild Seed Project](#) aims to meet the challenge of biodiversity loss head-on by restoring a minimum of 70% of native plant biomass to support healthy populations of butterflies, bees, birds, and insects that are crucial to a functioning ecosystem.

The pledge to rewild includes 10 action steps to help you get started. This month, we're focusing on adding non-growing features to your garden to make it even more wildlife-friendly.

Water

We're used to thinking about providing a bird bath for wild birds, but insects and other wildlife need water, too. When streams dry up in the summer, wild creatures look for other sources. How many times have you found tomatoes full of holes on the ground in your garden? They're a great source of water, and the birds, squirrels, and possums know that.

Water will attract a wide variety of wildlife, including birds, insects, small and large mammals, amphibians, and invertebrates. Building a pond is one option and provides the opportunity to plant around it. This pond was built using a 15-gallon livestock watering tub. Part of the water surface should be covered with rocks or plants, to provide places for wildlife to access the water and hide.



A pond with earth edges provides more habitat, including mud for amphibians and insects. Moving water will attract more wildlife and can be accomplished with a waterfall or just a bubbling fountain.

Water can also be as simple as a flowerpot saucer on the patio, with some flat stones to provide perches for birds and insects.



Many butterfly species congregate on wet sand and mud to drink water and extract minerals from damp puddles. It's easy to create a butterfly watering station using a flowerpot saucer, sand, and rocks.

Nesting Sites

Animals, of course, need safe areas to raise their young. You can find building plans for almost any kind of birdhouse on line. However, some birds aren't cavity nesters and will appreciate densely branched native shrubs and trees as nest sites. Others aren't as choosy -- a few days after this garden glove was hung up to dry, it was taken over by a pair of winter wrens.



Habitat

Brush piles are an important habitat element for many different kinds of wildlife. They provide cover from predators and places for nests, escape routes, and dens. Many insects are attracted to the decomposing wood, which provides a bounty of food for birds, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals.

Brush piles are easy to build. In addition to benefiting wildlife, they keep a lot of yard waste out of landfills. They can be planted with climbers such as Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) or woodbine (*Clematis virginiana*) and screened, if necessary, using shrubs and tall perennials like bee

balm, perennial sunflowers (*Helianthus*), asters, *Helenium*, and Joe Pye weed.

If you have trees on your property that need to be removed, consider not cutting down the entire trunk. This maple was cut down about 10 years ago, leaving a 12-foot snag that has provided habitat for



nuthatches and woodpeckers. Bayberry (*Myrica pennsylvanica*) was planted around the base, providing additional cover.

As dead wood is decomposed by fungi and bacteria, it aids new plant growth by returning important nutrients to the ecosystem. The soil around this decaying trunk is now far superior to what was there previously. Scarlet beebalm (*Monarda didyma*) seeded in from the nearby meadow, providing an invitation to hummingbirds.

Nighttime Lighting

Research suggests that artificial light at night has negative effects on many organisms, including amphibians, birds, mammals, insects, and plants. Artificial light attracts some insects and amphibians to locations where they would not normally congregate, concentrating them as a food source to be preyed upon, or creating a false lure that exhausts and kills them.

Glare from artificial lights can impact wetland habitats that are home to amphibians such as frogs and toads, whose nighttime croaking is part of the breeding ritual. Artificial lights disrupt this nocturnal activity, interfering with reproduction and reducing populations.

Birds that migrate or hunt at night navigate by moonlight and starlight. Artificial light can cause them to wander off course and toward the dangerous nighttime landscapes of cities. Every year, millions of birds die colliding with needlessly illuminat-

ed buildings and towers. Migratory birds depend on cues from properly timed seasonal schedules. Artificial lights can cause them to migrate too early or too late and miss ideal climate conditions for nesting, foraging, and other behaviors.

Research done in Switzerland found that artificial light at night disrupted pollination networks, reducing visits of nocturnal pollinators to flowers by 62%. This disruption caused a 13% drop in fruit production, even though the plants also received numerous visits from daytime pollinators. Light pollination may share responsibility for the recent precipitous decline in insect populations, along with climate change, habitat loss, invasive species, and pesticide use, due to its interference with the development, movement, foraging, and reproductive success of diverse insect species.

Fortunately, there are some easy fixes at the homeowner level. Many people install lights on their homes, trees, and other landscape features, either as decorative accents or for security. Lighting to illuminate walkways and driveways is more effective when aimed downward than when it's aimed at the sky. Likewise, security or decorative lighting installed above doors and windows or along roof eaves and pointed downward can accomplish its purpose without contributing to light pollution.

Outdoor lights can be designed or shielded so the light is not directed upward. Most important, adding motion sensors will insure that the lights are not on all night, minimizing their impact on animals and insects. As an added benefit, lights that are not on all night will save on electric costs.



For more information about the effects of light pollution on wildlife and what you can do to help:

International Dark Sky Association -- [Light Pollution Effects on Wildlife and Ecosystems](#).

[U.N. Environment Programme](#)

Design Lights Consortium -- [Responsible Lighting at Night](#)

Plant This Not That-- Common Nursery Plants Many nurseries and big box stores sell nonnative ornamental plants that are listed as invasive in some states across the U.S. While these plants may look harmless in their small pots, they can overrun and displace native shrubs and trees and rob our wildlife of the food they need to eat. They are [listed as invasive](#) in many states. Some have recently been banned from sale in Pennsylvania.

Instead of These Nonnatives	Plant These Natives
<i>Iris pseudocorus</i> (yellow flag iris) Fast-growing pond plant that spreads by seeds to wet meadows and streams, where it can form impenetrable monoculture thickets that outcompete native vegetation.	<i>Iris versicolor</i> (blue flag iris) Clump-forming iris native to marshes, swamps, wet meadows, and shorelines. Violet-blue flowers with streaks of yellow on the falls in mid-summer.
<i>Berberis thunbergii</i> (Japanese barberry) Brilliant red fall foliage, small red berries. Spreads by seed and root sprouts to form dense thickets. Banned from sale in PA as of October 2023.	<i>Itea virginiana</i> (Virginia sweetspire) Spires of fragrant white flowers in spring, long-lasting brilliant red to purple fall foliage. <i>Rhus aromatica</i> (fragrant sumac) Very adaptable small to medium shrub with bright red to purple fall foliage.
<i>Euonymus alatus</i> (burning bush) Mid to large-size shrub with bright red fall foliage and red berries. Spreads prolifically by seed and outcompetes native understory plants and tree seedlings.	<i>Aronia melanocarpa</i> (black chokeberry) Fragrant white flowers in spring, black fruit, brilliant red fall foliage. <i>Vaccinium corymbosum</i> (highbush blueberry) White or pink flowers in early summer, edible fruit, bright red fall foliage.
<i>Pyrus calleryana</i> (Callery or Bradford pear) Asian native imported for hybridization with fruiting pears. Reseeds in fields and woodlands, forming thickets that crowd out native species. Banned from sale in PA as of November 2023.	<i>Amelanchier arborea</i> (serviceberry) Small tree with masses of white flowers in spring, red edible fruit early summer. <i>Prunus americana</i> (American plum) Thicket-forming shrub or small tree with spreading crown, showy white flowers in spring, and small edible red plums in summer.
<i>Ligustrum spp.</i> (privet) Tall, dense shrub used in hedges. Spreads rapidly by seed in disturbed areas such as forest clearings and abandoned farm fields.	<i>Viburnum nudum</i> (possumhaw) Medium-height shrub (12-15'), white flower clusters, berries turn from pink to deep blue, good fall leaf color, very low maintenance. <i>Aronia arbutifolia</i> (red chokeberry) Multi-stem shrub, 6-10' tall, clusters of white flowers in spring, red fruit, good fall leaf color.
<i>Hedera helix</i> (English ivy) Evergreen leaves (sometimes variegated) form a thick mat on the ground and climb to smother trees.	<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i> (Virginia creeper) Climbing vine or groundcover, not mat-forming. Brilliant red fall foliage; adaptable to sun or shade and most soil types. <i>Clematis virginiana</i> (woodbine) Deciduous climbing or groundcover with finely textured leaves and masses of white fragrant flowers in late summer, followed by silvery seed heads.
<i>Acer platanoides</i> (Norway maple) Large tree with broad rounded crown; yellow fall foliage. Spreads rapidly by seed and out-competes native trees.	<i>Acer saccharum</i> (sugar maple), <i>A. rubrum</i> (red maple) Large-crowned trees with brilliant red fall foliage.
<i>Miscanthus sinensis</i> (Chinese silvergrass) Large showy clumping grass with silver seed heads in summer. Spreads aggressively by seed and rhizomes. Displaces native vegetation and increases fire risk.	<i>Panicum virgatum</i> (switchgrass) Clumping grass with airy seed heads in fall, golden fall foliage. <i>Sorhastrum nutans</i> (Indian grass) Tall clumps of slender arching blue-green leaves and thick golden flower plumes in summer.
<i>Buddleia davidii</i> (butterfly bush) Fast-growing shrub with arching stems and plumes of fragrant blue, purple, pink, or white flowers that attract butterflies. Reseeds aggressively.	<i>Clethra alnifolia</i> (summersweet) Spires of fragrant pink or white flowers in summer, good fall leaf color, adapts to sun or shade. <i>Fothergilla gardenii</i> (witch alder) Fragrant white flowers in spring, bright yellow fall foliage, very low maintenance.
<i>Vinca minor</i> (periwinkle) Thick semi-evergreen ground cover for part to full shade. Small blue or purple flowers in spring. Can escape cultivation and spread to nearby woods and fields.	<i>Phlox stolonifera</i> (creeping phlox) Evergreen foliage on creeping plants forming a thick mat in part to full shade; purple flowers in spring. Easily transplanted. Tolerates drought once established.

Diary of a Rewilder

This year, we're focusing on a different step in the rewilding process each month. If you're new to rewilding, you might be thinking -- how does this work in practice? Here we share with you some personal experiences that could help with your own rewilding projects.

The Site

This month we're visiting a gardener who started rewilding his 1-acre property just 2 years ago. The property consists of a large lawn with a few mature trees -- a crabapple, a cedar, a huge old sycamore, and three Norway maples. The large, sunny back yard slopes toward a creek and includes two sheds and a fenced vegetable garden. The front yard is smaller and is almost completely shaded by two maple trees.

Overview

When starting with large expanses of lawn, one choice is just to kill it off and replant with natives; for example a large-scale meadow planting. Another choice is to expand the existing non-lawn areas and decrease the lawn slowly. This option allows the gardener to work with smaller areas and to customize the plantings to each area.

Each structure and tree can be surrounded with plants. The shade cast by buildings and large trees, and the limitations posed by the roots of mature trees, will help determine which plants are selected.

Water Issues

The ground along one side of the house is steeply sloped, causing stormwater to wash away soil between the house and the concrete walk to the back yard. The owner used old bricks to build terraced



beds beside the steps. Since this area is shaded by a large maple, he planted shade lovers: foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*), Jacob's lad-

der (*Polemonium reptans*), and white wood aster (*Eurybia divercatus*). Wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*) and woodland stonecrop (*Sedum ternatum*) were interplanted as groundcovers. With just one or two plants in each narrow section, this area can showcase each plant's varied leaf textures, colors, and delicate flowers.

Work With Existing Structures

Each structure in a yard is an opportunity to create an area that's beautiful or useful, or both. The former chicken coop below is now a storage shed. With some paint and a few repairs, it forms the backdrop for a small stone patio, and a glider where the owner can sit and watch the birds and insects around his vegetable garden.



Plants include lady fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*), royal fern (*Osmunda regalis*), alumroot (*Heuchera americana*), and downy skullcap (*Scutellaria incana*). The brick edging keeps the lawn from encroaching into the plantings.

The vegetable garden was another opportunity to shrink the lawn and plant more natives. The garden fence is usually where weeds sprout, but this gardener planted a bed of sun-loving annuals and perennials for summer color, including annual coreopsis (*C. tinctoria*), grey-headed coneflower (*Ratibida pinnata*), calico aster (*Symphyotrichum lateriflorum*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), aromatic aster "Raydon's Favorite" (*Symphyotrichum oblongifolium*), spiderwort (*Tradescantia virginiana*), beebalm (*Monarda didyma*), Texas sage (*Salvia coccinea*), and purpletop vervain (*Verbena bonariensis*). These plants are also pollinator magnets. When in bloom, their flowers are constantly visited by numerous species of bees, large and small, as well as clearwing moths and hummingbirds.



Logs from the woods in back of the garden are used to edge the flower bed for ease of mowing. It's easy to move the logs further out into the lawn as the plants grow into their spaces.

Use Existing Beds

Another easy way to shrink the lawn is to expand existing flower beds. The owner opted to keep the



long-established hybrid roses, and the bed was simply enlarged to accommodate the addition of native plants, including downy skullcap (*Scutellaria incana*), blue wood aster (*Symphotrichum cordifolia*), white wood aster (*A. divaricatus*) and prostrate heath aster 'Snow Flurry' (*A. ericoides* var. *prostratum*). The purple skullcap is stunning interwoven with the red roses. The shade-loving wood asters were planted on the north side of the roses to take advantage of the shade provided by these shrubs.

Create Instant Beds

Mature trees can offer the opportunity to replace some turf grass with native plants. This large sycamore was surrounded by weeds because the owner didn't want to damage the bark by weed-whacking too close to the trunk.

This bed was created in one afternoon earlier this summer. The owner and a friend weed-whacked the lawn down to dirt in a rough circle around the trunk, then laid cardboard and topped it with wood chips. Existing wild asters were allowed to stay. This fall, the owner will add shade-tolerant natives by cutting planting holes in the cardboard. In order to minimize disturbance to the sycamore's roots, the owner plans to use plugs, which will allow the plants to grow into the space without harm to the tree roots..



Install a Meadow

Last fall, the owner removed part of the sunny back lawn using a manual sod-stripper. After replacing the layer of removed soil with a mix of topsoil and sand, he seeded a sunny short-grass meadow mix and mulched the area lightly with straw. This spring he started seeing seedlings of some sun-loving perennials, such as coreopsis and echinacea. It was hard to tell whether the grasses that sprouted were part of the native mix or just left over from the turf grass that was removed.

This summer, the area is being weed-whacked at 6" to 8" in height when it reaches 1' tall. This will keep most weeds from going to seed while protecting the native seedlings. However, this high mowing won't take care of any dandelions or turf grass that sprouts this year. These plants will still need to be removed by hand, unless the gardener prefers to wait and see if they will be out-competed by the natives next year.

If undesirable plants pop up in a seeded meadow, they should be removed by cutting the stem below the surface of the ground, not by pulling, which can disturb nearby natives as they are getting established, as well as bring more weed seeds to the surface to germinate.

Events in the Community and Beyond

Pennsylvania Native Plant Society presents "[Using Native Plants in the Landscape](#)"

Sept. 1, 30 E. High St, Manheim PA, 5 to 8 p.m.

Sept. 18, Manheim Train Station, 210 S. Charlotte St, Manheim PA, 2 to 5 p.m.

[Philadelphia Honey Festival](#). Workshops, bee-themed vendors, food trucks, and family activities.

Sept. 9, [Glen Foerd on the Delaware](#), 5001 Grant Ave, Philadelphia, 5 to 9 p.m.

Sept. 10, [Wyck House](#), 6026 Germantown Ave, Philadelphia, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Sept. 11, [Bartram's Garden](#), 5400 Lindbergh Blvd, Philadelphia, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Sept. 10, [Pennsylvania Native Plant Society Summer Native Plant Sale](#), 328 N. Crawford Rd, Grantville PA, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Sept. 17, [Mennonite Central Committee BioBlitz & Nature Fest](#), 21 S. 12th St, Akron PA. 9 a.m. - noon.

Sept. 24-25, [York County 18th Annual Pawpaw Festival](#), Horn Farm Center, 4945 Horn Rd, York, PA, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. \$5

Educational Opportunities

Aug. 18 [From Enthusiast to Restorationist: A Naturalistic Journey](#). Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve, 7:00-8:00 p.m., zoom, \$15.

Aug. 20 [Butterfly Festival](#). Colonial Gardens, Phoenixville, PA, 9:00 a.m. - noon.

Aug. 23 [Zoom into Nature: Asters & Goldenrods](#). Western Reserve Land Conservancy, 6:30 - 8:00 p.m., free.

Aug. 24 [Native Plant Gardens: Designing for Beauty](#). Ecological Landscape Alliance, 2:00-3:00 p.m.

Aug. 27 [Knowing Native Plants: The Amazing Aster Family, Confusing Yellow Composites](#). Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve, 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m., zoom, \$25.

Sept. 10 [Fall Garden Care for Wildlife](#). Mt. Cuba Center, 3120 Barley Mill Rd, Hockessin, DE 10:00 a.m. - noon, \$19.

Sept. 24 [Knowing Native Plants: The Amazing Aster Family and Their Colorful Companions](#). Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve, 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m., zoom, \$25/\$30.

Sept. 24 [Bringing the Wild Home: A Nature-Inspired Garden](#). Kellys Run Nature Preserve, 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Oct. 8 [Knowing Native Plants: Trees of the Preserve](#). Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m., zoom, \$25.