

## Homegrown National Park

By Lynn Sparks

Erie County Master Gardener

It is no secret that natural space is disappearing all over the world. Our state and National parks, although wonderful and effective in their own right, are too fragmented and truly too small to provide the scope and diversity that nature needs to repair itself. To start to reverse the loss of plants and animals that are needed to stabilize the ecosystem, more pockets of native landscaping are needed—ones that are close to each other to allow breeding animal, plant and insect populations to thrive.

It has been theorized (by O.E. Wilson, a Pulitzer Prize winner) that emergency measures to stabilize our biosphere would require setting aside half of the Earth as a human-free natural reserve to provide the needed biodiversity. This doesn't seem likely to happen—actually impossible given the current human population. However, there is a possibility that could work—and is not only actually doable but might be fun!

Doug Tallamy, a professor in the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware, has outlined his vision for a solution in his newest book *Nature's Best Hope*. His goal is to turn about half of the green lawn space of privately owned property in the US into 20 million acres of native plantings. This would allow the space and diversity that nature needs to start to repair itself. If each property owner planted half of their lawn with wildlife friendly, native plants, the ecosystem could repair itself. We would have the equivalent of a national park right in our own backyards!

Dr. Tallamy feels that time is of the essence in this project. We are at a critical point of losing so many species that nature's ability to produce the oxygen, clean water, pollination, pest control, etc that we humans need to survive is at risk. His call is for every one of us to do our part with the following projects:

1. Shrink the lawn. It doesn't have to be 50% the first year; you can start small. This will be a work in progress.
2. Add keystone plants first. Native oaks are an excellent choice for trees—they support the highest number of caterpillars. Other native shrubs, flowers, and groundcovers can follow.

3. Leave your leaves. They house dormant insects and provide important nutrients for your soil.
4. Plan a pocket meadow. A small area with blooming plants that attract nectar and pollen-loving bees and pollinators, balanced with host plants for moth and butterfly caterpillars, is valuable real-estate for your new mini-park
5. Remove invasive plants. Although this may include ornamentals that you already have established, there are alternative choices that are not on the invasive list. The invasives may provide blooms for adult insects, but they probably don't feed the larvae and their spread will endanger more valuable native plants.
6. Enjoy the new diversity and beauty you have enabled when the insects and birds show up in your yard. If you build it, they will come!

For further inspiration, check out <https://homegrownnationalpark.com>. Web searches for native Ohio plants and invasive pests in Ohio will also yield information you can use to develop your share of the new *Homegrown National Park*.