

Home Gardeners, Go Native!!!

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Call to arms! Home gardeners, unite! We need your help. Our planet needs you. The insects that pollinate our plants and sustain our birds need you!

“Human survival depends on a thriving ecosystem; one of the main components is insects. Native insects cannot survive without native plants to feed on. Incorporating native plants into our gardens and greenspaces is an excellent way to do our little part to support the ecosystem.”

Erie County Master Gardeners Lynn Sparks and Marty Kerns recently brought these concerns to about twenty participants at a recent Old Woman Creek program on Seed Stratification.

Research supports these ideas. University of Delaware entomologist and professor Doug Tallamy has helped bring the problem to the forefront for more than a decade. He explains that insects have been clobbered by an array of threats, from habitat destruction and deforestation to climate change. He adds that insect decline is documented around the globe. “Plants introduced from abroad pose a grave threat to native insects by transforming native plant communities into so called novel landscapes increasingly dominated by exotic species on which many insects cannot feed.” He speculates that these exotic species threaten not only insects but also the birds and other animals that depend on insects for survival. This can have cascading effects higher up the food chain.

You can also check out research from Yale, Penn State, Princeton, UConn, Notre Dame and others. This “insect apocalypse” definitely warrants some attention.

Back to seed stratification, the title of our program: a process of pre-treating seeds in order to simulate natural condition that seeds would experience in the soil over winter. Pretreating seeds help the seed break dormancy and initiate the germination process.

For this step, we took our empty gallon milk jugs from the classroom to the garden benches. A variety of native plant seeds were available for our planting. The Old Woman Creek Preserve grows many native species including purple coneflower, common milkweeds, ironweed and black-eyed susans. I planted native black-eyed Susans in my mini-greenhouse and John chose native sunflowers.

These now rest in front of our porch, loving those below zero temperatures and doing their thing. We have been simply onlookers. Nature is taking care of the rest. We are hoping for sixty days of below freezing temperatures and snow. (Did I say that?) We can supplement watering if needed and there is always the refrigerator. Our ten-day forecast looks good (for the plants that is).

Come spring, when they start to sprout, we will transplant them to a sunny spot in our yard where they will feed some native insects and birds. We can collect seed and repeat the process next winter. We can save the world, one little yard at a time!

Does it sound good? Are you in? Native seedlings will be in the stores soon. Do your part.

Emily Kuzmick, Coastal Training Program Coordinator, explained that this was the first of a series of four workshops on native plants. One is in the works for late February. Consult the Old Woman Creek Nature Preserve website for updates or give them a call.

Other Erie MG news: April 15 is the deadline for application for our scholarships for students interested in pursuing careers in agriculture and horticulture. Visit the website at erie.osu.edu and access information under the Master Gardener tab under programs. Saturday, March 2 is the date for our annual plant seminar at Mesenburg Catering in Huron. Info is upcoming. Saturday, May 11 is the date for our annual plant sale at the Erie County Fairgrounds. We'll have native plants for sale. We'd love to meet you.

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