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Wild Ones in the Field

Photo: Doug Benson

# **MINNESOTA CHAPTERS**

#### Arrowhead - Duluth & NE Minnesota

Hartley Nature Center
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Duluth, MN 55803
www.Arrowhead.WildOnes.org
facebook: ArrowheadChapterWildOnes

#### Big River Big Woods -Roseville & Greater St. Paul

Autumn Grove Park
1365 Lydia Avenue West
Roseville, MN 55112
www.bigriverbigwoods.org
facebook: Wild Ones Big River Big Woods

# In a time of destruction, create something.

#### Northfield Prairie Partners -Northfield & SE MN

Emmaus Baptist Church
712 Linden St N
Northfield, MN 55057
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facebook: Wild Ones Northfield Prairie Partners

#### Prairie Edge - Minnetonka & SW Metro

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#### St. Cloud - St. Cloud & Central Minnesota

225 33rd Ave S Saint Cloud, Minnesota 56301 320-356-9462 bjohnson@csbsju.edu <u>facebook:</u> St. Cloud Wild Ones Native Plants Natural Landscapes

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# WHY DOES WILD ONES MATTER?

Marilynn Torkelson, Wild Ones Prairie Edge President

As writer and educator Maxine Hong Kingston states, "In a time of destruction, create something." Wild Ones offers education and outreach that helps us all learn how to create that useful

"something" in this era of human-caused climate change, water scarcity and pollution, deforestation, and more. By learning how to restore essential ecosystem services, such as converting resource-intensive turf grass into beneficial and beautiful habitat in our yards and our communities, we can all make change in a time of destruction. Protecting and creating healthy native plant communities, and welcoming the creatures large and microscopic who come to live there is essential to remedying the causes and consequences of environmental damage. So, let's act with resolve, and take our lead from the words of Wild Ones' honorary lifetime director, Lorrie Otto: "If suburbia were landscaped with meadows, prairies, thickets, or forests...then the water would sparkle, fish would be good to eat again, birds would sing, and human spirits would soar."



Wild Ones member, Marilyn Jones, volunteers at this year's socially distanced spring native plant sale at Prairie Restorations in Princeton, MN. Photo: Holley Wlodarczyk

What You Can Do! BRING a friend to a Wild Ones meeting, tour or event JOIN a local Wild Ones chapter PLANT a native plant garden—no matter how small!



Left to Right: Summer tour, Prairie Edge Chapter\*. Prairie Edge Chapter Arbor Day outreach event. Carol Rothe leads a Wild Ones Prairie Edge tour of the restoration work she has spearheaded at Colonial Church in Edina. \*Events are not from 2020

Cover photo: Liz Stanley. Gray treefrog on swamp mi

DYNAMIC DUOS

DYNAMIC DUOS

## Thank an Ant!

# THE ESSENTIAL SPRING WILDFLOWER GARDENERS OF THE INSECT WORLD

By Vicki Bonk, Wild Ones Twin Cities chapter



Above: Trillium grandiflorum Photo: Vicki Bonk

Right: Ants on trillium seeds in an herb garden. Photo: Mike Dunn

## The Ephemeral Spring Wildflowers

After a long winter, spring wildflower ephemerals herald a new growing season. The first blooms magically transform the woodland landscape. These early plants emerge in deciduous forests before the overhead trees fully leaf out. Those same trees provide the leaf litter that creates the nutrient-rich soil in which ephemerals and other spring wildflowers flourish. The ephemerals have a brief, glorious mo-



ment to capture the sun's rays to photosynthesize, grow, reproduce, store food, and go to seed before their foliage dies back just as trees leaf-out in the spring. Ephemerals, in contrast to other spring blooming forbs, lie dormant until the following spring.

For those of us tuned-in to nature's rebound, this time of year is a treasure. But we humans aren't the only ones anticipating the early flora arrivals. A myriad of forest community members wait to interact with critical beneficial exchanges, including early pollinators. However, there is an often overlooked but crucial partner in this woodland web of life: the ant. Never underestimate the value of the ant! Or, a plant's ability to entice another being to do some legwork on its behalf.

#### Myrmecochory and Mutualism

Myrmecochory is the name for the specific phenomena of seed dispersal by ants. An astounding 30 to 40 percent of woodland spring wildflower seeds are "planted" by ants. This connection runs deep. (After all, there is an "ant" in the word plant!)

Mutualism is a relationship in which both sides benefit: a give and take. In the case of ants and spring ephemerals, the plants' seeds feed the ants and the ants plant the seeds. The seeds of myrmecochorous plants have a specialist attractant to ants. These seeds have "fat bodies" called elaiosomes—a lipid and protein-rich, oily attachment to the outside of the seed. This fatty food closely matches that of the insects that ants would naturally prefer to eat. Ants gather the appealing seeds, carry some back to their nests to feed their larvae the elaiosome, and then discard the remaining seed in their underground tunnel "garbage" (think compost) piles. The wildflower benefits by having their seeds planted in nutrient-rich germination grounds, safe from seed predators, and away from plant competition.

A woodland rich with ants abounds with wildflowers...and vice versa!

### The Ant + Spring Wildflower Seed Relationship



Clockwise from left: Bloodroot seeds before being carried off by ants. Photo: Vicki Bonk

An ant transporting bloodroot seed. Photo: Mike Dunn

Nodding trillium, *Trillium* cernuum seeds displaying fleshy elaiosome.

Photo: Heather Holm





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### A Sampling of Spring Wildflowers Planted by Ants



■ Bloodroot | Sanguinaria canadensis Bloom season: March - May | Height: 6 -12" Habitat: part shade, shade; woods Photo: Vicki Bonk

**Trout Lilies** I white trout lily, *Erythronium albidum*, shown here Bloom season: April - May. I Height: 4 - 8"

**Habitat:** part shade, shade; moist woods. *Photo: Vicki Bonk* 



Spring Beauties among maple seedlings Virginia spring beauty | Claytonia virginica, shown here Bloom season: April - June Height: 3 - 6" Habitat: part shade, moist woods. Photo: Vicki Bonk

**Hepatica** I sharp-lobed hepatica, Anemone acutiloba, shown here Bloom season: March - May I Height: 2 - 6" Habitat: part shade, shade; deciduous or mixed woods. *Photo: Vicki Bonk* 



**Dutchman's Breeches** | Dicentra cucullaria Bloom season: April - May | Height: 4 -12" Habitat: part shade, shade; rich woods. Photo: Andy Scott

Twinleaf | Jeffersonia diphylla Bloom season: April - May | Height: 4 -18" Habitat: part shade, rich woods. Photo: Heather Holm

Wild Ginger | Asarum canadense is known more as a groundcover than for its (mostly hidden) red flower. Wild ginger is not an ephemeral but does emerge early in the spring.

Bloom season: April - May | Height: 4-12" Habitat: part shade, shade; rich woods.

▼ Violets | common blue violet, Viola sororia, shown here Bloom season: April – June Height: 3-8". Habitat: shade, sun; woods, lawns, roadsides, fields. Native violets are a spring wildflower, not an ephemeral. Photo: Vicki Bonk

Photo: Vicki Bonk

Note: Thank you to Mike Dunn for his fabulous seed and ant images. Learn more about ants, bloodroot, and trillium at his <u>Roads End Naturalist</u> web site.

To learn more about spring ephemerals, check out this great article from <u>Prairie Nursery</u>.





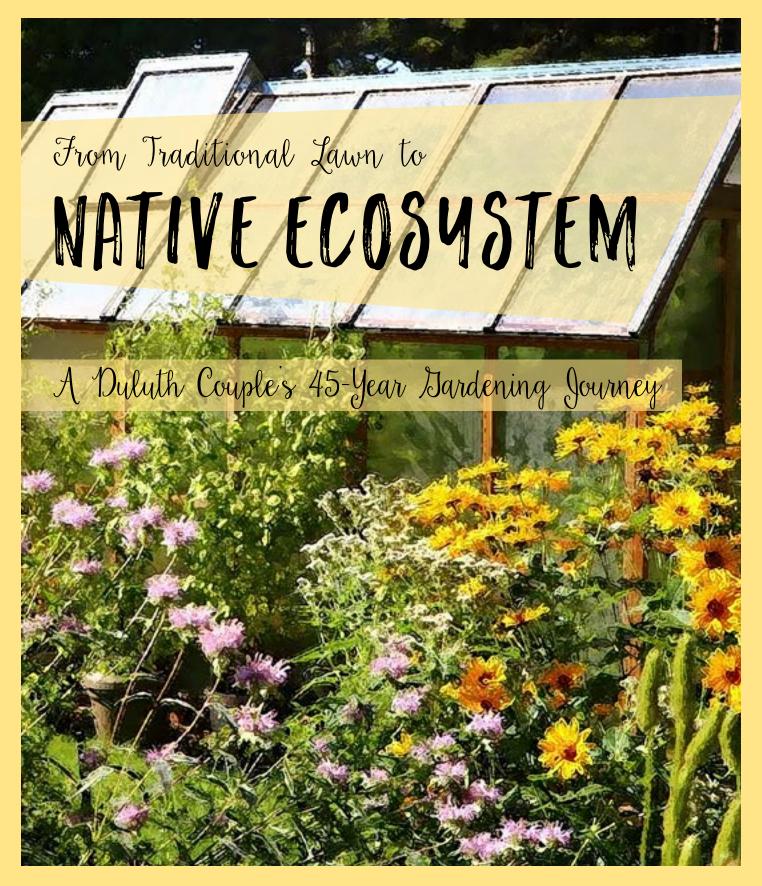








# **GARDEN SHOWCASE**



North Shore of Lake Superior in Duluth. They first gardened in Detroit Lakes, then Fergus Falls. After moving to Duluth 13 years ago, they had the opportunity to create a new landscape once again. Today, their lush two-acre property supports both native plant and food gardens. Following are their observations about gardening through the decades.



# How have garden practices changed in the 45 years that you have been gardening together?

Our original landscapes reflected the typical style of the day: traditional urban lawn and garden, very pampered, manicured and well-trimmed. In the ensuing years, we slowly transitioned our landscapes by planting native vegetation.

Each place we lived, we educated ourselves on the specific growing conditions of the area. In western Minnesota, we had hardwoods, prairie, heat, dry conditions, as well as colder winter weather. On the North Shore where we live now, we have tall pine and spruce trees, fog, shade, rocks, and pine forests in which the soil is acidic and mostly clay—totally different experiences in which to create anew an ecologically sustainable and natural environment.

Above: A mink frog, basking in the pond on a marsh marigold.

Previous page: Mature native plants next to the greenhouse, including monarda, giant hyssop, and false sunflower.

# How did you evaluate what to do with your property when you first moved to Duluth?

When we first moved here, we walked our two acres—comprised of both woods and open areas—and made note of the native plants, shrubs, and trees that were already successfully growing on our property. We educated ourselves as to what naturally grew in our specific area. We selected regionally native shrubs, trees, forbs, and grasses that were well suited to the soil conditions on our property. We removed invasive vegetation as well as turf grass. We used rocks to hold soil, and pine needles for mulch. We constructed deep beds for our vegetable gardens, used cardboard to control weeds and turf grass, and then slowly started planting out small areas with native plants. When we planted our gardens, we worked hard to create natural landscaping that fit into the North Shore area where we live.

Plant selection also included resources available through Wild Ones. We attended meetings which included presentations as well as conversations with others about what was and was not working well for them. We researched various publications on regional native plants that matched our soil and moisture conditions\*. Native plant garden tours provided valuable insight as well. Internet research, county extension services, and the public library all provided useful resources.

# You wanted to create an "environmentally responsible" landscape. How have you done this?

We realized our original practices were negatively impacting the environment. We wanted to reduce our carbon footprint by eliminating grass mowing, and to stop using pesticides and chemical fertilizers. We also needed to minimize stormwater runoff and erosion on our property so we installed terracing, French drains, and a rain garden. We eliminated invasive species with minimal impact to the ecosystem, and planted native trees, plants, and edible landscape plants. These cultural practices resulted in a healthier landscape and safer food resources.

Below:
Summer fruit
bounty of
thimbleberries,
raspberries,
blueberries,
cultivated
raspberries, and
black current
nestled on a
strawberry patch.

We feel that, as stewards of the land, we want to leave this property a better place than we found it.

Long ago we witnessed how algae in lakes bloomed in-synch with lawns being fertilized by homeowners—stormwater carries this run-off full of fertilizers to local waterbodies. It woke us up to the impact our human practices have on the environment. We realized our two-cycle lawn mower polluted the air more than our car. Something had to change, starting with us.



# You also have food gardens on your property. How do food gardens and native plants support one another?

Our food "Victory Garden" evolved from our initial restoration with native vegetation. We have since integrated fruits and vegetables on our property. Our native plant area beds were extended to include raised-bed vegetable gardens as well as inter-planting vegetables with native plants.

We've planted various heights of shrubs and trees to provide an edible landscape of blueberry, cranberry, elderberry, black currant, raspberry, chokeberry, grapes, and honeyberry, as well as apples to provide shade which promotes cool weather plants and delays evaporation. The relationship between the edibles and

# Educate yourself, learn about your area, start slow, plan well, enjoy the process.

native plantings has had a positive impact on all vegetation due to the shared pollinators, some light soil cultivation, and shade/moisture exchange.

### Did you need to amend soil on your property at all?

We selected many plants by observing and foraging what was already growing on undeveloped areas of our property. We relocated some "willing volunteers" to the garden so no soil amendments were required. We researched various publications on native plants to home-in on vegetation that would naturally thrive in existing soil and moisture conditions. Some of the integrated vegetables, however, required some localized soil amendments. The deep vegetable beds are a topsoil blend and receive an occasional top dressing of organic manure.

Below: Nan and Ken's fall harvest includes onions, garlic, squash, carrots, beets, and more.

# What have been some of the challenges on your property?

... negetation...

Our property originally had excessive water ponding and significant roof runoff. We routed our roof gutters through a series of French drains to a low area adjacent to a seasonal creek bed, then tapered and sloped the yard so it would drain naturally. We built a raised berm to trap and slow down rain runoff and to filter organic materials from garden sultimes:

then tapered and sloped the yard so it would drain naturally. We built a raised berm to trap and slow down rain runoff and to filter organic materials from garden cultivation. Native plants were planted that would absorb water, offer interesting winter structure, and a continuous season of blooms. A pleasant outcome of these efforts was the creation of a frog pond right beyond the rain garden for sediment collection (in the event the rain garden becomes overwhelmed). Our grand-children love the frogs! And, this little pond bridges their environmental awareness of the interconnection between rain, the gardens, and the pond.

One of our more interesting challenges are the larger animals such as bears, wolves, deer and fox, who "enjoy" our property. We have installed minimal fencing to redirect these animals. Other challenges have been those that everyone now experiences: controlling invasive vegetation. We scout our property for vegetation such as invasive non-native lupines—which most people don't realize are a problem because they are so lovely—tansy, valerian, non-native lilies, buckthorn, barberry, and snow-on-the-mountain.



Despite the challenges, the rewards are many. We are registered as a certified Monarch Way Station. Our grandkids love exploring our property. We welcome visitors frequently so that we can share what we have learned with a hands-on tour of our property. We see it as our responsibility to spread the word about native plants by helping to raise community awareness and volunteering with Wild Ones' projects, educational programs, and demonstration gardens. When asked for advice by people who are new to this kind of gardening we always

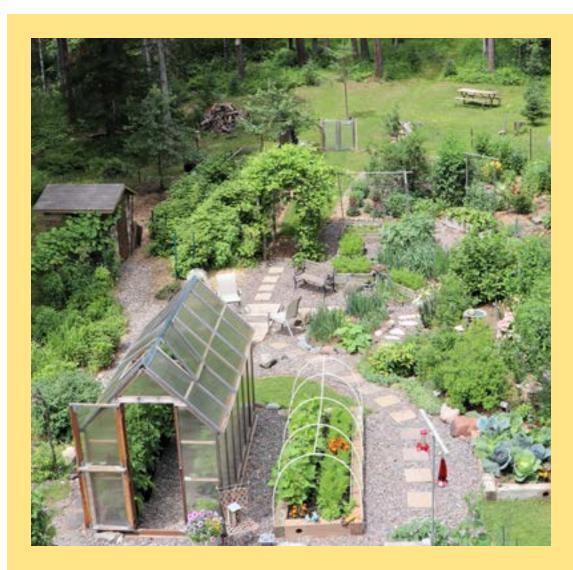
eft: A monarch
utterfly on
alico aster
symphyotrichum

respond: educate yourself, learn about your area, start slow, plan well, enjoy the process.

#### \*From the Minnesota DNR:

"A native plant community is a group of native plants that interact with each other and with their environment in ways not greatly altered by modern human activity or by introduced organisms. These groups of native plant species form recognizable units, such as oak savannas, pine forests, or marshes. that tend to repeat over space and time. Native plant communities are classified and described by considering vegetation, hydrology, landforms, soils, and natural disturbance regimes." Want guidance as to how to create a native plant community in your yard that is indigenous to your specific region? Refer to the DNR's System Summaries and NPC Fact Sheets for

Note that the asterisk\* is attached to this sentence on page 8: We researched various publications on regional native plants that matched our soil and moisture conditions\*.



Overhead bird's-eye view of the backyard layout with native plantings, vegetable deep beds, container garden and greenhouse. A rain garden on the far left-hand side of the photo captures runoff from the gardens above. The woods beyond are also on the couple's property.

# Q&A THE CURIOSITY CORNER

By: Dustin Demmer, Owner of Blazing Star Gardens

Question: I've heard about native gardens that blend grasses and flowers using "matrix planting" as the foundation for the garden. What is matrix planting and how is it used in native plant garden design?



**Answer:** Matrix planting is a technical term for mixing native grasses and sedges together in a garden design to form a closely knit foundational ground-cover. Including grasses and sedges in a design is like adding interior wall paint to a house. Wall paint might not be as showy as artwork and pictures, but it can be just as important.

A loosely designed grid of rows and columns of native grasses and sedges helps provide weed suppression, moisture retention, and structure in a planting. Grass roots, unlike many forb (flower) taproots, have extensive, dense networks in the first few

feet of soil, making it harder for weeds to find opportunities to grow. A matrix of grasses and sedges provides cohesiveness, forming a snug groundcover from which forbs emerge. And in the winter, the short grasses planted within a matrix will mat down to cover the ground to provide a natural mulch.

Grasses and sedges add a strong ecosystem value to the garden as well as they are a key part of native prairies, woodlands, and wetlands. Integral to the food web, their foliage provides food for skipper butterfly larvae and seeds for birds. Short grasses are a perfect space filler—the softness of grass leaves throughout a garden helps balance the busyness of flower leaves. And from an aesthetic perspective, there's just something soothing about the fine texture of grass leaves that puts us at ease.

Short, "tame" grasses and sedges work best in a matrix design. There are many to choose from, but we often use the same seven tried-and-true species: blue grama grass, prairie dropseed, star sedge, and little bluestem for sunny gardens; rosy sedge and ivory sedge for shady gardens; and fox sedge for rain gardens. We prefer species that we know through experience will coexist



Above: Spring sedges fill the planting in early spring, making it challenging for early-season weeds to take hold.

Below: Later in the summer, the same planting dazzles with drifts of late summer prairie and meadow blazing star, cardinal flower, and black-eyed Susan, *Rudbeckia hirta* set against a soft backdrop of prairie dropseed and fox sedge.

nicely with the forbs over time. Sedges are particularly useful because they are cool season plants that start growing right after the snow melts. This gives the garden a "jump start" of tufts of green while most of the warm season plants are still dormant and brown. It's fine to experiment with other grasses and sedges but be mindful that taller, aggressive grasses can spread and eventually crowd-out shorter forbs.

When we design a new garden, we typically use 50 percent forbs, and 50 percent grasses and sedges. It might seem like a lot of grasses and sedges, but they won't overwhelm the forbs as long as you choose short species. In the two feet around the

borders, we plant grasses or sedges that are under 18 inches tall, such as blue grama grass and star sedge in sunny gardens; and rosy sedge and ivory sedge in shady gardens. These species are very short, stay in clumps, and don't spread much by seed, making them great companions for short border flowers like prairie smoke, prairie onion, and prairie blue-eyed grass. Pennsylvania sedge is also short and spreads underground—making it a great groundcover or lawn alternative—but also making it slightly aggressive with shorter flowers.

In the center of the planting, we use these same short grass and sedge species, but also mix in some medium-height species such as prairie dropseed and little bluestem. Prairie dropseed makes a lovely, fined-leaved mound in a few years, while little bluestem creates a tall column of copper-colored leaves that stands throughout winter (it spreads by seed). Fox sedge is a nice clump sedge for rain gardens.

When installing a new garden of grasses and forbs, we recommend planting the grasses and sedges first, about 24 inches apart on center. After that, we plant the flowers in between the grasses with the goal of densely planting the forbs about 12-15

inches apart. Planting the grasses first helps keep everything evenly spaced and mixed together. We prefer to mix the grasses and sedges but keep the flowers in rough drifts.

Adding grasses and sedges to an existing garden is even easier—just add some of the species listed above in between existing flowers. The goal is for a thorough carpet of fine grass and sedge leaves, just like the prairie and forests, with flowers that bloom above and in between.





Above: A matrix of prairie sedge, prairie dropseed, and little bluestem grasses in early spring. The previous year's thatch forms a natural mulch to help suppress weeds and retain moisture.

Below: Summer forbs emerge through a foundation of grasses in this four-year-old garden at the Children's Museum in Mankato, Minnesota.

Have a Question? Send it to the Wild Ones Twin Cities periodical editors HERE! [info@wildonestwincities.org]

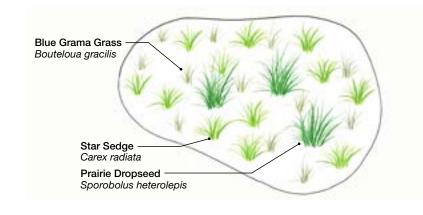
# From the Designers Desk

Dustin Demmer, Blazing Star Gardens

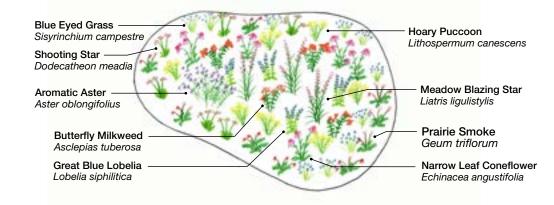
## Designing a Matrix Garden with Grasses and Sedges

These two designs are for the exact same sunny garden area. The design as shown is for an approximately 100 square foot planting. Plant the grass "matrix" first, then plant the forbs into this matrix of grasses. This design can be scaled to any size. For example, plant three butterfly milkweed in place of every one that is drawn on the design. Add more species as the garden gets bigger. Plant very short grasses and sedges on the borders and also in the middle. Plant medium height grasses in the middle. Plant forbs in rough drifts or individually throughout the garden, keeping tall species toward the middle.

# GRASS MATRIX PLANTING PLAN



# FORB PLANTING PLAN



## **About the Designer**

Dustin Demmer is the owner of <u>Blazing Star Gardens</u>. He specializes in large-scale public plantings and business garden designs. He brings hard-to-find plants to market such as hoary puccoon, wood betony, and native lilies; <u>Blazing Star Gardens</u> now offers online native plant ordering. For design inquiries, Dustin can be reached at <u>blazingstargardens@gmail.com</u>.



# WEB of LEARNING

Online Resources to Link, Connect, and Expand Knowledge

# **Ecological Landscape Alliance:** 2020 Season's End Summit.

Wednesday, October 28 @ 9:30 am EDT - 4:30 pm EDT. Online virual class/workshop/conference with topics and speakers such as The American Garden – A Life or Death Situation, with Neil Diboll; More than Pollinator Friendly with Uli Lorimer, Retooling the Role of the Landscape Designer with Heather Heimarck, and more.





### **Monarch Gardens:**

Pollinator-Friendly Alternatives to Hosta & Day Lily. Benjamin Vogt's excellent blog and newsletter keep the good ideas coming all year long.

# Native Plant Trust: Online classes offered year round.

While the focus of these classes is primarily on vegetation of New England, many of the classes (e.g., design, botany, insect/plant interactions, site preparation, seed conservation, etc.) transcend geography.





## The Bird of Paradise.

OK, this one's not about native plants. But, this delightful short video will make you fall more in love with Mother Nature more than you already are. Guaranteed.

# WHAT WE'RE READING, WATCHING & HEARING What We're Reading...

Nature's Best Hope by Douglas Tallamy.

"Nature's Best Hope is nature writing



at its best—rooted in history, progressive in its advocacy, and above all, actionable and hopeful. By proposing practical measures that ordinary people can easily do, Tallamy gives us reason to believe

that the planet can be preserved for future generations" (from Goodreads).

# What We're Watching...

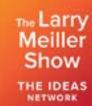
Fall Forage in the Pollinator Victory Garden

Kim Eirman, author of *The Pollinator Victory Garden*, also creates a wide



podcasts and videos on her EcoBeneficial website. This short video on asters and goldenrods is a good reminder of their

importance. "Many pollinators are active in fall and looking for food, but few landscapes have the nectar and pollen they need. Boost the pollinator juice in your landscape with these EcoBeneficial tips on our beautiful native goldenrods and aster."



What We're Hearing...

Garden Talk: Fall Prairie Plant Care

An excellent

Q&A podcast with Neil Diboll, owner of Prairie Nursery

# **HOW TO CREATE HABITAT FOR STEM-NESTING BEES**

Graphics and Content: Colleen Satyshur, Elaine Evans, Heather Holm, Sarah Foltz-Jordan

Thirty percent of native bees lay their eggs in cavities such as hollow stems or in holes in snags of dead wood. If we cut pithy stems to the ground as part of our fall or spring "clean-up" routine, we take away important nesting sites for our native bees. This graphic offers a simple tutorial for creating habitat for stem-nesting bees. When in doubt, simply cut stems of pithy native plants to varying 8 to 24 inch heights and leave them in the garden until they naturally break down.

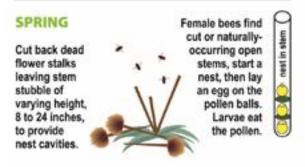
Carpenter bee excavating into the end of a flower stock stem Photo: Heather Holm

















# WILD ONES—In the Field

## Chapter/Membership Information



Wild Ones volunteers and community members volunteering at the Nokomis Naturescape garden in Minneapolis.

Despite COVID-19, many gardeners continued to show up this season to lend a hand at the Nokomis Naturescape in Minneapolis—a native plant garden that has been managed by Wild Ones member, Vicki Bonk, for the past 20 years. This past spring, the Minneapolis Park Board shut down the road that encircles the lake, giving bikers and pedestrians social distance and free reign of this road normally dominated by cars. The public's response to this extra space was enthusiastic. Nokomis Naturescape gardeners used this unique opportunity to set up an info table and to give away free milkweed—right in the road. We lured in many curious walkers and bikers and are hopeful we inspired some passersby to consider naturescaping in their own yards!

#### Want To Volunteer?

Check out chapter websites to sign up for volunteer opportunities around the state. Thank you.

# LEARN MORE and JOIN the movement at wildones.org



### ALL MONTHLY TOPIC MEETINGS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC!\*

\*All events are subject to change or cancellation due to COVID-19. The Annual Design with Nature conference will not be held this year. Many chapters' meetings/presentations are virtual this winter and spring. See individual chapter websites for further information.



#### WILD ONES MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

WHO WE ARE... Wild Ones is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to provide learning and field experiences to those interested in Minnesota native plant landscaping and environmental education.

### WHY IOIN?

**LEARN** more about native plant landscaping and related topics during our monthly programs from experts in the field. Minnesota Wild Ones Chapters also sponsor an annual Design with Nature conference in February.

**SUPPORT** our mission by purchasing local native wildflowers, grasses and shrubs during our annual spring native plant sale.

**TOUR** local homeowners' native plant gardens and yards during the

**VOLUNTEER** at Wild Ones sponsored community activities, such as the Minneapolis Monarch Festival and native plant habitat gardening at Nokomis Naturescape in Minneapolis.

**SHARE** and connect through regular email and quarterly newsletters or get up-to-date program information on our website.

**ENTOY** getting to know people who share your interest!

\$40 tax-deductible annual membership includes the national organization and local chapter.

Wild Ones Reflections is published periodically by the Twin Cities Wild Ones chapter with contributions from Wild Ones chapters throughout the state.

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