GOOD PLANT NEWS

NATIVE PLANTS ⊛ INVASIVE SPECIES ⊛ EDUCATION



Image (left): Native trees and seedlings planted at Houghton Park at a community volunteer event hosted by Buffalo Niagara River Land Trust (BNRLT). Photo Credits: Lucy Rauker (BNRLT).

WHERE CHANGE BEGINS: COMMUNITY, ECOLOGY, & ACTION

This newsletter is rooted in a simple idea: meaningful ecological change doesn't come from a few large actions, but from many small, consistent efforts shared across a community. When people take the time to learn, observe, and care for the land around them, those individual actions begin to add up in powerful ways.

Native plants are at the center of that work. They are part of the ecological memory of this region, supporting pollinators, rebuilding soil health, stabilizing habitat, and sustaining the complex relationships that both humans and local wildlife depend on. When we restore native plant communities we're not just planting gardens, we're helping rebuild functioning ecosystems.

You are a part of that change. Thank you for being here. I'm genuinely inspired by the projects happening here in Western New York and by the care that people are putting into the land in their own ways.

Alongside local restoration work, this newsletter will highlight what's happening in the broader scientific community, including breakdowns of exciting new publications and ideas shaping how we understand and care for ecosystems. We'll also share updates, events, and developments from across Western New York, connecting regional science, restoration efforts, and local groups working to inspire change in creative ways.

This first issue highlights some of our current projects, as well as a discussion on a native plant movement that is currently sweeping the nation.

Image (right): Lesser celandine (Finca verna) identification. Flowers, leaves, and patches. Photo credits: Dave Fenwick.

RECLAIMING HABITAT FROM LESSER CELANDINE

A small but impactful ecological restoration project is underway in Hamburg, NY, focusing on the removal of lesser celandine (*Ficaria verna*), an aggressive invasive plant that has been spreading rapidly through landscapes along the east coast. Recognizable by its glossy, dark green leaves and bright yellow flowers, lesser celandine may appear harmless, but it poses a serious threat to local ecosystems, lawns, and home gardens.

Celandine Continued on pg. 4



ONE PLANT CAN CHANGE HOW YOU SEE THE WORLD

When the loss of biodiversity feels overwhelming, when you look at our forests, fields, and waterways and struggle to imagine how we could possibly turn things around, it can be hard to know where to begin.

I am a firm believer that *all you need is one native plant* to become a part of something much bigger. Just one native plant tucked into a garden bed or a pot on your apartment porch. A flower buzzing with insects or a seed head left standing through the winter is a small decision that can become a surprisingly powerful act of resistance, resilience, and hope.

Recently, we installed a native garden for a homeowner featuring species such as prairie smoke, little bluestem, coreopsis, and butterfly weed. At first, it was simply a garden. A collection of beautiful native plants designed specifically to thrive in her backyard. But as the garden grew, so did her curiosity about what was happening within it. She was quick to realize that this newly formed habitat was already much more a-buzz with life than her old landscaping.



Image (above): Prairie smoke (Geum triflorum)



Image (above): Butterfly weed (Asclepias tuberosa)



Image (above): Goldfinch (Spinus tristis) perched over a sea of Coreopsis grandiflora plants (large tickseed coreopsis). Photo Credits: © Don Freiday, 2013.

One day, she asked us what she should do with her coreopsis once the flowers had gone to seed. We gave her a few options: she could wait for the seeds to dry, collect them, and share them with friends, she could deadhead the plants to encourage another flush of blooms, or she could leave the seed heads right where they were. And if she did that, we told her, she might get some exciting visitors... goldfinches love coreopsis seeds.

About a week later she excitedly told us that a goldfinch had arrived! She watched it perch atop the coreopsis, bobbing gently in the breeze as it picked through the seed heads. A tiny yellow bird on a tiny yellow flower, in a garden she had helped create, eating the seeds of a plant she had chosen to grow. That moment might seem small, but it is exactly why we plant native. The more you know, the more you see.

Once you know that goldfinches seek out the seeds of certain native plants, you start noticing goldfinches. Once you learn that a particular plant supports a particular caterpillar, you start looking for those caterpillars. Once you understand that a flower isn't simply something pretty in a garden but food, shelter, nesting material, or part of a much larger relationship, your yard starts to look completely different. What once seemed like random encounters begin to reveal themselves as intricately formed connections. You begin to plant for them rather than for yourself. A flower blooms. An insect arrives. A bird finds food. Seeds are carried away. New plants grow. The cycle continues.

It is important to note that a landscape can be green without being particularly "alive." We can fill a yard with non-native plants and still leave very little behind for the wildlife that lives around us. The relationships that we witness between different species aren't random. They are the result of countless generations of plants and animals evolving alongside one another, each species shaped by, and actively shaping, the living community around it. What can feel like magic is also biology. It is ecology. It is evolution. And it is happening right outside our windows.



Image (above): Little bluestem (Schizachyrium scoparium)

In moments when we feel that spark of deep wonder that comes from being part of the living world we can say to the goldfinch, "thank you for being here." And perhaps the goldfinch, in its own way, is saying, "thank you for planting food that nourishes me."

It is almost inevitable that you begin to share this wonderment of nature with other people. Friends, family, neighbors, coworkers, and just like that, a movement that is currently sweeping the nation continues to grow.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SMALL CHOICES ADD UP?

"HOMEGROWN NATIONAL PARK"

On its own, a single yard may seem insignificant against the scale of biodiversity loss. But what happens when thousands, or millions, of people make the same kinds of decisions?

This is the idea behind "Homegrown National Park," a movement founded by an ecologist at the University of Delaware, Doug Tallamy. Tallamy asks us to rethink where and how conservation happens. We tend to imagine conservation as something that takes place in national parks, preserves, and other protected areas, but most of the landscape between those places is privately owned. In the eastern United States, more than 85% of land is privately owned, meaning that an enormous portion of the habitat available to wildlife is shaped by decisions made by individual landowners.

And the scale of our yards is surprisingly enormous. Tallamy points out that the U.S. has roughly 40 million acres of lawn and that if we transformed just half of that, 20 million acres, into productive native habitat, the resulting landscape would be larger than the *combined area* of many of our largest national parks, including Yellowstone, Yosemite, Denali, Grand Canyon, and Great Smoky Mountains. Tallamy's idea is not that everyone needs to eliminate their lawn or turn their property into wilderness. Instead, imagine what could happen if we simply gave some of that space back, replacing portions of lawn and invasive plants with native species that can actually support local food webs.

That is where the idea becomes powerful. Conservation doesn't always have to mean setting land aside. Sometimes it means changing how we use the land we already have. A backyard doesn't have to become a nature preserve to matter. Over time, small individual patches can begin to function as a network rather than isolated islands of habitat. Homegrown National Park describes this as small actions connecting to something much bigger.

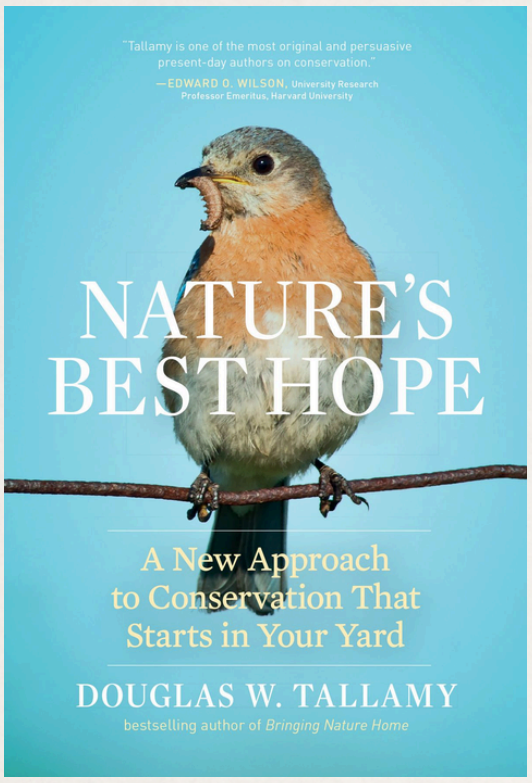


Image (above): Doug Tallamy's book "Nature's Best Hope," also available on most major platforms as an audiobook.

And the movement is already growing at an unbelievable rate! As of 2026, Homegrown National Park reports more than 170,000 acres logged on its Biodiversity Map, with tens of thousands of people and hundreds of organizations participating. That is already bigger than Zion National Park in Utah!



Image (above): Monarch butterfly caterpillar (Danaus plexippus) feeding on the leaves of a milkweed plant (Genus: Ascelpias)

Image (left): Monarch butterfly feeding on the nectar of a flowering common milkweed plant (Asclepias syriaca)

So when we talk about planting one native plant, removing one invasive species, or letting one part of a lawn become something more diverse, we're not pretending that one yard can solve biodiversity loss. We're recognizing that landscapes are made of individual pieces and that we have the power to change the piece we control. And when enough of us make those decisions, the landscape starts to change. See page 5 to find out where you can go to purchase locally grown native plants in Western New York!



QR Code (above): Biodiversity map on Doug Tallamy's website.

Celandine Continued:

Native to Europe, North Africa, and parts of western Asia, lesser celandine was first brought to North America as a home garden plant valued for its early spring blooms. Over time, it escaped cultivation and established itself in natural areas where it now takes over forest floors, floodplains, and other habitats.

There are a few things that make lesser celandine both particularly aggressive and particularly difficult to get rid of. First, it is one of the first plants to emerge and bloom in the spring. This allows it to (1) get a head start, absorbing a lot of the resources in an area and (2) form dense mats that crowd out everything from lawn and garden plants to native wildflowers.

In addition, lesser celandine retreats underground when it starts to get hot out. As summer approaches, the leaves die back and disappear from view, *but the plant isn't gone.* Instead, it pulls nutrients into its root system, where it continues to spread underground all summer, choking out the roots of other plants. Then, when the next spring arrives, a larger patch emerges. Because of this, the treatment timing is critical. There is only a short window before it goes dormant for the summer.

Finally, lesser celandine also has the ability to spread via seeds that disperse with the wind, and above-ground structures called "bulbils" that enjoy tracking to new areas on muddy boots and tires or washing to new areas in the rain. Over time, a diverse, living landscape, a garden, or a green lawn will be reduced to a sheet of lesser celandine in the spring and bare mud in the summer.

For this restoration project, the homeowners requested a herbicide-free approach, so removal required careful, thorough digging. Even small pieces left behind will regrow.

> ***"At first we actually thought it was kind of nice. We saw it pop up one year and didn't mind the little yellow flowers coming into the lawn. After that, it really took off and spread fast, covering about an eighth of the lawn. In the summer it dies back and goes underground, and we're left with a flat sheet of mud. Nothing else grows in it once it's there. Now we notice it taking over the woodlands surrounding the 18-mile creek."*** *- Project Homeowner*



Image (above): Lesser celandine takes over a forest understory in Ohio, destroying native biodiversity. Photo credits: Joe Boggs, Ohio State University.



Early Meadow-Rue (Thalictrum dioicum)



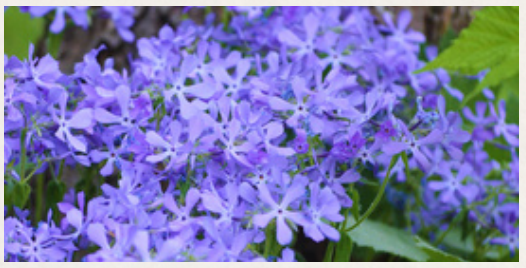
Maidden Hair Fern (Adiantum pedatum)



Virginia Bluebells (Mertensia virginica)



Eastern Columbine (Aquilegia canadensis)



Woodland Phlox (Phlox divaricata)

Images (above): Native understory species in Western New York that lesser celandine is displacing. This is what a forest floor in Western New York should look like: rich, diverse, and seasonally dynamic.

Once removed, all plant material must be double-bagged in thick contractor bags and disposed of in the landfill, never composted. Plant parts can survive composting and spread to new areas. Proper disposal is just as critical as removal!

This project aims not only to eliminate the invasive species but also to reclaim the space for a healthier, more diverse ecosystem. The area was seeded with native low-growing violets to replace both the lawn and the lesser celandine. These early springtime bloomers can be mowed, maintaining the appearance of a green lawn, while supporting local pollinators with a food source when they are emerging from their winter hibernation. Plus, after a long Buffalo winter, who wouldn't love to look out their front window to see a carpet of tiny purple and white blooms welcoming spring?

As invasive species cause native plants to disappear, the insects, birds, and other wildlife that depend on them disappear as well. Recognizing lesser celandine early and taking action can make all the difference, making infestations easier to manage before they spread and displace native plants.

What happens in our yards matters beyond our property lines. Private lands make up a huge part of the landscape surrounding our parks, preserves, and other natural areas, so managing invasive species at home can help prevent their spread and protect the larger ecosystems we're all part of. With the right timing, persistence, and follow-up monitoring, we can help you restore your space to a diverse, thriving landscape. If you notice lesser celandine in your yard, reach out to learn about treatment options!

A GUIDE TO NATIVE PLANT SHOPPING

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO BUY NATIVE PLANTS WHOSE SEEDS ARE LOCALLY SOURCED?

Many native plants have surprisingly large geographic ranges. Little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), for example, is native across much of North America, from parts of Canada to the southern United States. But a plant growing in Charleston, South Carolina experiences a very different climate than one growing in Buffalo, New York.

Over generations, plant populations of the same species can become adapted to the specific conditions of their region, including temperature, precipitation, soils, and the length of the growing season. These regionally adapted populations are known as "local ecotypes."

This is why where a native plant comes from matters. A wildflower grown from seed collected in Western New York may be better adapted to our winters, soils, and growing season than the same species grown from seed collected hundreds of miles away, allowing them to establish better and grow stronger.

Choosing locally sourced native plants can also help preserve regional genetic diversity and maintain the ecological relationships between plants and local wildlife.

I.e. *Native is a great start, but locally sourced ("local ecotype") natives are even better!*



Images (above): Choose Violets is a local Western New York business that hand-collects, cleans, and sells the seeds of native plants (8.1 Ecoregion)!

NATIVE SPECIES, CULTIVARS, AND HYBRIDS: WHAT ARE YOU ACTUALLY BUYING?



Image (right): Butterfly weed (Asclepias tuberosa) is the native species form, with its characteristic orange flowers.
Image (above): The cultivar Asclepias tuberosa 'Hello Yellow', bred for its yellow flowers.

Walk into a nursery and you'll see plenty of plants labeled "native." I encourage you to take a moment to look a little closer. Names like 'Autumn Brilliance', 'Little Henry', or 'Standing Ovation' indicate a cultivar: a plant humans have selected and propagated for traits we prefer, such as a particular flower color, size, shape, or growth habit. You may also see hybrids, created by crossing different species or varieties.

The important question is: what happens ecologically when we change the way that a plant looks or behaves to suit our preferences?

Plants and wildlife have spent thousands of years evolving alongside one another. Pollinators can be remarkably specific about the flowers they use, responding to characteristics like color, shape, scent, and how pollen and nectar are positioned. When we alter those traits for our gardens, we may also be altering how wildlife interacts with the plant. Some pollinators might not even recognize cultivars or hybrids.

All cultivars are not necessarily "bad," but the effects on pollinators can vary and are not always well researched or understood. When supporting local ecosystems is the goal, choosing the straight species preserves the traits found in natural populations and is the more predictable choice. *If your goal is to create habitat, look beyond the word "native." Look for, or ask for, the "species form."*

We're putting together a list of local native plant sellers for our next issue.
If you sell native plants and would like to be included, let us know!

Send us an email: WildlyNativeSuburbia@gmail.com

WHO WE ARE:

Wildly Native Suburbia, LLC is an ecological landscaping and restoration company based in Western New York, founded and operated by ecologists trained in scientific research. We bring that expertise directly to your yard, helping you turn your property into a beautiful, resilient landscape that supports the wildlife around you.

We can help you design a square-foot-by-square-foot native garden, select and source native plants, manage invasive species, and restore degraded areas. Whether you want to replace part of your lawn, add a pollinator garden, plant a new native tree, tackle an invasive plant, or completely rethink your landscape, we develop practical, site-specific solutions based on your property's conditions and your goals.

Our approach combines the beauty of thoughtful landscape design with the science of ecology. We consider what will thrive on your property, what will provide habitat and food for wildlife, and how your landscape can remain healthy and manageable for years to come.

Your yard is part of a much larger living landscape. Let us help you make it work for both you and the wildlife that calls it home.

NATURALIST TOURS:

We're now offering naturalist tours throughout Western New York for community members, student groups, after-school programs, and college students of any age or experience level.

As educators, we create outings that can range from learning plant identification and using a dichotomous key to uncovering forest history, recognizing ecological change, and learning how plants, animals, and people shape a landscape.

No experience is necessary. We adapt each outing to the group's age, skill level, interests, pace, and accessibility needs. Whether you're curious about the woods or looking for an in-depth ecology lesson, we'll meet you where you are.

$10 per person or group rate of $75 for 10+ people. Up to 15 people per session. Email us to plan an outing.

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WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

- Questions: there is so much that we want to write about, but we first want to prioritize the topics that you want to learn about! Send us an email to let us know what you are curious about.
- If you are a native plant grower in WNY that wants to be added to our local plant sellers list.
- If you are an ecologial professional with constructive criticism, ideas to add, or other feedback.
- Sustainability, restoration, education, etc. projects: We would be happy to share your hard work with new audiences.
- Professors, graduate students, or undergraduate students publishing new research related to climate change, conservation, restoration, native species, or invasive species: we would love to work with you to translate your work from a scientific format to a digestible story to make it accessible to broader public audiences.
- Stories of activism, hope, and resilience in our communities.
- Personal observations, realizations, and connections to nature, old or new.



Image: Blue Mist Flower (Conoclinium coelestinum)

SUPPORT GOOD PLANT NEWS

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