



Growing through Education

Wildflowers

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www.wildflowersmich.org

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An Early Spring Wildflower

by Judy Webber

After a long, cold winter, spring has arrived in our beautiful state, and that means the arrival of the spring wildflowers. Of course, we always think of the beautiful woodland blooms such as trillium, Jack-in-the Pulpit, and hepatica among others. But some of us are not blessed with woodland areas and so are not able to grow these lovely flowers in our yards; this means waiting for the sun-loving blossoms to make their appearance.

All is not lost, however, because there is an early sun-loving flower: Geum triflorum, with the common names prairie smoke or long-plumed purple avens. This member of the rose family is a low-growing plant with jagged, irregular leaves. It blooms from April-June with three purplish flowers on each stem, hence the name triflorum. The flowers are lovely, but it is the seed heads that provide the interest: they are wispy and threadlike, pointing straight up like a little feather duster. Planted in groups or masses, the effect is truly striking and provides much desired color in the spring garden.

This plant likes rocky, sandy soil, so it may not do well in clay soil or wet areas. According to Michigan Flora, Part II by Edward Voss, you will find prairie smoke growing on Drummond Island in the Upper Peninsula and in Allegan, Barry, Ionia, Kent, and Ottawa Counties, so it is not too widespread. You can also see it in the Welcome Wildflower Site garden in Frankfort, MI.

According to Esther Durnwald of Michigan Wildflower Farm, prairie smoke

plants do not spread wildly from seed, so they are not invasive. It will also spread gradually by forming "pups", so the gardener will have a nice number of them in just a short time without fear of the garden being overwhelmed. Prairie smoke will provide many years of pleasure with very little care. So if you're looking for early, native bloomers try this lovely, unusual flower. I think you will be thrilled with the results.

Plants are available from Oakland Wildflower Farm or Wildtype. Michigan Wildflower Farm sells the seeds. For specific information on these sources, go to the WAM website or see pages 10-11.

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Prairie Smoke

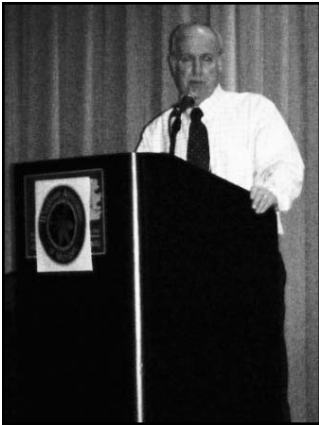
Photo by Laryssa Kaufman

WAM

By increasing awareness and knowledge, the Wildflower Association of Michigan encourages the preservation and restoration of Michigan's native plants and native plant communities.

An Interview with Douglas Tallamy

By Kathy Prelesnik and Judy Webber



Most of us have come to our present understanding of the importance of native plants by traveling a crooked path. Dr. Douglas Tallamy, author of *“Bringing Nature Home: How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens”* is no exception. He attended Allegany College in Meadville, PA. But he didn’t begin with a major in biology because, his brother said, “don’t take science, it’s too hard for you.” Tallamy

told us, “I tried several other disciplines, like sociology and history; I knew I wouldn’t like English and I didn’t want to be a teacher because I was too afraid to talk in front of people. The only thing I hadn’t tried was biology. So my sophomore year I did and it just clicked. But it trained you to for pre-med. So I decided to go to dental school. I was there for two weeks, which was how long it took me to figure out how to get out of this horrible mistake.” An undergrad course in entomology with Dr. Bugbee (really Dr Bugbee!) was what ultimately inspired him and led him to pursue a masters, Ph.D. and post-doctorate in entomology. Tallamy is energetic, enthusiastic, comfortable to be with and a humbly intelligent man. His sense of humor and candor made us feel at home from the moment we sat down. What follows is the first of two articles from our interview.

We began by asking Tallamy how his research led to writing Bringing Nature Home. He quickly answered, “It didn’t. After a 5 year search by my wife, we moved to a new home. It was ten acres that had been mowed for hay and then lay dormant. When we decided to restore it, we really didn’t realize what we were getting into; it was full of autumn olive, multi-flora rose and Oriental bitter sweet. Some plants had 6 inch stems. There weren’t many natives. At first, I cut trails. I would walk through and look for insects. I noticed the leaves of the black cherry and other native plants had damage but the non-natives had no damage at all. That was my aha moment!

The differences in damage were predictable, but I am always looking for interesting research projects. I figured someone had probably done research on this topic, but there was nothing on how non-native plants messed up the food web. I figured I could do some basic work, so I had a student spend the summer quantifying insect damage. The publicity office always wants new material and my student had written a paper on her findings. In it she said, ‘Tallamy says alien plants are going to make the birds disappear.’ That was more than I actually said, but people started asking me to give talks about it. I had given talks for about a year when

people started asking if there was something they could read or if anyone else was doing this research. Nobody else was and I had nothing they could read. So people wanted me to write a pamphlet. I said, ‘OK I’ll write a pamphlet, it shouldn’t be hard to do.’ I thought, ‘anybody can sit down and write a pamphlet.’ So I started. But to explain the concept I wanted I couldn’t leave out any steps, I had to cover all the bases; it got a lot longer than a pamphlet. When it was finished I asked my friend, Rick Darke, who published with Timber Press if he thought they would be interested in it. He emailed a copy to his editor on Friday of Memorial Day weekend. She emailed me on Memorial Day saying, ‘Yes, we’ll accept it, but it you have to make it twice as long. Can you do that?’ I said, yes, but, it took me another year to complete the book. I was confident that people would buy it because they had asked me to write it!” Thus was born *Bringing Nature Home*.

What advice do you have for people who want to restore their landscape? “We learned a lot restoring our land. I suggest that people take it a step at a time. First, research and decide what plant community is appropriate for your area. If restoring a large piece of land, clear only what you can replant right away. This prevents that 7 + year seed bank from deciding what will grow back. Mechanical removal of woody plants that regenerate from root stock is not effective. Cutting and immediately painting the stumps with Garlon kills all the roots. A piece of Japanese knotweed root the size of your pinkie fingernail can regenerate a new plant.

The native plant movement seems to be associated with the non-herbicide/pesticide movement. I encourage using herbicides sparingly. Not using herbicides is a primary cause of frustration and causes many people to give up on restoration projects. Don’t bite off more than you can chew. Restoration projects take a lot of time and energy. Decide if it will be your energy or if you will hire someone to do the work. Work with nature whenever possible. Squirrels love acorns and will plant pin oak, white oak, and black oak acorns. I have also watched blue jays plant acorns in disturbed soil. A white oak will support over 534 species of moths and butterflies.”

Won’t insects just eat up my garden? “People say to me, ‘If I plant native plants, I will get insects and they will mess up my garden; you have already told me they will eat it.’ But the natural enemies of these insects will keep them in balance. Data on homes landscaped with native plants, compared to ones with alien plants show no real difference in damage levels. We have only had 1 summer of gathering research data, but those statistics show 3.5% damage on

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~ ASSOCIATION NEWS & VIEWS ~

~ PRESIDENT'S NOTE ~



The 22nd Annual Wildflower Conference is now a memory. Can spring be far behind? Thanks to all of you who supported our efforts to educate by attending. Especially during these financially challenging times, it was reassuring that attendees thought our conference to be a great value. It was an exceptional two days filled

with knowledge and inspiration shared by such a talented group of presenters. It is a privilege to meet such experts. This year's theme of "Building a Web of Life" really clicked as I noticed variations on this theme throughout the event. Not only were the chosen topics connected, but it seemed that the speakers themselves connected more with other speakers and attendees as well. We've reviewed the evaluations and plans are already underway in preparation for 2010. If you didn't have an opportunity to fill out a conference evaluation and have ideas you may email me at wildflowers@voyager.net. Exciting news is that our new additions to the newsletter staff, Kathy Prelesnik and Judy Webber have already been hard at work. Part one of their interview with Professor Tallamy is included in this issue as well as other articles provided by Kathy and Judy. I know all WAM members will appreciate their work.

Have a great spring!

Esther Durnwald
President

"As always, a wonderful conference. I wait for this conference every year."

"Once again, I have really enjoyed another great conference. I've attended for the past 7 years and always enjoy the presentations and networking. What keeps me coming back is that WAM looks at the large picture. WAM does a good job on the diversity of speakers and subjects. It is important to explore trends of what is happening."



**Quotes From 2009 Conference
Evaluation Forms**

WAM has participated in the Lansing Home & Garden for the past 10 years. This year's show was the best ever. Our location at the show is spectacular and people see us when they first enter the building! We



had information available about WAM, membership and information from growers so that, come spring, people could buy the native plants they were looking for. WAM's display showed photos of native plants and featured over 15 handouts containing information about them.

Most of our time was spent talking to folks and in a five hour span on Saturday alone, we talked to well over 100 people who were seeking information about restoring indigenous plants to their property. Interest ranged from just beginning with a single species or two in an existing garden to restoring several acres of open land to prairie.

The most frequent question asked was, "Where can I buy native plants?" This of course, prompted us to talk about the problem with knowing the difference between native plants and cultivars. We encouraged people to ask their nurseries where their plants were from, preferring plants grown from seed collected with permission in the wild or grown by a well established grower. Our reply of caution was, "If it has a name like 'Sunset' after the Latin name, it is probably a cultivar so keep looking.

A handy list of Michigan native plant growers in our handout issues of *Wildflowers* was very popular. We encouraged people to buy from the closest native grower to them in order to encourage local genotypes. We did well in referrals for the Lansing area, but believe it or not, there were folks from as far as Gaylord and other places both south and north. We would like to be able to provide a more extensive list of growers located throughout our State.

The interest shown in native plants was encouraging. It seems that this is a movement whose time has come. Our time at the show passed quickly; we felt good to be able to share our enthusiasm for "bringing nature home." It takes up to 10 encounters for people to recognize a new concept, but in our encounters we felt that an impression was made in their understanding of the food web and the need to enrich it through gardening as

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~ BUSINESS MEMBER PROFILE ~

Chad Hughson

The Birth of Hidden Savanna Nursery

by Chad Hughson



The seeds of our nursery were planted several decades ago during my childhood. From preschool through elementary, I was extremely fortunate in that my back yard was the Gourdneck State Game Area in Portage, Michigan. My playground was several thousand acres of state land which included oak savannas, oak forests, bogs, fens, ponds, a stream and a small lake. I was allowed to roam and explore rather freely with my comrade Brandy, our Great Dane. I did not know what Special Concern, Threatened, or Endangered meant, but I knew when and where to find Eastern Box Turtles, Spotted Turtles, and Blanding's Turtles; they were common to me. Catching salamanders was a spring time ritual. There were Spotted Salamanders, Tiger Salamanders, Red-backed Salamanders, and Blue Spotted Salamanders. Tiger Salamanders were my favorite because they were the largest and would eat worms right from your fingers. Besides herpetology, my other passion was fishing. With many ponds and a lake within walking distance, taking on this pastime was a natural fit. Eventually, as I grew older, my excursions into the wild took on a much broader scope; I had a bicycle and new friends to go exploring with. We could visit far away lakes, swamps, and forests as long as we returned home by dark.

Then we moved to the lake, West Lake to be exact, during middle school. It was a bigger house and within walking distance to my school. The neighborhood was much larger than the previous one I had lived in, but in it lived many of my friends. I could no longer roam for hours without seeing a soul, but I was entering my teen years and spending time with my friends — particularly if they had long hair and pretty eyes — was becoming much more important. I still spent my fair share of time fishing and exploring the protected sphagnum bog along our lake, but my life focus shifted to school, sports, and socializing.

During my childhood adventures I had developed a close relationship with nature. In fact, although I did not realize it at the time, the fauna, flora, and natural communities of our area had become a very important part of my being. Back then I did not know what Wild Lupine was called, but I knew where it grew in sandy, dry openings within the oaks, and that's where the Eastern Box Turtles often laid their eggs. I

thought *Asclepias amplexicaulis* was our most common milkweed, as it grew in many places near my home and that's what I used to raise monarch butterflies. I knew of sundews and pitcher plants from far-fetched advertisements in comic books and catalogs, but, more importantly, I had seen these plants in the wild and knew they grew in the floating bogs by the lake.

Jump to the year 1998. I became engaged to my amazing wife Kristin, and we are looking for our first home. We had spent a short stint in Chicago after college, but missed our family and friends back home in the Kalamazoo area. She is a Registered Nurse with a BS in Nursing from Michigan State. I am a software consultant traveling all over the country for various projects, although my degree from Michigan Tech was in Chemical Engineering. With my weekly business traveling, Kristin ended up spearheading the house hunting project. We looked at several homes and then ended up at our current residence. Nothing too fancy, but it is on two acres and is adjacent to a dwindling Christmas tree farm of 33 acres.

We moved in to our new house in late April. The farthest thing from our minds was native plants or opening a nursery. We are concerned with more important things like our jobs, furnishing our home, buying cars, taking vacations. We are in hot pursuit of the American dream. A few weeks passed and as I'm strolling in the back yard, I see a patch of pretty blue pea-like flowers in an opening on the Christmas tree farm. I've seen it before... I do some more wandering on the property and there are cacti growing there. Hmm, how did these get here? Being a scientist, my curiosity sparked, and thus began a new adventure, this time with native plants. I start buying and reading books about native plants. I read

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~ BUSINESS MEMBER PROFILE ~

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about *Lupinus perennis* and our native *Opuntia humifusa*. People such as Ken Kirton, Robert Pleznac, and Tom and Nancy Small offer me early guidance. I joined a group called Kalamazoo Area Wild Ones. The decision is made; Kristin and I would landscape our home with native plants.

A few years pass, and my passion for native plants steadily increased. Some may even call it an obsession. We have been slowly removing our front lawn and replacing it with native plants. We are also landscaping our back yard with natives. I have even started raising them. The Smalls and Steve Keto have generously offered advice on growing native species. I had been shown places to collect their seeds, and, oddly enough, I recalled where certain species grow from my childhood. I may have not known the names, but when I see them in a book my memory is sometimes sparked. I joined WAM and start attending conferences. And then something scary happens... the Christmas tree farm property is put up for sale. It will surely end up becoming a neighborhood. There will be no more bumble bees frantically gathering pollen in the patches of Wild Lupine. There will be no more giant yellow blooms of Prickly Pear in the summer. There will be no more Woodcock dancing in the air in early spring. I am teary-eyed at the thought of not ever again hearing the Whippoorwills through our open windows during late spring and early summer. It must be saved.

We ponder the thought of purchasing the property, but just don't have the money saved up yet for the down payment, and we are concerned with the additional mortgage payment. What if I lose my job? Some think it is insane that we are considering purchasing the property as it costs more than our home. Kristin's parents then came to the rescue and gave us an early inheritance; we take the plunge. Our 2 acre native landscaping project has now grown to 35 acres. The time span of our project has also grown as this is going to take a lifetime.

I continued with my day job as a project manager and software consultant, but started spending more time and effort

with native plants and restoration. I continued to buy additional books to educate myself and attended more conferences. I started propagating more and more plants and species. I continued to find and be shown additional remnants. I became less and less interested in my current job. Maybe it was time to simplify and, more importantly, enjoy life. The corporate rat race was weighing down my soul.

During the fall of 2007, I planted many more seed flats than I could use on our property. I also planted some species that would not even grow on our soils. The idea of starting our own nursery was incubating in my mind. NESTA Prairie Perennials had recently closed its doors and the end of my current consulting contract was uncertain. I began planning the potential business in the winter of 2007/2008 and filed the paperwork during the following spring. The stars aligned and Hidden Savanna Nursery was born. My last consulting project did not end until June 1, which was later than I had anticipated, so I was not able to get the early start I was wishing for last year.

This year will be the first full season for our nursery. As I write this, seed flats are starting to germinate in the new greenhouse I built last fall. It is heated solely by passive solar power. I will also be expanding the outdoor nursery area.

Life has come full circle for me. Once again I am spending much of my time observing and working with nature. Don't get me wrong, nursery work is not easy and can be quite tedious. Have you every transplanted thousands of seedlings? But knowing the potential of each and every seedling, and knowing that every plant I sell can help heal our ravaged ecosystems makes it all worth it.

Please see our web site, www.hiddensavanna.com, for our retail sale dates/times, information on the plant species we sell, directions, and contact information. We are located on the western edge of Oshtemo Township near Kalamazoo. We specialize in upland prairie and savanna species, but we also offer a selection of both wetland and forest species. Most of our seed sources are southwest Michigan genotype. If you are in our area, we hope to see you at the nursery this season.



BIKERS AND HIKERS!

Remember to always check your bike tires, shoes and clothes for seeds picked up in other areas before entering a forest or other hiking/biking trail.

Stop the spread of invasive alien plants.



An Interview with Douglas Tallamy

~ Continued from Page 2 ~

native plants and 4% on traditional landscapes. That's really no difference. We are continuing our research, but I think the statistics will bear this out. Studies show that most homeowners don't even notice damage on vegetation until it reaches 10%".

I see those ugly tent caterpillars all over, won't they kill everything? "I tell people, telephone poles are ugly too, but they are a necessary part of our lives, we grew up with them, we accept them. We don't like tent caterpillars because they make an ugly tent. But they only lay their eggs on cherries and apples. Most people don't have black cherry in their yard; if you do, you can just remove the tent. That's easy because they have only one generation, in June. But black cherry supports 456 other species of caterpillars. So ask yourself, do I eliminate a tree that supports another 456 species, because I don't like one?"

Tent caterpillars are an important part of the food web.

Gardeners have become important players in the management of our nation's wildlife. It is now within the power of individual gardeners to do something that we all dream of doing: to "make a difference."

D. Tallamy

They feed yellow billed and black billed cuckoos who follow them and rip up their tents; they are the best protein for Orioles when they arrive in spring, and bats eat them too. It is the invasive species, like gypsy moth, ash borer, Japanese beetle, and azalea lace bug (the biggest pest of ornamental plants in this country) all of which we brought into this coun-

try, that give tent caterpillars and other native insects a bad name."

How do I know the plants I buy at a nursery are native to my area? "Let me tell you a story. My wife heard there was a nursery going out of business in New Jersey, so we went and bought several 3' beech trees. We planted them and in the spring they leafed out. They leafed out 2 weeks earlier than they should. A late frost killed the leaves. They leafed out again, but then they were behind. So the next year I was ready. They leafed out early again, so I put sheets over them. They had grown, so I couldn't get them completely covered. Another late frost killed the leaves. The trees probably came from North Carolina, so they weren't in our phenological area. We still have them, but climate change may be helping because we have had no late frosts lately. Now they are 10 feet tall and are on their own. But, I got burned by not knowing where those trees had come from. We must have some degree of trust in nurseries. We also need to persevere in getting an answer about where plants are specifically from. They must fit into the phenological schedule of your area, which means they must break bud, put out leaves and drop leaves for the time zone you live in. Insects and birds time their activity to the plants they depend on. The temperature zones you see for plants are pretty broad latitudinally. That is the first thing you can use. Ask about a plant's provenance when you buy natives. Use the Latin name. Deal with nurseries that guarantee their plants."

Do you have another book in process? "Timber Press is coming out soon with a paperback edition of *Bringing Nature Home*. And I do have a sequel in the works. It will be a 'how to' book. I'm working with Jules Bruck, Assistant Professor of landscape design at the University of Delaware. I think it will be helpful to people who want to 'garden as if life depended on it.'"

Kathy Prelesnik

Watch for more of the interview with Douglas Tallamy in the next issue of Wildflowers.



LANSING HOME & GARDEN SHOW

~ Continued from Page 3 ~

an impression was made in their understanding of the food web and the need to enrich it through gardening as

Douglas Tallamy speaks of in *Bringing Nature Home*. We cannot end without a plea to all WAM members reading this, especially those residing in and around the Lansing area. Plans are made to exhibit at the Lansing Home & Garden Show again next year, but more volunteers are needed to staff the booth. If you are serious about the difference we can make in our environment through our gardens, pencil in March 18-21, 2010 to help in our booth. You do not need to be an expert on native plant gardening, we have plenty of handouts to deal with questions. I promise you will find these few hours well spent.

Kathy Prelesnik

~ WAM BUSINESS ~

2009 CONFERENCE SCHOLARSHIPS

WAM made scholarships available to college students focusing on horticulture/ landscaping studies to attend the Wildflower Conference. Attending conference 2009 were:

Calvin College – Amanda Hoffmeyer, Anna Pranger, Linda VanAndel and Andrew Weirsma

Michigan State University – Amanda Taylor and Leigh Whittinghill

University of Michigan – Patrick Reed and Allison Kreuger

THE RECIPIENTS OF THE WAM/GLASSEN EDUCATIONAL GRANTS FOR 2009:

Clarkston Watershed Group / City of Clarkston

Burns Park Elementary School Parent/Teacher Organization Ann Arbor

*MI Master Gardener Association, Huron Co. Chapter
Bad Axe*

*Knabusch Math & Science Center/Monroe Schools
Monroe*

*Upland Hills School
Oxford*

*St. Michael's School
Grand Ledge*

Detroit Eastside Community Collaborative

*Otsego Conservation District
Gaylord*

*Friends of the Rouge
Livonia*

*Pine Lake Village Cooperative
Ann Arbor*

*Muskegon River Watershed Assembly
Big Rapids*

Congratulations and we look forward to hearing the progress on your native plantings!

See www.wildflowersmich.org for more WAM Educational Grant info



Maryann Whitman awarding grant to recipient, James Brueck from Clarkston.

Want to get involved?



Become a forest watcher in your favorite forest community.

~ ANOTHER BOOK FOR YOUR REFERENCE LIBRARY ~



Donald I. Dickmann

Donald I. Dickmann, professor emeritus at Michigan State University, Dept. of Forestry gives us a brilliant resource for looking at the importance of forest communities in our State. Like Douglas Tallamy he draws our attention to the importance of trees and the ecosystems they provide. If you attended the WAM conference or read Tallamy's book you know the value he places on native trees as a source of

food and habitat for native insects, birds and animals. Dickmann shows us that "forests are a defining natural feature of Michigan's landscape." They provide vital habitat and food for the birds, animals and insects we love.

Dickmann's MSU extension publication (E3000, \$14.95), *Michigan Forest Communities; A Field Guide and Reference*, is a must have book in the collection of anyone interested in exploring and identifying forests or restoring native plant species to a landscape that was once forested. It is a simple to use, brief, well-organized guide that can be used with other field guides.

Professor Dickmann describes the subject of defining forest communities as 'idiomatic'. He says, "The trees, other plants, and animals that inhabit Michigan can occur together in an almost infinite array of combinations and permutations. By necessity, forest typing requires that boundaries and limits be established...." Not to be confused with lumberjacks, those who attempt forest classification are generally divided into two groups; lumpers and splitters. Dickmann considers himself a 'lumper', looking at wide boundaries defined by common traits and accepting a considerable range of variation within them. 'Splitters' sort natural variation out into a large number of tightly defined units." Either way, understanding forest communities teaches us more about the way Michigan has evolved and the importance of protecting and preserving its unique environment.

With this in mind, Dickmann invites those of us who concentrate on our personal gardens to look more closely at an aspect of native plants we may not readily think about. He provides a history of how forests came to be

a "prominent part of the Michigan landscape;" how they have been treated in the past; describes, with words and photos, the habitat for 23 different forest communities that are prominent today and how to identify them. He defines the habitat characteristics of each area; then clearly lists the signature trees, as well as other trees present, associated shrubs and plants, and the distribution and status of each forest community. Maps of the State, delineated by county, with key viewing areas for each forest community type compliment the basic information he shares. Finally, the uses and management for each forest is given a quick review. The author briefly discusses animals present in Michigan forests; however, this text does not focus on the fauna of Michigan and its dependence on forests.

As a resource, *Forest Communities* is quite complete in its listings. But, the learned observer may still be surprised by other plants in any given forest area. For example, I noted that woodland poppies were not listed. An uncommon but striking plant, woodland poppies abound in limited forests in Benzie/Manistee Counties. Although native species are the primary focus of the book, some alien and invasive plants are also listed and identified with an asterisk. For the reader who might be looking for other helpful field guides, Dickmann also provides a list of guides for trees and shrubs, wildflowers and herbs, animals, birds and insects.

Forest Communities is an excellent resource for anyone who loves nature, especially for the forest hiker and biker or those who own woodlots and other forested lands. Although forests are continually changing, Dickmann presents the important position of why we need to preserve the dynamic, ever changing forests of "Michigan's pleasant peninsulas." It opened my eyes to yet another way of looking at the need for ecosystems that support the plants and animals that have grown up together and called Michigan their home for thousands of years. I think you will find this tidy, succinct book informative, helpful and exciting.

Kathy Prelesnik

To purchase a copy of Donald Dickmann's Field Guide and for many more books/pamphlets on Michigan's flora and fauna contact:

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**www.emdu.msue.msu.edu
Office Hours: M-F 8:00am-5:00pm**

This is **YOUR** newsletter and we appreciate **YOUR** input. Do you have something to say about your experience with native plants? Are you able to supply information for or write an article for Wildflowers? Is there something you would like to see covered in Wildflowers? Do you have questions you'd like answered in this newsletter?

If so, email Kathy at bottletreegirl@yahoo.com or Judy at jlwebber8117@charter.net

Another Convert

It started with a tomato vine held up with dowels and string, a glossy paper packet of zinnia seeds, a violet and yellow iris, and a pink tulip. My life as a gardener began with my mother, in the back yard of our house. She always complained about the heavy clay soil in the yard, but I only learned of it firsthand when I endeavored to dig a hole for a native plum tree to replace the deceased one nearby. Flat, Lake Plain sediment; I believed that all of Michigan—indeed, the entire world—was as flat as the landscape I saw around me.

Twenty years and many drowned houseplants later, I decided that I was going to follow through on that initial exposure (see how important it is to guide children to any new ideas?) and once again become a gardener. I made fabulous displays of impatiens, hostas and lambs quarters, and yes, even zinnias—which remain one of my guilty favorites. I even built double-dug beds, determined to do things right this time.

Then, the devil came in the form of Michael, who urged me to go visit Fernwood Nature Center near Berrien Springs. The center had created a small one-acre experimental plot of tallgrass prairie in front of their building, and we went down to see it ourselves. Michael had been busy trying to grow his own wheat and grind it for meal, digging up his clay soil and marveling at the consequent lack of compaction and doubling in volume, and probably growing native plants by then. I didn't quite get the whole idea.

Until, I lay my eyes upon that glorious plot of ground called a tallgrass prairie. It was a riot of life, with big bluestem, at eight feet as tall as the yellow composites which were probably silphiums, and every other complex thing going on. I knew right then that this was a most inter-

esting idea. I soon went from my initial desire to intermix plants to foil the conventional mixed-border design, to the native-plant philosophy. A little plot of "Life" knocked me to the ground.

Since this was the mid-nineties, there were no local resources as there are today, so Michael and I also went to visit Stephen Keto in Kalamazoo. Stephen had transformed a bunch of decrepit greenhouses and waste ground (there is no such thing as "waste" ground) into fields of native plants. "Do you like tall plants?" he asked. I eagerly answered yes. "Do you like this one, that one?" I took them all. My zinnia patch was transformed into something...taller.

It took me a few more years, but I finally realized what that prairie plot was really all about. The web of life that is an ecosystem is far more important than we are, as individuals or even as a species. We have an obligation to the world of life around us to be a part of that web, not apart from it. How much more important a choice can we make than that? My native plant garden is one of the most gratifying projects I've ever undertaken. Yes, it's a bit blowy and wayward, and the neighbors mutter to each other, but I am rewarded with my Garden of Life every time I step outside. And I am grateful to all of the life forms in it. I have created a refuge for them in a world where we are too busy destroying them everywhere else. As a gardener, there is no greater reward, nor any more worthwhile ambition.

*Mark Ritzenhein
Member WAM and Wild Ones,
Red Cedar Chapter*



The Landscape Design Panel: Mike Appel, Jerry Stewart and Cheryl Tolley.

~ WAM BUSINESS & ORGANIZATION MEMBER DIRECTORY ~

We thank these businesses and organizations for supporting WAM with their business level membership. Business membership does not imply WAM endorsement of an individual business. Detail information about these members at www.wildflowersmich.org

American Roots

Trish Hacker-Hennig
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Zack Stephens, the youngest conference attendee offers assistance during the annual meeting.

Wildflower Association of Michigan

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Diantha Martin and Gene Hengesbach talk spiders at the conference.





WAM Conference Luncheon

WILDFLOWERS NEWSLETTER

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The quarterly meetings of the Board of Directors Are usually in April, July, October and January. Check the website for dates and times.

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