

# 2025 SPEAKER PROFILES

## KEYNOTE SPEAKER



**Todd Crail, PhD**, is a University Distinguished Lecturer in the Department of Environmental Sciences at the University of Toledo. He is an ecologist and naturalist covering broad topics from non-game fish and mussels to landscape management. His focus is fostering undergraduate student engagement through field experiences both on campus and in the local community to solve local environmental issues. He works to employ inquiry and project-based learning through informal classroom environments to maximize the student's experience.

## BREAKOUT SPEAKERS



**Alysia G. Babcock** is a Conservation Steward, Master Naturalist, Advanced Master Gardener, completed the KBS Field Botany Class, and is a Certified Shoreline Professional. She has volunteered on The Kal-Haven Trail with the Wildflower Restoration Project, with Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, and the Strike Team with the Rockford Sustainability Committee.

Alysia is the owner of The Garden Guru Kzoo, LLC. and Native Plant Nursery based in Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo. Specializing in native plant garden design and implementation, landscape makeovers, and annual garden maintenance including invasive species control and removal.



**Rachel Hackett** has worked at Michigan Natural Features Inventory since 2018. She uses her botanical skills to delineate and classify natural communities, document species habitat, combat invasive wetland plant species, and study plants of conservation or cultural interest. She earned her BS in Environmental Science at Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. After seven years of working in informal science education in Michigan, Costa Rica, and the Pacific Northwest, she returned to school to earn her MS and PhD studying plant diversity of prairie fen wetlands from Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant, Michigan. She devotes her free time to bicycling, board games, and roller derby.



**Lorraine Johnson's** most recent book is *A Northern Gardener's Guide to Native Plants and Pollinators*, co-authored with Dr. Sheila Colla, with an introduction by Douglas Tallamy, and published by Island Press (2023). Lorraine has been writing books about native plant gardening, urban agriculture, and environmental issues for more than 30 years and has published more than 10 books. Lorraine is a Past President of the North American Native Plant Society and a former national board member of Wild Ones: Native Plants, Natural Landscapes.



**William Kirst** is the founder of Adapt: Community Supported Ecology a 501(c)3 that trains community leaders, who offer a variety of free services and is co-owner of Adapt Landscapes LLC a full-scale garden design and installation company for those seeking larger, elegant native plant and perennial edible landscapes. While not freaking out about running two organizations, he likes to hang out with his children - doing art or playing football, plays a variety of musical instruments, sings with Adapt Landscapes co-owner Kat Baskin, reads science fiction and pretends that someday he will start running or practicing yoga again.



**Carolyn Miller** received her bachelor's degree in botany and plant pathology from Michigan State University and master's degree in biology at Miami University (Ohio), where her focus is developing innovative ways to inspire urban residents to landscape with native plants to help support native pollinators. Since 2015 she has been the Arboretum & Invasive Plant Species Coordinator for MSU, spending much of her time mapping and recording data for all the trees and shrubs across more than 5,000 acres of campus. She's currently the Vice President of the Red Cedar Wild Ones, on the Board of Directors for the Wild Ones National, President of the Wildflower Association of Michigan, Recording Secretary of the Michigan Botanical Society, and Vice President of the Great Lakes Chapter of the Michigan Botanical Society. She has a small native plant landscaping business, *Two Green Thumbs LLC*, where she transforms unproductive lawns into productive pollinator habitats. She can be found spearheading efforts to remove invasive plants from local habitats and botanizing all over the state of Michigan with her wife, Diane.



**Jen Roedel** is a PhD Candidate and Graduate Research Assistant in the Department of Entomology at Michigan State University. During her graduate work, she has been surveying bee and floral communities in vegetable cropping systems and has worked directly with farmers and gardeners to expand pollinator habitat on their lands. She is interested in beneficial insect conservation, sustainable agriculture, local food systems and community health.



When **John Blair** retired from his automotive engineering job, he knew he would need something interesting to do with his time. He found it when he attended a presentation in the winter of 2012 by butterfly expert Brenda Dziedzic on making a butterfly garden with native plants as the focal point. John got busy that spring creating his own butterfly garden at his Westland home that over the next seven summers grew to over 5000 square feet in size with 130 species of native plants and 38 different species of butterfly visitors. In 2019, having filled all his available gardening space, John and his wife Sheri moved to a new home in rural Brooklyn, Michigan with about 9 acres of land that he is using to make even more butterfly and pollinator habitat through restoring large tracts of land to original prairie with native plants, creating a gigantic butterfly and pollinator habitat! John enjoys giving his inspirational talks and educational tours of his restoration to help others get started with their own pollinator habitats using native plants, which is something that means very much to him!

*John's garden has appeared in Fine Gardening magazine, Michigan Gardener, the Detroit Free Press and the Garden Answer YouTube channel. He has also authored articles for Michigan Gardener magazine on creating pollinator gardens. Over the last twelve years, John has given his "How to Make a Butterfly Garden" and "Prairie Restoration Journey" talks to county Master Gardener organizations, Michigan State University, Greenfield Village, numerous Michigan garden clubs, Church groups and Nature clubs throughout southeast and mid-Michigan.*



**Karma Thomas** is currently a pollinator research assistant at Michigan State University where her work focuses on urban farm pollinator conservation. They have an M.S. in Biology emphasizing plant-pollinator coevolutionary ecology from Syracuse University. Her work has been in education, plant-pollinator research, and native plant landscaping.



**Mike Weis** is the owner of the Kalamazoo-based native plant landscape company [Dropseed! Native Gardens and Ecological Restoration](#). He has been gardening with native plants since 2005. Mike also works seasonally for Hidden Savanna Native Plant Nursery and volunteers as an ecological steward for Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy and Stewards of Kleinstuck. Mike is also on the executive and program committees for Kalamazoo Area Wild Ones, a board member of Stewards of Kleinstuck and he is the representative of KAWO for the Asylum Lake Preserve Council.