



Updates from the Trail: March 2022

Celebrate National Native Plant Month

On March 30th, the U.S Senate passed Resolution 570, designating April 2022 as National Native Plant Month! Lately it seems almost every day and month is now a national holiday for something strange like 'National Hotdog Day' (the third Wednesday in July) or 'National Fresh Celery Month' (also April), but this is certainly one I can get behind and encourage everyone to take part!

Not only do native plants require less water, fertilizer, and work to maintain, but the ecological relationships they support are the foundation of our food webs; their importance in the landscape cannot be overstated. You don't have to tear up your entire lawn to make a difference. Small steps taken in your garden can enhance these food web interactions and make them more resilient.

One of the easiest steps you can do is to take a closer look at what invasive plants may be lurking in your yard. Common invasive species like Burning bush and Shrub honeysuckles were originally bought and sold as ornamental plantings for home landscaping. However, these plants eventually escaped our yards and started moving quickly into surrounding natural lands. Now they outcompete native vegetation and create dense monocultures that change soil chemistry, inhibit forest growth, diminish water quality, and don't provide anything to the local wildlife. Some plants, like Japanese barberry can even serve as vectors for disease; Lyme disease infected deer tick populations have been found to be 3x times more abundant in populations of Japanese barberry than native counter parts.

So, celebrate National Native Plant Month by taking a closer look at what's in your yard and consider replacing it with a native counterpart. The same traits that make invasive plants attractive ornamentals can often be found and in native plants and can even be improved on.

You can find a list of invasive plants and their native replacements from the [Association to Preserve Cape Cod here](#) and a list by [Bluestem Natives Plant Nursery here](#). To help choose the perfect native plant for your home garden, visit the [Association to Preserve Cape Cod's plant finder website here](#).

Be warned however, utilizing native plants in your garden can have drastic changes on the landscape and how you view your garden. Once you notice the birds, bees, and all the other bugs enjoying your work, you start to garden not for yourself or the curb appeal but for wildlife.



A monarch caterpillar munches on Common milkweed at Windmill Meadows. Milkweeds are a great alternative to invasive butterfly bush.