



## Updates from the Trail: January 2023

### The best time to plant a tree...

There's a saying: the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago; the second-best time is today. According to [the recent Resilient Lands Initiative and Healthy Soils Action Plan](#) released by the State in December, **Massachusetts has approximately 435,000 acres of lawn.** That's enough lawn to cover every square inch of Cape Cod twice. In those acres we have areas for sports like soccer fields, baseball diamonds, and golf courses. We have lawns for events and picnics, and areas like my backyard where my dog Howie runs around. These are what lawns are made for because they're great at withstanding things like foot traffic. But lawns are not great everywhere.

In those 435,000-acres, there are areas that aren't used. Areas that are watered, fed, and cut, only to be watered, fed, and cut again. Every year as our droughts get worse, we use drinking water to keep these areas green. Every year as our ponds and coastal waters are closed due to harmful algae blooms, we feed these areas with fertilizer by the ton and contribute to algae blooms. And every year, as the climate changes due to emissions, we use mowers to cut the very thing we spent so much water, fertilizer, and money to get to grow.

Two Cape Cods worth of lawn is, dare I say, excessive. In the face of global issues like biodiversity loss and climate change, your lawn might seem like a small insignificant part of the problem, but it can be a key part of the solution.

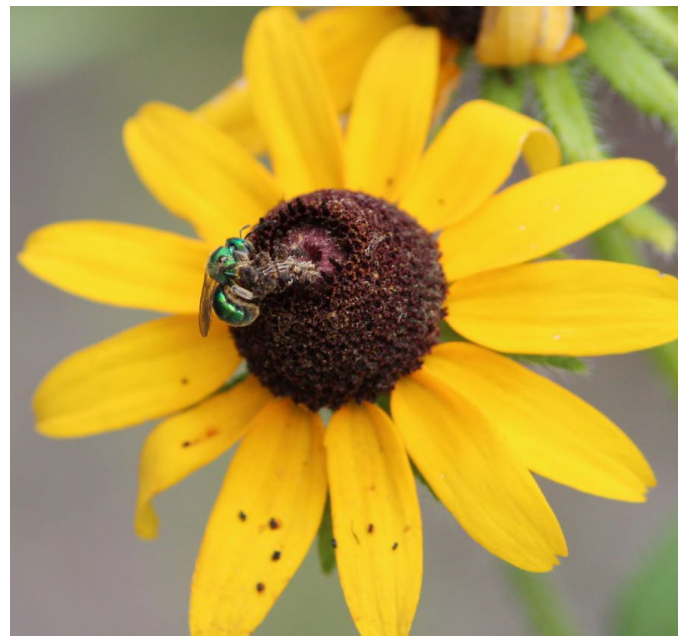
If we could convert 1% of those lawns to native plantings that would be 4,350 acres or 2.7 times the amount of land that BCT has protected to date. Filling that 1% with keystone native plants, such as trees or black-eyed Susan's, would not only result in less resource use, and nutrient runoff but support local food webs and at-risk species.

BCT has moved to convert our own lawn to a native pollinator meadow. This year, we had our first blooms of species like black eyed Susan's and evening primrose. With those two flowers, we saw dozens of different species of pollinators and other insects that had not been here before. Little green metallic sweat bees and the pink and white evening primrose moth or golden digger wasps and asteroid caterpillars. These tiny insects are small parts of what our local food webs depend on and we won't have any of it with nothing but lawns.

Don't take my word for it though. This year, take a look at your lawn and consider what replacing 1% of the area with native plants would look like and impact it would have. My guess is



*Howie enjoys the sunshine on his portion of those 435,000 acres.*



*A metallic Epauletted-sweat bee (*Augochloropsis metallica*) visits a Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*) at the Hay Conservation Center (8/29/2022)*

that it would have a marginal impact on the activities you use your lawn for, but a massive impact on our local environment.

Make 2023 the year of action. They say the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago, but the second-best time is today.

[You can visit the Association to Preserve Cape Cod Native Plant Initiative](#) to get ideas on how to incorporate native plants into your landscape.