

a voice
for the natural
landscaping
movement



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Celebrating natives
plant and natural
landscapes
since 1979.

The Grapevine

By Maryann Whitman

Making Friends and Influencing People

Reeser Manley, who teaches landscape horticulture at the University of Maine in Orono, is launching an interesting research project in collaboration with Marjorie Peronto, University of Maine Cooperative Extension Horticulturist.

Peronto and Manley believe, "Horticulturists are becoming increasingly interested in creating regionally unique landscapes that are environmentally friendly, landscapes that are extensions of surrounding native plant communities and thus function to provide habitat for native plants and animals... Currently only 5% of land in the U.S. is protected from development and many ecologists feel that even a conservation goal of 10% may be too low to prevent mass extinctions... if the remaining landscape succumbs to development... To prevent an environmental crisis, isolated islands of protected land areas will have to be connected by vegetation corridors with a strong component of native plant species. Managed landscapes of all sizes can fill this critical need. Even residential plantings can provide food, water and shelter for small mammals, birds, insects and amphibians as they move about the landscape."



Peronto and Manley hope to add to knowledge available about the adaptability of native plant species to managed landscapes. They are creating a database from information gathered by Master Gardeners on the tolerance of thirty native trees and shrubs to stresses associated with urban landscapes. They hope that this network of Master Gardeners throughout Maine will be an educational resource for the design function of native trees and shrubs in managed landscapes.

"We probably know more about the environmental stress tolerances of non-native species, and thus their 'marketability', than we do about our native species. It is a mistake in thinking to assume that because a species is regionally native that it will be able to deal with the environmental stresses of managed landscapes. Even the climate in the managed landscape, because of heat island effects and the like, may be different from the climate in the native habitat. So to assume that a species, because it is native, is better adapted, is incorrect. We need to investigate and demonstrate the tolerance of each species to soil compaction, deicing salts, drought, heat island effects, air pollution and root restriction, if we want to know how and where we can use each species in our managed landscapes."

This sounds like a long term project. I hope Peronto and Manley will share the results with Wild Ones as they become available.

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Catch-22

Many of us have experienced these scenarios: native plant species are not available at our otherwise well-stocked garden center, and in response to a request for them, we are told that there simply is no demand. And, if native species—unmodified, unselected, unnamed—should happen to be available, the supplier cannot tell us their provenance.

Last fall I cornered my local large grower/seller, who “explained” that most growers don’t keep “diaries” of the sources of their seeds. He laboriously tried to explain that the ferns at which I was looking had come to him from a grower in eastern Ontario, Canada. But, he knew that she had close contacts in British Columbia. Therefore, he thought that her starting stock might have come from there. It simply had not occurred to him to ask her.

Here in southeastern Michigan, I avoid buying from any but small native plant growers like Bill Schneider at Wildtype, Mike Appel at the Native Plant Nursery, or Jewel Richardson of Wetlands Nursery (all Wild Ones members

and supporters), who I know collect their starter seeds within a hundred miles of my land. This makes sense to me as I am trying to restore a bit of native landscape that has not been significantly modified since the 1850’s.

The Wild Ones “Guidelines on the Selection of Native Plants and the Importance of Local Ecotype,” published recently in the Wild Ones Journal May-June 2002, makes good ecological sense to me. I find I have already been living by them. But, how do we go about getting “local ecotypes” into the hands of a contractor who is landscaping a subdivision down the road from us? Into the garden centers? To folks who have not heard of Wild Ones?

Beyond suggesting that we raise a hue and cry to let our local garden centers know that there is indeed a public demand, I have no answers.

I am very curious to know what conditions are like in other parts of the country regarding the supply of local ecotype. My e-mail address is featureseditor@wildones.org and my mailing address is Box 231, Lake Orion, MI 48361. I’d really appreciate hearing from you.

Maryann Whitman is Features Editor of Wild Ones Journal and a member of the Oakland (MI) Chapter.

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