

Member Garden

Loris Damerow
Fox Valley Area (Wisconsin) Chapter



Loris Damerow sits on the Aldo Leopold bench given to her by the Wild Ones of the Fox Valley Area Chapter.

Amazing isn't an overstatement. The back yard features a sunken deck with chair where Damerow likes to drink coffee in the morning and watch nature around her. Then there are stone and mulch pathways that slowly lead down the hillside, with that Aldo Leopold bench and native plants interspersed. On the bottom is a fence, and on the other side of the fence is now staghorn sumac (*Rhus hirta*) and prickly ash (*Zanthoxylum americanum*), host for the giant swallowtail. "The sumac just sprang up after the buckthorn

was removed and the prickly ash was transplanted from a Wild Ones rescue," Damerow says.

She estimates that about 80 percent of her plants are native, and says she started in the front yard, wanting to show people how you could incorporate native plants into an urban setting. "I immediately set to work making an island bed in the front of the house," she recalls. "I had 3 yards of sand brought in to create a low mound, a place to incorporate native plants that prefer good drainage. I wanted to learn about and grow

About the Yard

- The one-third acre lot is located in the city of Appleton, Wisconsin, and sits on a bluff overlooking the historic Fox River. From the backyard, you can see and hear the rushing water going over a dam.
- It includes a 45-degree slope in the backyard where she's created stone and mulch pathways between the many native plants added after she got rid of the common buckthorn that had taken over the lot.
- Much of her property gets full sun, with the exception of shade created by two large basswood trees.
- About 80 percent of the plants are native, and the vast majority are native to Wisconsin.
- A sunken deck and an Aldo Leopold bench provide a great place to sit and watch nature.
- Some of Loris Damerow's favorite native plants include wild petunia (*Ruellia humilis*), prairie dock (*Silphium terebinthinaceum*), wahoo tree (*Euonymus atropurpureus*) and sweetgrass (*Hierochloa odorata*). But she adds, "I love all native plants."

species that did not take to the dense clay soil around the house."

That front bed includes her favorite flower, wild petunia (*Ruellia humilis*), as well as pale purple coneflower (*Echinacea pallida*), little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) and many others.

As she designed her new landscaping, Damerow pulled the flowerbeds away from the house. When she started work on the side slopes, she tried to take it a little bit at a time.

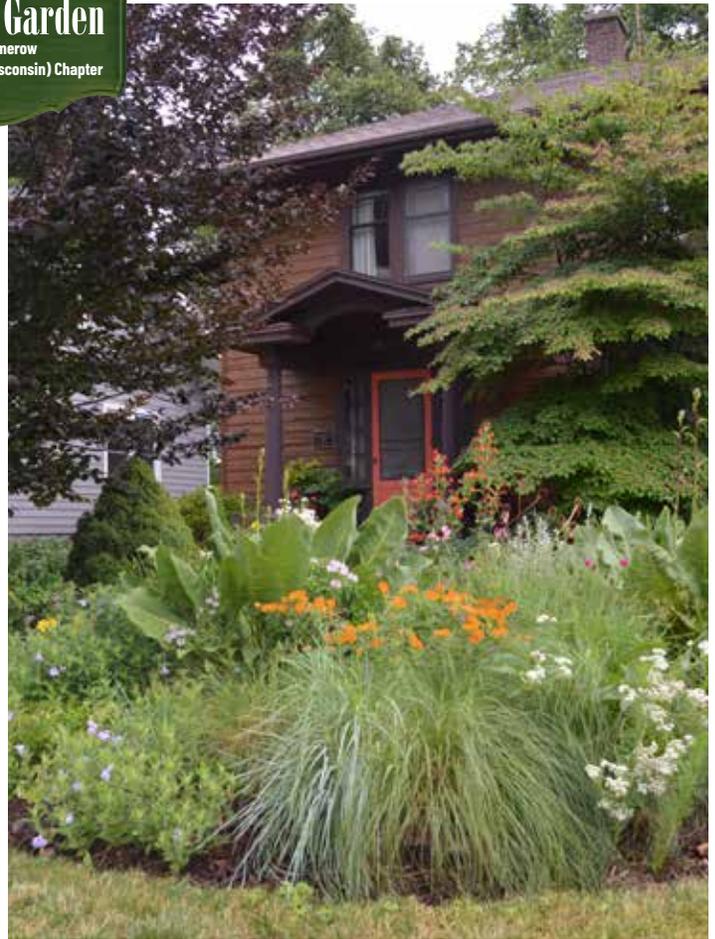
"I'd start with a manageable area and get that done, and then each



The Damerow yard, before and after. Photos courtesy Loris Damerow

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Left: Loris Damerow added pathways to her slope, allowing visitors to see native plants close up. Right: Clearly defined edges give the front yard an intentional look. Loris Damerow had 3 yards of sand added to start this flowerbed.

season, expand out," she says.

She actually moved a flatbed of plants from her previous home in South Beloit, Illinois, to Appleton. "I brought some of my favorite plants with me, like my Japanese tree peonies and large clumps of prairie dock. My investment in native plants deepened when I moved to the Fox Valley 10 years ago and became active in Wild Ones. I learned more about the critical role that native plants play in our environment. Now, I have little interest in the new shiny, fancy plants."

Damerow had her own landscape design business from 2000-2007, and today's she a little embarrassed about some of the plants she recommended others put in. "I used a lot of cultivars because that is what you could purchase," she recalls, "and I'm embarrassed by how much barberry I've installed," quickly adding that she's wiser now. "Designing a habitat

is not like designing your living room. It's not just about color or shape; it should serve an ecological function."

Last summer, Damerow was able to share her love of native plants when her property was selected to be part of a community Garden Walk. She included large photos of what the property looked like in the past so people could really appreciate the transformation, and a Wild Ones display touted the benefits of natural landscaping. In addition, she identified 25 plants with stakes and labels. "It was my opportunity to showcase native plants," she says.

For those new to native landscaping, Damerow recommends adding well-defined edges on flowerbeds. "You can have a tangle of wild plants, but if you have a clear edge, people will relax and think it is intentional," she explains. "That's particularly important in urban settings so people don't get too un-

nerved by the sprawl."

She also encourages people to learn about the native plants they are adding to their yards, and recommends they start small. "It's easy to get overwhelmed, and expensive, too. But just keep expanding."

And that's what Damerow continues to do. "I'm slowly replacing the other ornamentals. Everything I add is a native forb, grass or shrub. You can't do it all at once."

Damerow says she gardens to stay balanced. "I work in mental health, so this is my therapy. Maintaining my gardens isn't a hardship because it's what I love to do. I love looking at the form and texture of plants, and noticing where they grow and how they change."

In fact, she calls her yard her personal sanctuary. "I am not only creating a sanctuary for myself," she says, "but also for the plants and for the larger environment."