

Plant Talk

JANUARY 2012

Getting Wild!

by Michael Yanny

Native plants seem to be gaining in popularity as each year passes. I remember when I first started working at the nursery in 1980. Native Oaks were hard to come by. Few nurseries carried them. Musclewood was a cool little plant that grew down in the woods at the edge of our property but not in our nursery. And I didn't know that Hairy Wild Petunia even existed.

Things have really changed.

We get more and more requests for native plants and have continued to expand our selection of both seedling material and cultivars of native plants. We now have a whole line of restoration natives in #1, #2 and #5 containers as well as the B&B material we've always carried. Much of the work that I am doing with new plant development is in the realm of native plant cultivar selection.

I went to a presentation a little over a month ago by a guy named Douglas Tallamy. He's a professor in the department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware. (By the way, I was really interested in wildlife ecology back in my Madison days. I took night classes at The Pub on State Street.) Seriously, I was blown away by Professor Tallamy's presentation, so much so that I've been telling everyone that will listen to me about it for the last month.

Professor Tallamy made some very strong points for why we should incorporate more native plants in our landscapes.

The main point, as I heard it, was that if we don't have the native plants in our landscapes, we lose the native insects and animals that are associated with those plants. The non-native plants will not substitute for



Mike says, "That's what an Assassin Bug looks like!"

the native species in most cases. The native plants will attract the various native organisms and allow them to complete their life cycles. It is most important to provide food for the larvae as well as nectar for the adults to have successful insect reproduction. So if you want to have Luna moths on your property, you need to have Hickories, Oaks, Alders, American Beech, and/or Birches. If you want to have the Royal Walnut Moth you have to have Hickories. If you want Monarch butterflies you must have milkweeds. So when you are selling these plants to a client they will very likely get the associated organisms. What a beautiful thing!

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Plant Talk Available Online

Each *Plant Talk* article is available online on the Johnson's Nursery website under the Contractor Sales section. Feel free to comment, ask questions or begin new topics! As always, Mike Yanny can be reached by e-mail:

mike@johnsonsnursery.com

http://www.johnsonsnursery.com/Plant_Talk.aspx

Getting Wild! continued

Professor Tallamy talked about the relationship between insects and the birds. He showed how important it was to have native plants that support specific insects that are the best food for particular birds when they are rearing their young. The non-native species rarely can serve this function. Although many of our native birds will eat many non-native fruits in the landscape, they are much more specific when it comes to feeding their young. If they don't have the preferred food for their babies, namely the insects, they aren't as successful rearing their young. This results in reduced numbers of bird species in the area. He pointed out the importance of the duff layer in our native woodlands and how this is habitat for multitudes of insects that are food for other creatures. I am still amazed by all of the wonderful work Professor Tallamy has done to bring light to these natural relationships that we have all seen.

His book, *Bringing Nature Home* from Timber Press expands on the discussions I've presented here along with outstanding specific information about which plants are essential for which corresponding organisms. I highly recommend the book for anyone interested in landscaping, plants, birds, and/or insects.

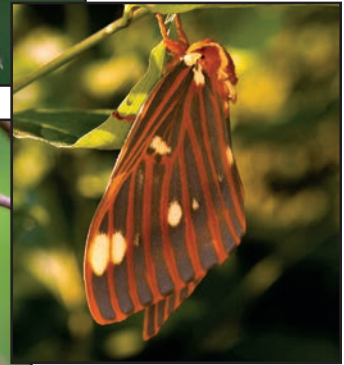
From a purely commercial self-interest perspective, listening to what Professor Tallamy is saying could be very profitable. He proposes that property owners decrease the amount of lawn on their properties and convert considerably larger percentages of their properties to more densely planted, primarily native landscape plants. He suggests making wider foundation planting beds around homes and ringing properties with natural screens of native trees, shrubs and herbaceous ground layer species. The designs can be as beautiful as any traditional landscape but with the added bonus of lower maintenance, much more wildlife, and a feeling of local conservation of species. This can be a great way to increase business and further improve the planet at the same time.

If you ever get the chance to hear Douglas Tallamy speak, don't miss it!



Left: Bluebirds rear their young on insects, not seeds or berries.

Bottom: *Citheronia regalis*, Royal Walnut Moth larva & adult. Hickory trees are a must for this rare moth.



photos by D. Tallamy

Recommended Reading

Louv, R. (2005) *Last Child in the Woods*. Algonquin Books.

Mizejewski, D. (2010) *Attracting Birds, Butterflies and other Backyard Wildlife*. National Wildlife Federation

Smith, G. (2010) *From Art to Landscape*. Timber press.

Stolzenberg, W. (2009) *Where the Wild Things Were*. Bloomsbury

Tallamy, D. (2007) *Bringing Nature Home*. Timber Press.

Wilcove, D. (2008) *No Way Home*. Island Press

Zimmerman, C. (2010) *Urban and Suburban Meadows*. Matrix Media press.

Check out the last page for a list of native plants that are great for biodiversity!

20 Valuable Woody & Perennial Native Plant Genera in Terms of Supporting Biodiversity

Woody Plants

| Plant Genus | Common Name | # of Lepidoptera (Butterflies & Moths) species supported |
|------------------|--------------|--|
| <i>Quercus</i> | Oak | 534 |
| <i>Prunus</i> | Black Cherry | 456 |
| <i>Salix</i> | Willow | 455 |
| <i>Betula</i> | Birch | 413 |
| <i>Populus</i> | Poplar | 368 |
| <i>Malus</i> | Crabapple | 311 |
| <i>Vaccinium</i> | Blueberry | 288 |
| <i>Acer</i> | Maple | 285 |
| <i>Ulmus</i> | Elm | 213 |
| <i>Pinus</i> | Pine | 203 |
| <i>Carya</i> | Hickory | 200 |
| <i>Crataegus</i> | Hawthorn | 159 |
| <i>Picea</i> | Spruce | 156 |
| <i>Alnus</i> | Alder | 156 |
| <i>Tilia</i> | Basswood | 150 |
| <i>Fraxinus</i> | Ash | 150 |
| <i>Rosa</i> | Rose | 139 |
| <i>Corylus</i> | Filbert | 131 |
| <i>Juglans</i> | Walnut | 130 |
| <i>Fagus</i> | Beech | 126 |
| <i>Castanea</i> | Chestnut | 125 |

Perennial Plants

| Plant Genus | Common Name | # of Lepidoptera (Butterflies & Moths) species supported |
|----------------------|------------------|--|
| <i>Solidago</i> | Goldenrod | 115 |
| <i>Aster</i> | Aster | 112 |
| <i>Helianthus</i> | Sunflower | 73 |
| <i>Eupatorium</i> | Joe Pye, Boneset | 42 |
| <i>Ipomoea</i> | Morning Glory | 39 |
| <i>Carex</i> | Sedges | 36 |
| <i>Lonicera</i> | Honeysuckle | 36 |
| <i>Lupinus</i> | Lupine | 33 |
| <i>Viola</i> | Violets | 29 |
| <i>Geranium</i> | Geranium | 23 |
| <i>Rudbeckia</i> | Black-eyed Susan | 17 |
| <i>Iris</i> | Iris | 17 |
| <i>Oenothera</i> | Evening Primrose | 16 |
| <i>Asclepias</i> | Milkweed | 12 |
| <i>Verbena</i> | Verbena | 11 |
| <i>Penstemon</i> | Beardtongue | 8 |
| <i>Phlox</i> | Phlox | 8 |
| <i>Monarda</i> | Bee Balm | 7 |
| <i>Veronica</i> | Veronica | 6 |
| <i>Schizachyrium</i> | Little Bluestem | 6 |
| <i>Lobelia</i> | Cardinal Flower | 4 |

For a complete list, go to
<http://copland.udel.edu/~dtallamy/host/index.html>