

Gardening with Purpose

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Douglas Tallamy, an American entomologist and author of *Bringing Nature Home* (Timber Press 2007), tells us that “for the first time in history, gardening has taken on a role that transcends the needs of the gardener...it is now within the power of individual gardeners to do something that we all dream of doing: to make a difference. In this case, the ‘difference’ will be to the future of biodiversity, to the native plants and animals of North America and the ecosystems that sustain them.”

In the last fifty years, our natural ecosystems have been nearly destroyed by chemicals, commercial agriculture, urbanization, industry and mining, climate change and deforestation. The resultant decline in our North American insect and bird populations is stunning. Since 1970 insect populations have declined by roughly fifty per cent and there are three billion fewer birds in our skies. Without insects, birds cannot survive and, in fact, neither can we as all the food we eat – whether plant or animal – requires insects at the bottom of the food chain.

Our suburban landscape of carefully manicured lawns, foundation plantings and beds full of imported flowers is considered a sterile environment by biologists. Imported ornamental plants simply do not support our native wildlife. In fact, Douglas Tallamy says that a garden full of what he calls “alien ornamentals” may as well be full of statues for all the good it does for biodiversity.

Tallamy’s vision is inspiring: we each have the capacity to use our gardens for a higher purpose

than simply creating beauty. Like most gardeners, I have always gardened with the goal of achieving a beautiful, serene space around my home. But in the last seven years or so, I have begun gardening with a more specific goal in mind: to restore a healthy habitat that supports wild bees, butterflies and other wildlife.

We have a chance to redeem ourselves by focusing on gardening with purpose. Adding native wildflowers, shrubs and trees to your property will provide insects and birds with the natural ecosystem they need to survive.

I hope you will take up this call to action this spring by adding some native wildflowers and shrubs to your garden. Learn more and find out about upcoming native plant sale events by visiting gwbutterflyway.wordpress.com.



The Guildwood
Butterflyway Project

Summer native plant sales cancelled

Please note that due to the ongoing circumstances related to COVID-19, the native plant sales originally scheduled for June have been cancelled. We will be sure to update the community with new dates if and when we’re able to reschedule.

Photo credit: Ann Brokelman

