



Native Wildflowers are Useful Additions to the Wayne's Toolbox

Forest Service botanists find that attractive local species save us a bundle on landscaping costs.



A native species blooms outside Athens District offices

Botanists at the Wayne National Forest are on a mission.

They believe that the Forest Service should lead by example. One important piece of that work is to ensure that we're landscaping around our offices with locally native plant species rather than exotic species.

According to the National Park Service, the U.S. actively spends tens of millions of dollars annually to tackle invasive plants, a substantial number of which start their careers as innocent-looking garden ornamentals. Other estimated financial losses (e.g. by agriculture) amount to the billions of dollars.

Further, substantial amounts of local money and resources are required to keep exotics alive in our gardens. More labor, water, and fertilizers are often necessary to keep plants looking healthy when they are removed from their preferred habitats.

Collaborating with several local partners, Forest Botanist Cheryl Coon has collected native species from nurseries that specialize in native plants, as well as during local "plant rescues," efforts which save rare and otherwise desirable species from destruction due to looming construction activities.

Some of the beds will provide seeds to help extend our gardens and to supply seed for rehabilitation of project areas within the Forest, and some will serve as research plots.

Ironton District Botanist Chad Kirschbaum is heading a research team devoted to native grass propagation. They'll study species grown from locally-collected seeds in beds where they'll formally test weed control and planting methods.

Coon and Kirschbaum also have been working on convincing local landscapers about the desirability of using plants native to our region.

"They're adapted to local weather and soil conditions and need far less care than exotic ornamentals," Coon said. "Once natives are firmly established in our beds, many of them will need no care at all."

As a result of her work, dozens of native plant species now populate the beds around the Athens District office. Many attractive plants that are native to Ohio woods and prairies flourish beautifully in gardens and other artificial landscapes.

Linda Hirst, who volunteered to help install some of the beds, noted, "Visitors told us how nice the front of the office looked just after we finished planting. There's certainly no aesthetic reason to avoid natives."

For more information contact Linda Hirst at 740-753-0915