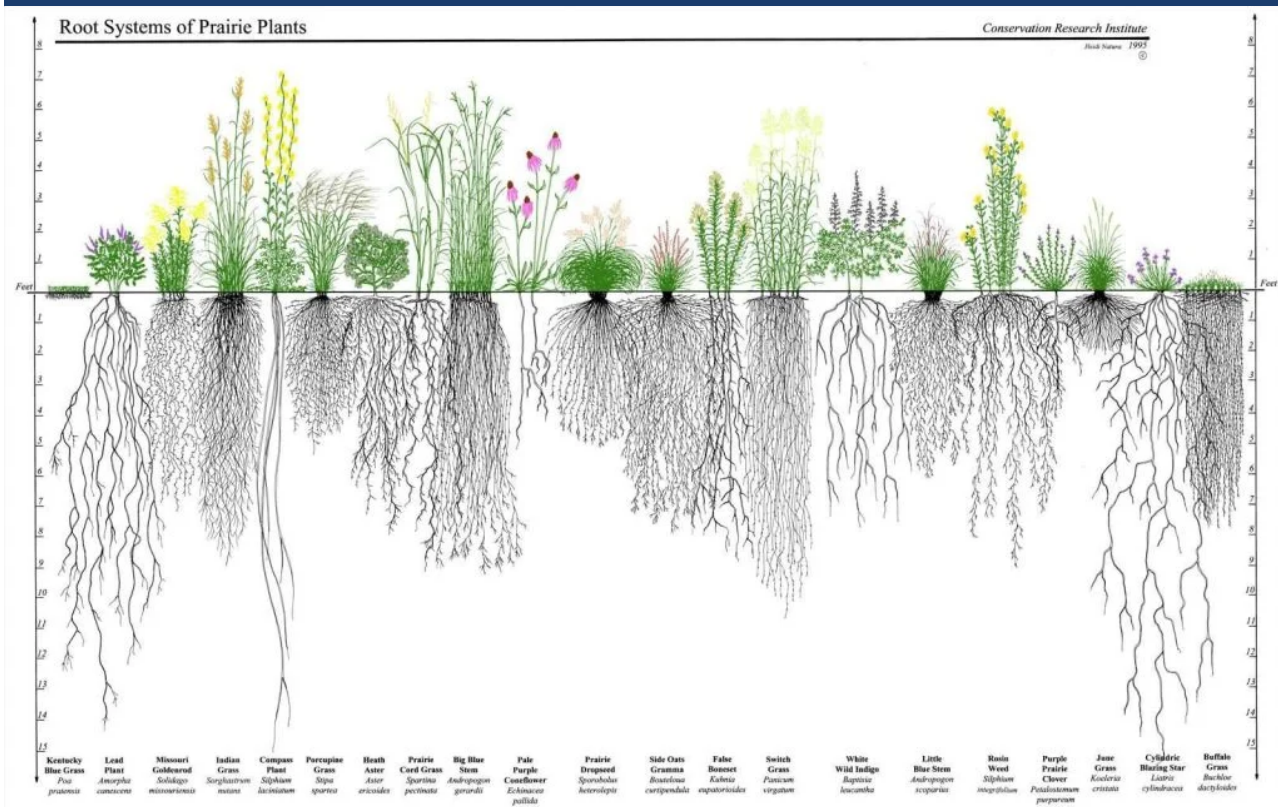




Washtenaw County Conservation District

FEBRUARY 2021 CONSERVATION UPDATE

Your Source for Conservation News in Washtenaw County



Vern Stephens of Designs by Nature LLC to Present on Planning and Design for Native Gardens

By Megan DeLeeuw, Executive Director

Not long joining the team at WCCD, I received a call from Vern Stephens. Vern introduced himself as owner of Designs By Nature LLC. He was reaching out to talk to me about offering more native plants at our distributions. For years the WCCD had been distributing a handful of species in our parking lot behind the USDA each Spring. Vern told me he worked with many Conservation Districts around the State to assist them with expanding their native plant offerings and wanted to help us do the same. Now several years later, we partner with Vern

on offering over 50 species of wildflowers and grasses for pick up at the [Native Plant Expo & Marketplace](#) and have expanded our educational offerings related to native plants.

Vern obtained his bachelor's degree in Zoology from Michigan State University and served for 21 years in the U.S. Air Force as a fighter pilot travelling around the world and the United States. Now Vern, his wife Susan and their son Zachary live on a 40-acre farm in Laingsburg where they operate Designs By Nature, LLC, a native plant nursery and native landscape consulting company.

Each year they work with conservation groups throughout Michigan hosting native plant sales and workshops. Vern was a member of the Wildflower Association of Michigan (WAM) and served on the board of directors for several years. Vern and Sue have over 30 years experience working with native plants and ecosystem restoration. They have consulted on projects throughout the state from home landscape design to university/corporate restoration and installation.

Vern retired from the Michigan DNR Wildlife Division as a Senior Wildlife Assistant where his work specialized in grasslands and invasive species management. Over the past five years, Designs By Nature has expanded with locations/partnerships in Grand Rapids - DBN West, South Boardman - Birdsfoot Native Nursery, Clio -DBN South and Marquette - DBN UP all bringing the same quality Michigan wildflowers and grasses as we have for over 25 years.

Join us Wednesday, February 17th at 2 p.m. for the Planning and Design for Native Gardens Webinar, presented by Vern Stephens. All attendees will have a chance to win a butterfly garden door prize from Designs by Nature! You must [RSVP](#) to attend.

We're hiring a Community Forester! Check out the job posting [here](#).

NEW WCCD Green Room Interview



RAIN GARDEN KIT

Rain garden kit (flat of 32 potted plants) Mix of different species (10 or more) geared towards wet soil tolerance and water absorption. Will plant a 4 foot by 10 foot...

Flat of 32 pots -
\$75⁰⁰



POLLINATOR GARDEN KIT

Pollinator garden kit (flat of 32 potted plants) Mix of different species (10 or more) geared towards feeding and attracting pollinators. Will plant a 4 foot by 10 foot garden space. Comes...

Flat of 32 pots -
\$75⁰⁰



MONARCH WAY-STATION GARDEN KIT

Monarch garden kit (flat of 32 potted plants) Mix of different

Flat of 32 pots -
\$75⁰⁰

WCCD Resource Coordinator, Doug Reith, discusses the Native Plant Expo & Marketplace and the School & Community Habitat Grant

The First Verified Food Forest in Washtenaw County

By Nick Machinski, MAEAP Technician

Working as a MAEAP technician for several years now, I've worked with a few orchards, but a never a food forest. So what is a food forest? A food forest is designed to replicate an actual forest, but a majority of the plant species are meant to be gathered and consumed by humans. Until recently, Food Forests were something I've read about. I've come across some landowners who have a private food forest that they can pick and use to their liking. But then I met Kirt Tidwell of Sylvan Food Forest.

Kirt is a young man who has worked in sustainable agriculture for years now. After reading and studying food forests Kirt found the right landowner and property for him to put down some roots, chestnut roots more specifically. Five acres of chestnut trees were planted in what had been a farm field years ago. Hazelnuts were planted in between and even a few Paw paw trees have been planted amongst the chestnuts. Sylvan Food Forest uses only organic fertilizers and pesticides for his trees. The tree shelters have helped protect the trees from deer damage for the most part, though some are knocked off from time to time. The food forest is young and Kirt has a long way to go to achieve the vision he has set his in his mind: a place where the public can come and gather nuts and berries at their leisure from dozens of species of trees, shrubs and forbs. As we chatted during his Cropping Verification, Kirt and I discussed agritourism and how Sylvan Food Forest could play a role in that. It is something, Kirt would like to see happen in the Chelsea area, and frankly so would I.



Continuing to Learn at Renner's Corner Farm

By Nick Machinski, MAEAP Technician

Renner's Corner Farm was reverified in their Cropping system but also picked verifications in Farmstead and Livestock. David Renner, owner and operator of the farm, raises sheep as well as cattle on his farm. He grows hay which he feeds to his livestock. David employs several conservation techniques on his farm including soil sampling, fencing off surface water to avoid contamination, and spreading manure to meet his crop nutrient recommendations. Doing all of this ensures that water contamination does not occur on his ground and that he doesn't overapply nutrients.

This is the first time Renner's Corner Farm is reverified in a MAEAP system. If you ask David why he participates in the program, his answer is simple, "Education." David always learns something when he participates in MAEAP. Whether it is about soil health or manure management, David is always looking to improve his operation as he finds that doing so, not only increases his soil's potential but protects the environment. In the future, David hopes to implement a rotational grazing system. He says he felt inspired to learn more about implementing such a system from attending WCCD's & MSU Extension's Virtual Grazing Field Day (Figure 1). If you'd like to see an example of what Renner's Corner Farm is planning for the future (and want to see some cows) feel free to watch a video of the field day by following this [link](#).



Photo: Students plan garden at Emerson School

School & Community Habitat Grant Now Accepting Applications and Donations

We are officially launching the new and improved School & Community Habitat Grant Program. The grant program is designed to provide plants, materials, design plans, and technical support for schools and community groups looking to establish natural areas. And we need your help! The grants award will be determined by donations we receive for the program. Every dollar donated will go to a local school or community habitat installation. You can donate online now:

<https://store.washtenawcd.org/products/donate>

Are you a School or Community organization? You can sign up for more information and updates or start your application now:

<https://www.washtenawcd.org/school--community-habitat-grant.html>

Shop Talk on Building Soil Biology for Resilient Crops

By Erez Brandvain, Conservation Technician

Farmers are invited to join us on March 10th at 3:00 p.m for a round table discussion webinar on conservation practice successes and challenges

throughout our region. The talk will feature a presentation and discussion by Joe Scrimger of Bio-Systems, a soil testing and consulting business that serves the Great Lakes area with biological technology and marketing services, on three key soil biology and crop management topics:

- (1) How can farmers best maintain water in soil to keep crops in peak conditions?
- (2) How do we rate organic matter to get the most out of our soils?
- (3) Discuss the benefits and drawbacks of different tillage systems.

RSVP for the Shop talk

Upcoming Events

Growing Native Plants for Butterflies

Webinar, March 3d

Author Brenda Dziedzic ([Raising Butterflies in the Garden](#)) will present on the necessary components of a garden for butterflies and moths. Select plants for your garden to encourage and support Monarchs, Giant Swallowtails, Cecropias, and Lunas in your landscape. Participants will have the opportunity to ask questions. RSVP [here](#). Follow event updates on the [Facebook event](#).

Soil Health Shop talk, March 10th

Join us March 10 at 3:00 p.m on Zoom for a round table discussion on conservation practice successes and challenges throughout our region. The shop talk will also feature a presentation and discussion by Joe Scrimger of Bio-Systems on innovative ways to build soil health and several break out sessions to discuss with peers. [RSVP here](#).

Volunteer for the Spring Tree & Shrub Distribution on April 21st-24th!

Help us distribute thousands of trees, shrubs and plants to Washtenaw County residents this Spring! We will organize this volunteer opportunity to ensure social distancing and customer and volunteer safety. Sign up for volunteer shifts [here](#).

Washtenaw County Conservation District

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