

Planting for a Greener Future

My purpose today is to provide an update about some Cobourg initiatives to promote a more sustainable environment and to give a boost to our Urban Forest Management Plan.

The Cobourg Horticultural Society has a new project for 2021: a program of environmental action that we are calling “Planting for a Greener Future”. This is a grassroots initiative to restore biodiversity by planting native trees, shrubs and flowers in resident’s gardens. Ontario’s native plants are vital to local ecosystems since they have evolved over millennia and are the foundation of our natural insect and wildlife communities. Native plants are those that were here when the first Europeans arrived. Not only are native plants essential, they require less care and generally eliminate the need for insecticides and chemical fertilizers. Best of all they can be as beautiful as European and Asian imports. Even in a pandemic we can do some planting and improve our environment!

Some of you may not be familiar with the Cobourg Horticultural Society. The Society has been in continuous operation since 1859 and currently has over 150 members. In 2019 the group contributed almost 1600 volunteer hours of community service. The Society receives no money from the Town of Cobourg but funds their activities by raising over \$4000 at an annual plant sale. Even in this pandemic year they raised \$2000 selling plants from their driveways! They established and now maintain a pollinator garden at the corner of William and King Street without cost to the town.

The inspiration for our “Planting for a Greener Future” initiative comes from Dr. Douglas Tallamy and his Homegrown National Park Movement in our southern neighbour. He advises that we must improve biodiversity on private land if we are to succeed in sustaining wildlife; parks will not be enough. If we plant natives in our gardens, we can create corridors where wildlife will be supported by the plants they evolved with over eons. Many people are not aware that non-native plants support few if any species of insects and wildlife. In the USA there are 40 million acres of lawn and that is more than total acreage of their national parks. In Canada the ratio of sterile lawns to parkland is likely similar. There is an urgent need for us to get planting in our gardens, on our patios or even on our balconies. Homeowners can do their part by planting on their property and support Cobourg’s efforts to improve our urban forest.

Other environmentally conscious groups such as WWF Canada and The Suzuki Foundation are advancing the homegrown natural park concept in Toronto. Local Enhancements and Appreciation of Forests (LEAF) supports many programs including their League of Trees

Campaign in partnership with Ontario Power Generation (OPG), Nature Conservancy of Canada and Bruce Trail Conservancy to educate Ontario residents on the benefits of forests and trees. In Cobourg I am working with the Cobourg Horticultural Society, Master Gardeners, The Ecology Gardeners, Ganaraska Conservation Authority and members of Sustainable Cobourg. I plan to solicit additional support from other groups including Rotary and Lions. To increase local knowledge of the importance of native plants the presenter at tomorrow's Horticultural Society meeting will be Lorraine Johnston with a topic of "Native Plants for Beauty and Biodiversity".

There are many websites with information on native plants. The LEAF website includes planting information and pictures of dozens of native plants (<https://www.yourleaf.org/>). The website for Grow Wild Native Plant Nursery includes pictures and planting information for native flowers in addition to trees and shrubs (<http://www.nativeplantnursery.ca/>).