

IT'S ALL CONNECTED

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presented by



Making the Most of Your Green Thumb

The weather is warming, plants are filling out, the ground is thawing, birds are nesting, and insects are emerging. It must be spring. Along with the nicer weather comes the desire to spruce up the landscape. Before getting the gloves, rakes, and shovels out, let's consider a few possibilities that will help mother nature be her best self.

[Leave the leaves](#) is an important concept put forth by Xerces Society. The gist is that leaf litter provides vital shelter for many insects to safely wait out winter. Hence, it

is recommended that we don't gather them up until temperatures remain above 55 degrees F. Take it a step further, and try to let some areas of your yard have leaf litter year-round. Not only does this create foraging areas for birds, the leaves decompose and return much needed nutrients to the soil thereby making fertilizer additives unnecessary.

Leaf litter strengthens the habitat and so do native plants. There is quite a buzz about adding native plants into your landscape and rightfully so. Native plants are superheroes when it comes to...well, everything. Native plants:

- are adapted to the landscape
- can survive on only rainfall once established
- create much needed habitat for birds, bees, butterflies and more

- need no extra pesticides or fertilizers
- require little maintenance

The general suggestion is to have 50% or more native plants in your landscape. There are many resources out there to help find good options for your particular outdoor space, here are a few: [NWF Native Plant Finder](#); [Audubon bird-friendly native plant finder](#); [Grow Native](#) - plants for the lower midwest; [Calscape](#) - plants for California; [Native Plant Trust](#) - plants for the northeast; and, [Xerces pollinator friendly plant guide](#).

Keep in mind when buying your plants, many corporate nurseries use [systemic pesticides](#) on their plants, called neonicotinoids. These chemicals remain within the plant vascular system and are harmful to the creatures visiting the plants for nourishment. Even worse, some of the pesticide slowly leaches into the soil affecting other organisms as well. Native plant nurseries are a great option for finding non-treated plants. Moreover, they can be a wealth of information and I find that the prices are not much different than the corporate nurseries.

Have you heard the slogan No Mow May? The idea here is to encourage folks not to mow their lawns as often and allow the pollinators to reap the benefits of the flowering plants hidden among the grasses. These early flowers provide much needed food for emerging insects. Letting the lawn grow longer also helps it retain moisture so less watering is required. The organization, Homegrown National Park, published two useful articles discussing taking the [No Mow May](#) idea further and [rethinking your lawn](#). I encourage you to read up as well as join their movement.



What movement, you ask? [Homegrown National Park](#) encourages us to greatly expand native plant habitat and reestablish healthy ecosystems by planting our own private outdoor spaces with large amounts of native flora. Imagine if instead of lawns (which provide almost no shelter, food, or habitat), those yards contained a wide variety of native plants. The birds, bees, butterflies, and all sorts of critters could more easily find their way through our concrete jungles because nourishment would be just around the next corner. We need nature and nature needs us, especially nowadays since our lifestyles have disturbed and disconnected so many vital habitats.

While we are talking about lawns, I just read two recent blog posts from the National Wildlife Federation that explore the [history of lawns](#) and [why we should rethink them](#). Please take the time to read these as well, it might just help you on your journey toward introducing more native plants and reducing the lawn.

Another often overlooked landscape feature is the dead wood. Whether it be a large tree snag, branches, limbs, or just dead flower stalks, these plant materials also have a place in our landscape. Nature is messy and loves it that way. Consider allowing some dead wood to remain in place around your property as long as it doesn't pose a hazard. Many critters need these spaces for food and shelter. Not to mention that the slowly decaying wood also pumps nutrients back into the ground. Sometime soon we will discuss dirt, soil, and important life processes happening under our feet. It's absolutely fascinating. Happy Gardening!



T.R.I.P.

This safety acronym used by the National Park Service is a helpful one to keep in mind as we step outside now that the weather is improving. T.R.I.P. stands for ticks, rattlesnakes, insects, and poison oak. It also refers to the word trip, meaning watch where you place your feet and don't fall. Let's break it down quickly:

Ticks are out there hanging on branches waiting to hitch a ride for a tasty meal. Be sure to do a tick check after every outing. A friend and I were recently on a hike and she placed her hiking clothes in a white bin afterward only to discover a tick there 5 days later. I guess they can survive a while, so be diligent and do your tick checks.

Rattlesnakes, and other snakes, are emerging from their winter sleep and will be looking for food and mates. Listen for their telltale rattle warning, and give them space. Don't walk in higher grasses where you can't see your feet. Last week, as we finished a hike, one of the participants was walking backward and chatting with us. He almost stepped on a rattler slithering across the somewhat paved path we were on. When out in nature, all kinds of encounters are possible, so keep your eyes open.

Insects can pose a problem when out and about. Not all bees and wasps sting, but if you see a group buzzing about, it's best to give them space. And, if you are not familiar with a particular critter, it is best not to pick anything up, since some might bite or sting in self-defense.

Poison Oak and other irritating plants are a fact of life out on the trails. Know what your local poison oak, poison ivy, stinging nettles, and such look like and avoid touching them or you might be in a world of itchy discomfort.

Quick Connections

Books, websites, documentaries, podcasts, events, quotes, and more



This short [video from The Muir Project](#) does a wonderful job showcasing the importance of diversity and inclusion in the great outdoors.



Quote we're pondering

"The whole world is a series of miracles, but we're so used to them we call them ordinary things." - **Hans Christian Anderson**



Plant Database

This tool shows the distribution of [plants in North America](#). Just type the genus into Google followed by BONAP. For example, [Magnolia BONAP](#).



Raven or Crow?

These two black birds can be difficult to tell apart. [Audubon](#) and the [Washington State nature mapping program](#) have some handy guides to help.

Community Connections

We want to connect with you. Did you participate in the City Nature Challenge using iNaturalist from April 26 - 29th? If so, what was your favorite observation or moment from the weekend?

If birding is more your thing, Global Big Day is coming up on Saturday, May 11. Submit your checklists on eBird and let us know if you got any lifers, or unexpected sightings.

We read each and every response and will share selected reader stories in upcoming newsletters.

Your feedback is important. [Tell us](#) how we are doing and what you would like to see covered in future newsletters.

Every connection counts! Please help grow our community of everyday heroes by sharing this newsletter with a friend or colleague.

Thank you,

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