



Hummingbird Hill Native Plant Nursery

September/October Newsletter

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WHAT'S NEW AT THE NURSERY:

Fall is the perfect time for planting!

As weather cools, summer dreams and plans can turn into action that helps save native plants and wildlife.

We've added to our inventory! We're excited to offer these new species this fall—all grown from local genotype seed. Schedule an appointment via our website to see which of these are good fits for a habitat corridor at your home!

Shady Areas

- Jumpseed (*Persicaria virginiana*)
- White Snakeroot (*Ageratina altissima*)
- Star Chickweed (*Stellaria pubera*)
- Bowman's Root (*Gillenia trifoliata*)
- Wild Hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens*)
- Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*)
- Woodland Sunflower (*Helianthus divaricatus*)

Sunny-Part Shade Areas

- Narrow-leaved Blue-eyed Grass

Hot, summer days: for us, this feels like the ideal time to prop ourselves in the woods or in a meadow, listening to the katydids singing and watching for butterflies and hummingbirds, while planning in our minds what we can do this fall to help them. What better way to appreciate and marvel in the abundance of summer insects?

As hot as it is now, fall will be here before we know it. Here's a peek at what will be happening at the nursery as weather cools:

Introducing: HABITAT CORRIDOR PLUG TRAYS



This month, we'll be debuting our custom-designed Habitat Corridor Plug Trays, like the one pictured left. An economical way to plant a habitat corridor, these trays consist of 50 plugs: a combination of 10-15 species of native plants hand-picked to fit a description of your planting site.

- (Sisyrinchium angustifolium)*
- Fire Pinks (*Silene virginica*)
- Yellow Giant Hyssop (*Agastache nepetoides*)
- Whorled Rosinweed (*Silphium trifoliatum*)
- Common Evening Primrose (*Oenothera biennis*)
- Black Raspberry (*Rubus occidentalis*)
- Carolina Elephant's Foot (*Elephantopus carolinianus*) (restocked)
- Dotted St. John's Wort (*Hypericum punctatum*)
- Plantain-leaved Pussytoes (*Antennaria plantaginifolia*)
- Green-headed Coneflower (*Rudbeckia laciniata*)
- Self-heal (*Prunella vulgaris*)
- Turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*)
- Wild Basil (*Clinopodium vulgare*) (restocked)
- Thread-leaf Coreopsis (*Coreopsis verticillata*)



Many caterpillars are active during late summer. Look for signs of them on your native plants, and know that your plants are serving a purpose! At the nursery, we're currently hosting batches of growing Monarch caterpillars (host plant: Milkweed species) and Spicebush Swallowtail caterpillars (host plant: Spicebushes and Sassafras trees).

How does this work? Simply visit the Habitat Corridor Plug Tray link on our website and fill out the requested info, which includes info about your site: sunlight and moisture levels, etc.

50 plugs of 10-15 species, customized for your site's conditions

Let us know how many trays you'd like, and we'll select a mixture of species that would naturally grow in your site: ones that grow well together and will combine to make a full-functioning habitat.

Pricing: Our custom-designed habitat corridor plug trays include 50 plugs of 10-15 species native to your site for \$180 (\$3.60 per plug). Single-species plug trays (50 plugs of one species) are also available for \$108 (\$2.16 per plug).



Each plug tray consists of 50 plugs, like the one pictured above.

The nursery will be open by appointment through October. To schedule an appointment, please use our online link at hummingbirdhillnatives.com.

We look forward to seeing you!

CREATING



What if each of us reading this newsletter took a little portion of our yard and converted it into a paradise for native plants and wildlife? Then, what if our plantings inspired the homeowners in our neighborhood to each donate just a hundred square feet of their lawn (that's ten feet by ten feet) to a habitat corridor? A spot here, a spot there...imagine how these tiny places could quickly add up!

a Paradise

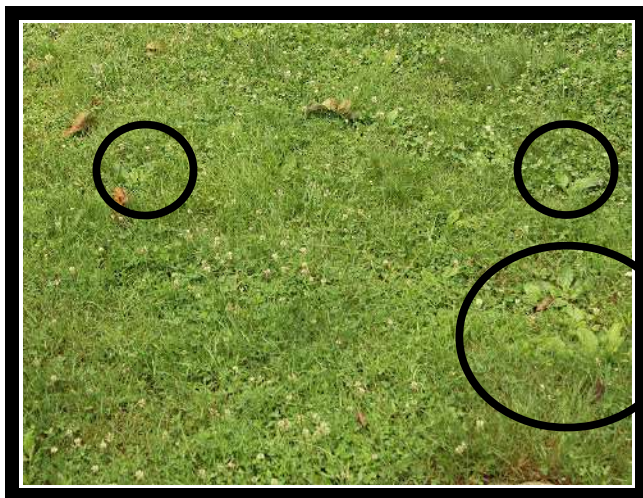
on a
small
piece
of land

Creating a habitat corridor can sound daunting, like a neat idea but something that isn't feasible for the average homeowner. Thankfully, that's not so. Anyone—whether you're on twenty acres or a small city lot—can start a habitat corridor. Today, we share our journey of making a small habitat corridor from a spot of lawn twelve feet by twelve feet, hoping that this simplifies the process and allows us all to embark on the mission of creating a paradise for native plants and wildlife, no matter the size.



1: Choose a Location

The first step to creating a habitat corridor is, of course, choosing a location. A habitat corridor can be anywhere! For this project, we'll be creating one from a section of lawn. After you choose your spot, look through the area and identify all of the plants present:



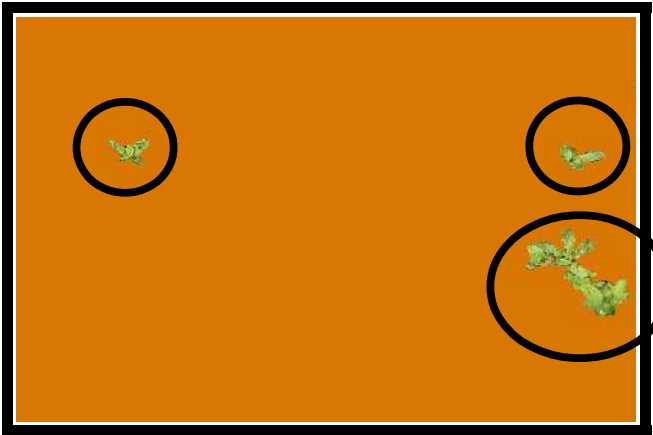
both non-natives and natives. Some habitat corridor sites may have a lot of natives already present; some may have none or just a few. Our twelve-by-twelve patch of lawn is dominated by two non-natives: fescue grass and white clover. There are a few clumps of American Plantain (*Plantago rugelii*), a native.

Natives: American Plantain

2: Remove the Non-natives

Now, for some manual labor! It's time to clear the area of non-natives, so that we can replant with natives. For a small area like this, it's relatively easy to dig out the grass and clover

using a spade. Other methods include: 1) covering the designated area with black plastic for several months during hot weather to kill the non-natives, 2) using a tiller to till up the non-natives and then removing them, or 3) simply hand pulling if your area is covered in easy-to-pull non-natives (such as Japanese Stilt Grass). Whichever option you choose, remember to always examine



the area first and only take out the non-natives present, while leaving any natives to become incorporated into the habitat corridor. In this case, we used a spade to dig out the fescue and clover, while leaving the American plantain undisturbed.

3: Selecting Plants: How Many?

At this point, our site is pretty bare—just three clumps of American Plantain and a lot of clay soil. It's time to think about adding plants.

First, how many plants are we going to put in? This can seem like a tricky number to determine, but it's important to remember that there's no need to be exact. The number

A note on digging: We've found that the best way to remove non-natives like lawn grass is to simply dig an inch or two into the ground, slide the spade under a clump of grass, and then scoop the clump out. There's no need to dig far into the soil.

of plants in our habitat corridor is going to change over time—and pretty quickly. The plants we put in initially will set seed, with new seedlings popping up in the bare soil between species. Volunteer natives will hopefully seed in on their own, now that we've eliminated their non-native competition. The original number of plants we decide on is simply a starting point: a decision we're making to get things going.

However, some guidelines can be helpful. On average, an area that is 100 to 150 square feet can hold around 50 plants, each planted about 18 to 24 inches apart. This spacing and number of plants results in a dense planting that fills in quickly. Of course, this isn't a strict number! For a denser planting, more plants can initially be put in. Fewer plants at the start is also okay and just means that it will take longer for the planting to fill in and may require more maintenance while the plants are getting established (ie: weeding out non-natives that come into the bare soil between natives).

For our habitat corridor, a spot that's twelve feet by twelve feet (144 square feet), we decided to initially plant 50 plants, spaced 18-24 inches apart depending on the species. This will result in a pretty

On average, an area that is 100 to 150 square feet can hold around 50 plants, each spaced about 18-24 inches apart.

full planting once established, with room for growing, spreading, and seeding. Try whatever you think is reasonable. Plant a ten- by-ten with 50 plants for a dense planting, or arrange the same amount into a fifteen-by- fifteen for a more economical plan.

4: Selecting Plants: What Kind?

containing 50 plugs.

We weighed their benefits: 50 1-quart potted plants would mean plants would fill in more quickly than plugs; less bare soil initially means non-natives are less likely to come in (therefore, less maintenance from the start); because plants are more mature, they will

Our custom-
designed mixed
plug tray



So, we plan to put in 50 plants. But, what kind? First, we could use either 50 1-quart pots *or* one habitat corridor plug tray

likely produce more seeds in the first year and go on to produce more offspring, therefore resulting in a habitat corridor that gets dense as quickly as possible.

-Benefits of one custom-designed habitat corridor plug tray containing 50 plugs: more economical than larger plants; the smaller plug size means holes for planting can be smaller (ie: easier to plant in compacted clay soil).

For this project, we decided to proceed using one custom- designed habitat corridor plug tray (50 plugs). Let's take a look at the mix of plants selected for our site. Here's the breakdown of the 50 plugs:

Habitat Corridor Plug Tray Info: Description of our site

- 1) Sunlight levels: receives direct sunlight from 11 am to 5 pm
- 2) Soil moisture: medium to dry; soil gets quite dry during times without rain; compacted clay

- 3) Naturally-occurring natives/non-natives: American Plantain in the area, along with non-natives like fescue and white clover. Natives around the site include:

Common Blue Violet, Path Rush, Horseweed, and Annual Fleabane

-County of planting: Albemarle County



3 Carolina Elephant's Foot (*Elephantopus carolinianus*)



4 Grey Goldenrod (*Solidago nemoralis*)

The seedheads of native grasses, like Broomsedge, provide vital food sources for birds in winter. Look for White-throated Sparrows (pictured right) and Juncos perched on stalks during snowy weather.



9 Broomsedge (*Andropogon virginicus*)

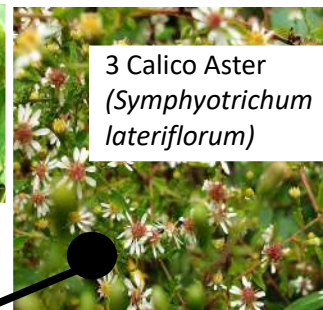


3 Yarrow (*Achillea borealis*)

The fruit of wild strawberries are eaten by Eastern Box Turtles, as well as various bird species.



3 Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*)

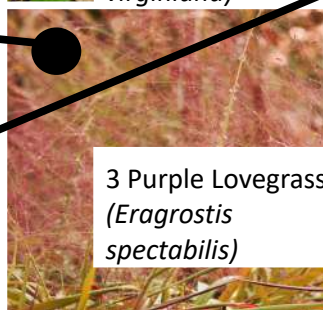


3 Calico Aster (*Symphotrichum lateriflorum*)

Native grasses are essential backbones of Virginia's ecosystems. Purple Love Grass is short, only reaching 1-2 ft tall.



Calico Aster blooms late—August to November. Look for a wide variety of insects using it as a nectar source, pictured left, before cold weather sets in.



3 Purple Lovegrass (*Eragrostis spectabilis*)



2 Wingstem (*Verbesina alternifolia*)

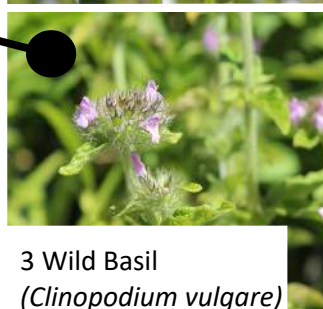
Bumblebees are a key visitor to Wild Basil. Equipped with long tongues, they have adapted to form a unique relationship with plants with tubular flowers, such as the blooms of Wild Basil. In return for providing nectar/pollen for the bee, the plant is pollinated and can set seed to help native plant populations. Xerces Society says that of North America's Bumble bees, nearly one third are already considered to be threatened.



4 Lyre-leaf Sage (*Salvia lyrata*)



3 Narrow-leaved Blue-eyed Grass (*Sisyrinchium angustifolium*)



3 Wild Basil (*Clinopodium vulgare*)



2 Common Evening Primrose (*Oenothera biennis*)

Early-bloomers, like Lyre-leaf Sage and Small's Ragwort, begin flowering in April and May.



3 Small's Ragwort (*Packera smallii*)



5 Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*)

5: Designing the Initial Layout

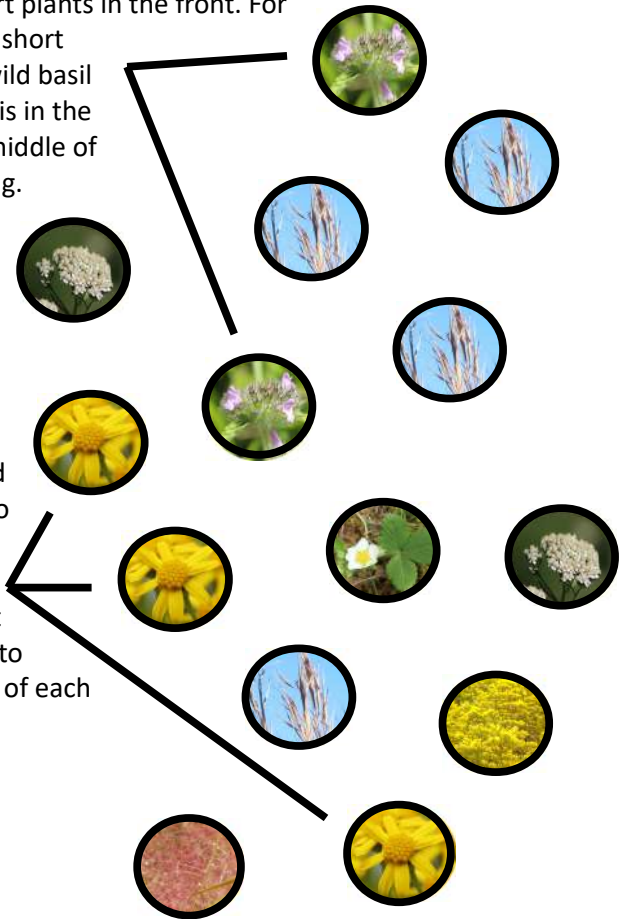
With plug tray in hand, we're almost ready to plant. But first, the design process!

Designing a habitat corridor is unlike designing your typical landscape design. Rather than for the human, we are designing the habitat corridor for native plants and wildlife. This approach means arranging the plants in a way that maximizes their use by insects, birds, and all native wildlife.

A loose arrangement is key to a habitat corridor's usefulness to native wildlife. Your habitat corridor should be planted in a meadow-like form (as shown in the example design, above right), mixing heights and species. Remember: this is your corridor's *initial* layout. There's no need to strive for perfection—the plants will move on their own by rhizomes or seeds to the right places and to fill in empty gaps.

Tall, medium, and short plants should be mixed throughout, rather than all tall plants in the back and all short plants in the front. For example, a short plant like wild basil (1-2 ft tall) is in the front and middle of our planting.

Plants should be mixed into the layout, in a loose arrangement (as opposed to large clumps of each species).



6: Planting & Caring for Your Habitat Corridor

Now to plant! There's no need to amend or condition the soil—just dig your hole, remove the plant from its pot, and put it into the ground. Like ours, your habitat corridor will show bare soil at first; but as time passes, the natives you planted will fill in, spread around, and create a place where natives and wildlife can thrive.

We recommend checking on your new plants regularly for about 2 weeks. This should give them time to get established. During this time, check for water needs—and only water them as needed. Remember: the plants you planted are native to your site, to its sun and soil conditions. This means that, if you are planting in a dry spot, then your plants are suited to dry conditions; they won't want to be wet, even while getting established.

Keep an eye out for non-native intruders, particularly while your plants are young and there is a lot of bare soil. We'll be watching for encroaching white clover, as well as invasives that would love to take advantage of our newly-disturbed site, pulling them out before they have time to get established. And, best of all, sit back and watch life begin to occur within your corridor! See how

your corridor changes over time. Observe as these plants self-seed (be careful not to accidentally pull out babies!) and spread, some becoming dominant while others recede into the background—and some, hopefully, spreading their seeds on to natural areas outside of your planting. Observe insects (once our plants are established, we'll be watching for insects coming for nectar, as well as for ones hanging around in our corridor, using plant stems and leaves). Watch for butterflies and bees and moths, and for birds and for toads and for skinks...Who knows what these slices of paradise—both ours and yours—can help? And, down the road when we look at it, we will think to ourselves, *Remember when this was just a lifeless patch of lawn?*



--- RESTORING HABITAT ---

An interview with local resident, Steve Phillips, on his re-vegetation project

First, could you tell us a little about your land?

I started by buying ten acres of forested land about five miles to the east of the national park. It's rocky and about 1200 feet elevation. The soil is dry and tends towards the acidic side, reflecting the mostly granitic nature of the underlying rocks. Some of the property had been pasture 50 years ago. Much of the forest was older but had been selectively logged, so it's a real mix of 100 plus year old trees and some much younger. I built a house near the top of a hill, and this meant clearing about one acre. In the process, most of the topsoil was either stripped away or buried under a mix of rock and mineral soil with no organic content. It looked pretty hopeless. As I soon found out, most rain simply ran off the hill and the full sun baked the surface to kind of a hard crust. With each rain, the top of the bare soil was washed downhill. Silt fences kept the eroded soil from getting close to any

stream, but, with each rain, the top and middle of the hill would be stripped of more and more soil, leaving an even more rocky and dry and less hospitable surface.

So it sounds like your goal was to stop erosion and re-vegetate this cleared area. What made you choose native plants for this site?

I like wildlife of all kinds and I wanted to promote a healthy habitat. Before moving to this area, I had a small suburban yard, and I tried planting a few plants that I was told would help birds. But I didn't really know what I was doing, which plants were best, and I was probably over focused on birds and giving them some pretty berries. I just had a vague idea that native plants were important, but I didn't know where exactly to begin. I now realize that I didn't really understand what it means for a plant to be truly native. Moving here and buying some land, I realized I had a chance to start over, learn as much as I could, and get serious and do the best that I could to establish a healthy habitat.



How did your perspective on growing natives change at your new property?

What I realized I needed was to make habitat as natural as possible, and that meant appropriate to the local ecology. I didn't want to buy a plant just because it was 'native to Virginia.' I needed something native to our local ecology at the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. What's more, I needed to take into account the extremely local conditions of my site: the type of soil, the moisture levels, the fact that it was on a hill, things like that. You've probably had the experience of walking in the mountains and crossing from one side of a ridge to another, and suddenly noticing that the plant life is completely different. Or moving from the top of a hill to farther down the hill, and again the species have changed. So I knew there were patterns out there, but I didn't know exactly which species belonged where. It's one thing to know there is such thing as 'plant communities', it's another to know exactly where they go and what species are in each. I was feeling overwhelmed and so I was relieved when I found out that Hummingbird Hill was just starting to offer site consultations.

What initial steps did you take to towards stopping erosion and re-vegetating? Did you face any challenges along the way?

Rather than planting traditional lawn grass seed, I had an idea to plant a native grass, Little Bluestem, around the top of my hill. I tried doing this from seed but ran into problems. I couldn't find a source of local ecotype seed of Little Bluestem, and I ended up buying seed that was originally collected in Oklahoma. So I'm a little worried that my Bluestem plot is not totally suitable to our environment or our ecology. Maybe I'll swap it for something else. But, anyway, much of my bluestem seeding effort got washed away by rain runoff. Some of it survived though. To slow the erosion while waiting for the plant cover to come in more, I arranged rows of rocks to slow the water and prevent gullies. What really helped, though, was allowing the leaves to blow in. At first, the wind and rain tended to wash and blow the tree leaves away, but I solved that problem by scattering fallen branches around the

hillside. I noticed that the first places for the volunteer seedlings to come were where the branches and rotting leaves kept moisture. Basically, I decided right up front if *any* native plant came up on its own, it was welcome to stay! After all, nothing is a weed; every native plant has some role to play. I was impatient and I didn't want to wait several years for the area to fill in, so I bought and planted more natives to speed up the process.

What types of species did you add?

I felt lost in terms of choosing species, so the site consultation was a huge help. I realized that if I drew on the suggestions from the site consultation, I couldn't make a mistake and put in a 'wrong' plant. From there, I learned to relax and choose confidently from the menu that was presented to me. Yarrow had appeared on its own and, since I liked the look of it and it was on the site consultation list, I decided to get 50 plugs. I also bought plants that hadn't appeared yet but were on the site consultation list, like Wild Strawberry. I have a real weakness for mints and so I got a 1 quart Slender Mountain Mint and a whole plug tray of 50. I learned not to obsess too much about the exact placement of each plant. I spread the species around. So far everything is doing fine. I'm so glad I'm not having to water, despite my dry location, knowing the plants are adapted to dry conditions.



Slender Mountain Mint (*Pycnanthemum tenuifolium*), far left, and Yarrow (*Achillea borealis*), left, were two species added to Steve's habitat, chosen from his site consultation species list.

Have there been things that have surprised you as you've created your habitat corridor?

Well, I've had a bunch of pleasant surprises. I was skeptical that I could just stick plants in my poor soil, with no organic material and little ability to absorb water, and not have to add compost or other amendments. But, sure enough, everything's taking. I was also pleasantly surprised that so many plants, of so many different species, seemed to appear out of nowhere. I was expecting a few plants from seeds from trees around the edges, and I got those, but the real surprise was the magical appearance of plants that don't even seem to be in the nearby woods. I don't know where they came from. The work was getting the plants into the rocky ground. I did have to water a few times in

the first couple of weeks. I was happy to learn after that, I could step back and enjoy.

Any unpleasant surprises?

The only unpleasant side is the non-natives appearing. All of my effort is not caring for the native plants;it's removing the non-natives.

What part of your project do you find especially rewarding?

It's been so rewarding to see the wildlife of all kinds appear, now that so many plants have come in. I'm still partial to birds, but now I'm paying closer attention to every little critter I see out there. [I see] five-lined skinks, and I love the bright blue tails on the little ones. Deer. I figure there's enough green for everybody. I haven't seen any signs of overgrazing. Turkey. And recently I saw a line of teenage turkeys following the adults. Turtles. The occasional bear, though just passing through. Red Admiral and Zebra Swallowtail butterflies. Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Scarlet Tanager. Red-breasted Nuthatch. I was thinking of Bluebirds. I didn't see any last summer, but I do see them now. It must be from the insects and plants. I'm hoping to learn more about insects, but for now I'm just happy that the birds seem to be happy with them. When I started this project, there was so much barren land around me, probably most of the birds I saw were at my feeders. I still have my feeders, but now most of the birding action is in and around my re-vegetation project.

See photos of Steve's restoration project below. By planting a large variety of plugs and quart sized plants, while encouraging natives that come in on their own, this open area is being restored into a habitat.

Steve Phillips now owns 20 acres, managed as habitat corridors. Here, he encourages native plants and wildlife and works to remove non-native invasive plants.



