Why now, Why me and What can I do to help?

As Rick Darke's forward states "Once in a long while a book appears that fundamentally changes the way we think about our gardens and their role in the larger landscape." Doug Tallamy's book *Bringing Nature Home* explains how if we as individual gardeners incorporate more native plants into existing landscapes, we can become better stewards of the land and help protect and conserve the precious natural world which we live in, for ourselves and future generations.

Whether gardening is our hobby or our profession, Dr. Tallamy explains with ecological science the threat to our ecosystem and society if we do not change our current mindset and continue to plant only for aesthetics without thinking of ecology. If we do not change, there is great fear (& supporting facts) that many species will be compromised and lost. Native plants have supported our native insects as food and breeding areas for thousands of years, and these insects simply cannot survive without them. We are not saying that gardeners can only plant native plants, but increasing the percentage of native plants within landscapes would greatly help. "Insects are not optional. It is not okay if they disappear. Insects are the primary drivers of our ecosystems. If they go, we go." Doug Tallamy

As articulately stated by Dr. Tallamy, "Gardeners enjoy their hobby for many reasons: a love of plants and nature, the satisfaction that comes from beautifying home and community, the pleasures of creative effort, the desire to collect rare and unusual species, and the healthful benefits of exercise and outdoor air. For some people, like my wife and me, there is a pleasure in just watching plants grow."

"But now, for the first time in its history, gardening has taken on a role that transcends the needs of the gardener. Like it or not, gardeners have become important players in the management of our nation's wildlife. It is now within the power of individual gardens to do something that we all dream of doing; to make a difference. In this case, the 'difference" will be to the future of biodiversity, to the native plants and animals of North America and the ecosystems that sustain them." (Pg. 11)

WHY NATIVE PLANTS?

Home - Native Plants Finder (nwf.org)

What's a native plant?
Native plants are the plant species that are naturally found in your area. Plants introduced from other regions of the United States or other parts of the world are called exotics. Native plants have evolved in your region over the course of hundreds of thousands of years. These plants thrive in the local soils, rainfall levels, weather, and climate conditions. Every region has different native plant communities.

Why are native plants important?
Native plants support local ecosystems better than introduced species, primarily by supporting food webs far better than non-natives. From perennial wildflowers to berrying shrubs to majestic canopy trees, native plants are beautiful and functional choices for any landscape. Many are just as ornamental as common exotics. They are unique to your geographic region! When you plant natives, you celebrate your natural heritage and reconnect your yard or garden to the natural world around you. When many of us plant natives in a particular area, we help to create wildlife corridors that are necessary to sustain groups of plants and animals in our highly altered modern landscapes. Plus, native trees and flower beds typically require less fertilizer and water than lawns, saving you time and money!

Wildlife evolved alongside the native plants in your region and use those natives as food, shelter, and a place to raise their young. As a result, nearly every living creature on the planet relies on native plants for survival. They are the foundation of local food webs, giving butterflies, birds, and other wildlife what they need to survive.

The follow up book to *Bringing Nature Home* was recently released, *Nature's Best Hope* takes the next step and outlines Dr. Tallamy's vision for a grassroots approach to conservation.

"Gardening is like cooking. It is tempting to cook only with the goal of achieving great taste, with no thought of healthy eating, but that often results in tasty concoctions so full of fat, sugar and salt that they are deadly in the long run. Similarly, it is tempting to garden only for beauty; without regard to the many ecological roles our landscapes must perform. All too often, such narrow gardening goals result in a landscape so low in ecological function that it drains the vitality from the surrounding ecosystem." Doug Tallamy Nature's Best Hope (Pg. 9)

Ten Concrete Steps Everyone can take to help make Homegrown National Park a Successful Reality - Nature's Best Hope (Chapter 11) by Dr. Doug Tallamy

(Summarized)

1. Shrink the Lawn – think of it as an area rug, not wall-to-wall carpeting
2. Remove Invasive Species – Invasive species are defined as non-native species that displace native plant communities.
3. Plant Keystone Genera (they produce the most food that fuels our insects)
    a. WOODIES: Native Oaks, Cherries, Willows, Birches, Cottonwoods & Elms
    b. HERBACEOUS: Native Goldenrod, Asters & Sunflowers
    c. See www.nwf.org/nativeplantfinder
4. Be Generous with your Plantings – Increase the abundance and diversity of your gardens and add vertical heterogeneity to your plantings by including understory trees and shrubs to the landscape. Most pollinators want to feed on just one kind of flower at a time, and they want to get as much in one "stop" as possible, rather than flying all over the garden. This is a strong case for planting your pollinator-attracting plants in large clumps rather than individual plants or a thin drift. Also, the more variety in bloom times, flower colors, and flower shapes, the more different pollinators will find food sources.
5. Plant for Specialist Pollinators – Common Generalist Honey Bees & Bumble Bees can get pollen for their larvae from numerous sources BUT Specialists need specific plants (think Monarchs and Asclepias/Butterfly Weed). Native Helianthus spp., Solidago spp., Aster spp. & Vaccinium help support specialists. Also, make sure they are available throughout the year (early spring, summer and late fall).
6. Network with your Neighbors – this will help expand the geographical area. For example, if the goal is to help the Monarch Butterfly, then plant a small Milkweed patch and encourage your neighbors to do the same, eventually drawing in more Monarchs. Social media will make is easier to find people who are willing to join a conservation community.
7. Build a Conservation Hardscape
    a. Cover up window wells – toads, frogs and other small creatures get trapped in window wells and slowly starve to death.
    b. Use motion sensor lights – security lights kill thousands of moths and increase our carbon footprint.
    c. Set lawnmower height no lower than 3". This will require less watering of the lawn. Also, try not to mow in the evening. Many nocturnal species leave their hiding places and are vulnerable to being killed by the mower.
    d. Install a bubbler. Small water features with gentle gurgling sounds, don't take up much space and are irresistible to migrating and resident birds.
    e. Build several small bee hotels with only a few holes each. Disperse these throughout your yard. This makes it more difficult for bee predators, parasites, and diseases to be able to attack all your native bees in one convenient place. Many bees are solitary and nest in small individual burrows in the ground. They prefer bare sandy soil, or under leaf litter, or at the base of a pile of old wood. This means they welcome messy areas in the yard all year round, so it is good to leave a corner or an out of the way place for them to nest.
8. Create Caterpillar Pupation Sites under your Trees – 90% of caterpillar that develop on plants do not pupate on their host plants but drop to the ground and pupate within the duff on the ground or within chambers they form underground. Replace lawn under trees with well planted beds with appropriate groundcover plants. AND treasure your leaf litter. Many leaves that fall each autumn harbor small caterpillars within the curled leaf margins, many of which eat fallen leaves.

9. Do not Spray or Fertilize - Insecticides & herbicides used to produce the perfect lawn kill many insects. Fertilizers are often washed into our waterways, where they cause deadly algal blooms, red tides and other problems. Creating soils rich in organic matter is entirely sufficient for healthy plants.
10. Educate your Neighborhood Civic Association – educate the uninformed, lobby your township and help rewrite the rules.

In addition to the books, Doug Tallamy, in partnership with Michelle Alfandari launched the website Homegrown National Park™.

HOMEGROWN NATIONAL PARK™ is a grassroots call-to-action to retore the biodiversity and ecosystem function by planting native plants and creating new ecological networks.

HOMEGROWN NATIONAL PARK

OUR MISSION
TO RESTORE BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEM FUNCTION because every human being on this planet needs diverse highly productive ecosystems to survive.

CALL TO ACTION
Catalyzing a collective effort of individual homeowners, property owners, land managers, farmers, and anyone with some soil to plant in…to start a new HABITAT™ by planting native plants and removing most invasive plants. **It is the largest cooperative conservation project ever conceived or attempted.**

OUR GOAL
Our goal is 20 million acres of native plantings in the U.S. This represents approximately ½ of the green lawns of privately-owned properties.

TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE
We are at a critical point of losing so many species form local ecosystems that their ability to produce the oxygen, clean water, flood control, pollination, pest control, carbon storage, etc, that is, the ecosystem services that sustain us, will become seriously compromised.

NO WORRY…… this isn't a "bad human" moment…instead. Have some fun while doing good…..stewardship.

Doug's message is a SOLUTION BASED ACTION - *small efforts by many people.* Together we will create new ecological networks that will enlarge populations of plants and animals enabling them to weather normal population fluctuations indefinitely.

THE MAP
Homegrown National Park™ is a term coined by Doug and is the key to our call-to-action:

"Our National Parks, no matter how grand in scale are too small and separated from one another to preserve species to the levels needed. Thus, the concept for Homegrown National Park, a bottom-up call-to-action to restore habitat where we live and work, and to a lesser extent where we farm and graze, extending national parks to our yards and communities."

THE MAP is an interactive community-based visual that will show each person's contribution to planting native by State, County and Zip Code.

There will be a gauge showing progress towards our goal of 20 million acres of native planting in the US.

Importantly, the map is a way for individuals to see their part in the greater whole – creating new ecological networks and restoring biodiversity.

Below is a link to the recording of the collaborative webinar between the Hardy Plant Society/Mid-Atlantic Chapter and the Scott Arboretum of Swarthmore College: A Guide to Restoring the Little Things That Run the World with Doug Tallamy, recorded on Sunday, January 10, 2021.

A Guide to Restoring the Little Things That Run the World with Doug Tallamy - YouTube