Fall 2023

SCHOOLCRAFT CONSERVATION DISTRICT NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the Schoolcraft Conservation District's Fall 2023 newsletter! Interested in receiving notifications about future issues? Head over to schoolcraftcd.org/newsletter to subscribe.

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Upcoming Events

BIODIVERSITY FIELD DAY | ENVIRONMENTAL LAB

Not open to public. The SCD will be hosting a science class from Manistique High School at the Environmental Education Lab. Topics covered will include tree measurements and species identification.

HABITATS WORKSHOP | LITTLE HARBOR RD

Come learn about the ins and outs of creating a wildlife habitat. The workshop will be at the intersection of Little Harbor Road and Mead Auto Tour Road. *Inclement weather backup day: Oct 27 at 6 pm*

SCRAP TIRE COLLECTION | ZELLAR SANITATION

Do you have any old tires lying around? We want to recycle them! Drop them off at Zellar Sanitation (125 Chippewa Ave Manistique) on October 27 from noon to 4 pm or October 28 from 8 am to noon.

HALLOWEEN LAMPLIT WALK | ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION LAB

Time to get your spooky on! We'll be hosting a lamplit Halloween walk at the Environmental Education Lab starting at 6 pm. You bring your travel mug; we'll bring the apple cider. This event is child friendly!

HERBALIST KITCHEN WORKSHOP | SCD OFFICE

So you're tired of buying grocery store herbs: now what? Join us at our office (100 N Cedar St., across from the library) to learn about how to grow, store, and use your own herbs.

HARVEST CELEBRATION | SCD OFFICE

Arts and crafts aren't just for kids! Whatever your age, come celebrate the harvest season with us as we make the perfect festive centerpieces for your Thanksgiving table. All supplies will be provided.

WINTER BIRDING WORKSHOP | SCD OFFICE

Despite the many birds who migrate south for the winter, there are many more who stay behind. Join us to learn how to identify them and where in our area they can be found.

WINTER SOLSTICE WALK | ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION LAB

What better way to welcome in the winter solstice than a snowy forest walk at dusk? Be sure to bring your snow shoes and dress for the weather! Hot chocolate will be provided.

Composting Workshop

On June 13, we hosted a composting workshop at the Manistique Community Garden (MCG). The workshop was led by Landen Tetil, UP Produce Safety Technician, who discussed different methods of composting and vermicomposting. She even brought some worms for everyone to look at! (Red wigglers, to be specific. They're a great addition to any compost pile.) After learning about the most effective ways to turn waste into nutrient-rich fertilizer, attendees put their new knowledge to use by building a new compost station for the community garden. The hope is that those who have rented garden beds will use this station to recycle their vegetable scraps, weeds, and other organic materials.

Everyone who attended the workshop was sent home with a composting pail to get them started on their composting journeys. If you missed this event but are interested in learning more about the composting process, see the next page for some helpful tips and tricks.

What is composting?

Composting is a controlled, aerobic process (in other words, it requires oxygen) that converts organic, biodegradable materials into a nutrient-dense soil amendment through decomposition. Microorganisms in a compost pile feed on the materials, consuming carbon, nitrogen, and oxygen as they go. What results is compost, an earth-like substance that can be used as fertilizer.

What can be composted?

Green Materials

- Grass clippings
- Tea bags
- Coffee grounds
- Rice and grains
- Egg shells
- Fruit and veg scraps
- Fresh leaves/flowers

Brown Materials

- Paper
- Sawdust
- Wood chips/shavings
- Twigs
- Dry leaves
- Napkins
- Paper towels

Not Compostable

- Meat and dairy
- Fish
- Bones
- Greasy food scraps
- Fat, butter, and oils
- Diseased plants
- Styrofoam

Getting Started

The first step to composting is deciding the right type of setup for you. Some of the common options include buckets, piles, wood or wire bins, or, if you want to get really fancy, tumblers. As soon as your setup is complete, the real fun can begin! It might be easiest to just throw whatever organic matter you have on hand into your compost pile, but try to plan ahead. Green materials tend to be high in nitrogen, whereas browns are higher in carbon. Microorganisms need both to survive, so mixing greens and browns will yield the best results. A general rule of thumb is to aim for one part green to two parts brown. Stir your mixture once every few weeks to speed things up.

Troubleshooting Common Issues

Symptom	Problem	Solution
Pile is wet and smells like a mix of rancid butter, vinegar, and rotten eggs	Not enough air, too much nitrogen, or too wet	Turn pile. Mix in straw, sawdust, or wood chips. Provide drainage.
Pile does not heat up	Pile is too small or too dry	Make pile larger. Add insulation. Add water and turn.
Pile is damp and sweet-smelling but will not heat up	Not enough nitrogen	Mix in grass clippings, food scraps, or other sources of nitrogen.
Pile is attracting animals	Meat or dairy products have been added or food scraps aren't well covered	Enclose pile in 1/4" hardware cloth. Cover food with brown materials or finished compost.

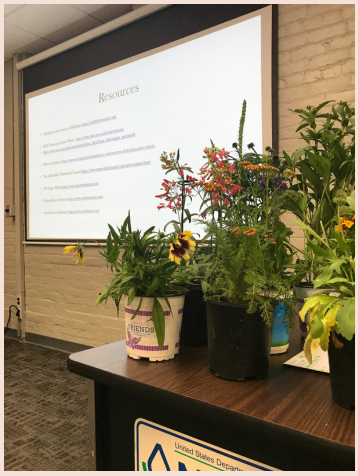
Source: Cornell Waste Management Institute

Native Plant Workshop & Sale

In conjunction with our annual native plant sale, District Manager Ashley Reitter led a workshop on how to design, prepare for, plant, and maintain native plant gardens. The topics covered included what native plants are and their benefits to pollinators, pollinators' benefits to humans and the environment, how to select native plant species based on your specific needs/growing conditions, how to prepare an area before establishing a native plant garden and how to keep it clear of animals, pests, and weeds after. Following the workshop, we were able to go out and tour the SCD's own native plant garden, which is flourishing since we put it in last fall. If you haven't seen our garden yet this year, be sure to swing by our office (on the N Maple St. side) and take a look.

Later in the summer, we held our first ever native plant sale, and we're thrilled to say it was a hit! Collection took place at the Manistique Farmers' Market, where we processed almost 60 orders total with the help of Marquette's UP Native Plants nursery. If you missed our sale but are still interested in planting this fall, visit their website at www.upnativeplants.com to see what they have in stock.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to making our first sale a success! We look forward to growing it in future years.



Starting a Native Plant Garden

Native plants (also known as indigenous or endemic plants) are informally defined as those living in North America prior to European settlement, occurring naturally in a particular region or habitat without human introduction. These plants have adapted over hundreds of years to their particular ecosystems--ecosystems that have in turn evolved to depend on native plants.

Because of this coadaptation, native plants come with a whole host of benefits. They enhance native biodiversity. They're less likely to be invasive. They are evolutionarily designed for local soils and climates, making them easy to grow and necessitating fewer resources. They support pollinators and the native food web, in addition to promoting soil health and erosion control. And, of course, they're beautiful to look at! In short, there are numerous reasons you might want to establish your own native plant garden.

When selecting what specific species would do best in your yard, ask yourself questions like: What plants do you already have? What are the conditions of your selected site? Is it dry, wet, seasonally wet? Does it get a lot of sun, or is it mostly in the shade? Does its soil have a higher content of sand or clay? What is the size of the area you hope to plant?

Plants for dry, sandy soil

Short:
- Black-eyed Susan
- Sand tickseed
- Thimbleweed
- Prairie smoke
- Prairie coreopsis
- Columbine

Medium:
- Wild lupine
- Pale purple coneflower
- Spiderwort
- Foxglove beardtongue
- Bottlebrush grass

Tall:
- Purple coneflower
- Gray-headed Coneflower
- Woodland sunflower
- Big bluestem grass

Plants for wet sites

Short:
- Blazing star
- Black-eyed Susan

Medium:
- Blue iris
- Sweetgrass

Tall:
- Cardinal flower
- Great blue lobelia
- Blue vervain
- Brown-eyed Susan
- Compass plant
- Milkweed
- White turtlehead

Shrubs:
- High bush cranberry
- Dogwoods
- Winterberry
- Nannyberry

Plants for shady sites

Short:
- Columbine
- Wild ginger
- Wild geranium
- Jacob's ladder
- Thimbleweed
- Maidenhair fern
- Lady fern
- Painted trillium

Medium:
- Bottlebrush grass
- Wild blue phlox

Tall:
- Woodland sunflower

Shrubs:
- Serviceberry
- Hazelnut
- Viburnums
- Red osier dogwood

Once you've established the species you want, think about how you want to prepare your site for a new garden. Existing vegetation such as grass can be removed using a number of methods, including direct removal, tilling, or suppress (e.g., using sheet mulching, plastic, boards, etc.). Adding landscape fabric is another great way to keep grass and weeds at bay once your garden is planted. Depending on your unique soil needs, you can also add organic matter (e.g., compost) or fertilizer.

Scrap Tire Collection

Bringing a permanent recycling program to Manistique is one of our top priorities as an organization, but in the meantime, we're thrilled to be able to run recycling events, the most recent of which was for scrap tires.

Thanks to the participation of Schoolcraft County residents, we managed to collect over 150 tires that will be used to make new asphalt. The event was funded by the Scrap Tire Recycling Grant from the Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE). Additional thanks to Zellar Sanitation for the use of their facilities.

Do you still have scrap tires you'd like to see recycled? We'll be holding another collection at Zellar Sanitation on October 27 from noon to 4 pm and October 28 from 8 am to noon. Please note there is a $3 fee per tire. Tires should be less than three feet in diameter, clean, dry, and off the rim.

Did you know? A whopping 280 million used tires are discarded each year by American motorists, only about 30 million of which are retreaded for reuse.

Although Manistique doesn't yet have a permanent recycling program, cardboard and scrap metal recycling is available through Zellar and Hiawatha Landfill. Bulb, battery, and electronics recycling is also available through Republic Services.

Tree Farm Field Day

Sunbaked to a balmy 75 degrees and set under an unblemished sapphire sky, July 21 was perfect for our Tree Farm field day at the Environmental Education Lab.

We kicked things off with a ribbon-cutting to celebrate the completion of a new wheelchair-accessible trail, bathroom, and parking at the Lab, a project funded by the Michigan DNR's Recreation Passport Grant program. The project's unveiling was led by Lab committee members Heidi Troyer and Deb LeBlanc, who thanked the many volunteers and donors who made these developments possible. Other speakers were DNR Deputy Information Officer John Prestin, Rep. David Prestin, and an aide to Sen. Ed McBroom.

"From its beginnings in 1991 through this most recent project, the Lab has always been the collaborative work of many organizations, businesses, and individuals in the community," said Troyer, current chairman for the Lab committee. "It is our hope that the new accessible features will allow many more visitors to enjoy the trails. The new interpretive signs which are also part of the grant add to its educational value for the public and for school groups."

The ribbon-cutting was preceded by presentations about various conservation programs available to local landowners, including the Qualified Forest Program, which offers tax incentives to forest owners in exchange for sustainable management practices, the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program, designed to reduce environmental risks for farm and forest owners, and several NRCS financial and technical assistance programs. Those who attended the field day also witnessed the Lab's Tree Farm certification and participated in guided hikes featuring tree and plant identification.

Annual Meeting & Board Election

We had a fantastic annual meeting and Board of Directors election this August at Inwood Township Hall. Thank you to our speakers Elise Desjarlais, the Coordinator of our Lake to Lake Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area, who talked about some of the most common invasive species in our region and management thereof, and retired MSU Extension forester Bill Cook, who addressed some of the common myths surrounding forestry, conservation, and sustainability practices. Their presentations were accompanied by a delicious dinner courtesy of Upper Crust Deli.

The evening wrapped up with a raffle drawing for eight swamp white oaks that were purchased by the district during our tree sale earlier this year. Congratulations to those attendees who won a tree!

The meeting also marked the end of Deb Le Blanc's service on our Board of Directors. Deb has been an incredible resource and ally for the district during the many years she has worked with us, and she'll be deeply missed.

A very warm welcome to Marvin Evink, the newest member of our board who will be serving alongside our returning directors Tony Wright, Tom White, Kipp Beaudoin, and Brad Hayes. We look forward to seeing where the future takes us.

Volunteer Events

In August, we held two volunteer events at both the Manistique Boardwalk and the Riverbank Audubon Sanctuary. Our boardwalk event focused on pulling the invasive spotted knapweed that's slowly been taking over the area. Native to Europe and Asia, spotted knapweed was introduced to the Americas in the late 19th century as an agricultural contaminant, and has since spread to nearly every contiguous US state. Like many invasive plants, spotted knapweed easily overgrows and chokes out vital native species, aided by its release of a toxin that poisons nearby plants. Worsening the situation, its bitter taste makes it unpalatable to wildlife. If left unchecked, spotted knapweed will quickly overtake an area.

Because there's a lot of milkweed around the boardwalk--a plant that's vital to the survival of monarch butterflies, a federally endangered species--it's especially important to get the spotted knapweed there under control. An enormous thank you to our volunteers who helped us pull an incredible 25 contractor bags totaling 240 pounds and 150 cubic feet of the weed.

Our second volunteer event took place at the Riverbank Sanctuary just outside of Manistique. The sanctuary, which is part of Michigan Audubon's bird sanctuary network, plays a critical role in protecting Michigan native plants and animals, including endangered and threatened species, while also providing educational and recreational opportunities. Unfortunately, some of the paths had become overgrown with ferns and blocked off by fallen trees. After a little TLC, we're pleased to say that this important habitat is now in better shape and will hopefully be a stop in our future Warbler Wonderland birding festivals.

Seed Library

The SCD is excited to announce that we're now collecting **open-pollinated and heirloom seeds** for our seed library which is set to open next spring to all residents of Schoolcraft County. Similar to a library for books, seed library patrons can "check out" seeds at the beginning of growing season; during harvesting, seeds can be collected from mature plants and donated to the library, creating a cycle of seed saving and sharing. That being said, there is no obligation to return seeds, especially for those new to gardening. Any participation is welcome.

Why a seed library? For better or worse, agricultural biodiversity has plummeted over the past several decades as seed corporations prioritize genetically modified and hybridized seeds. These seeds aren't without benefits--they often result in high yields, are pest resistant, produce large fruits and vegetables, etc.--but they have also resulted in a monocultural industry that threatens the existence of heirloom varieties. In addition, unlike open-pollinated plants, the seeds from hybrid plants can't viably be replanted. Generally, these are one and done crops. By recycling open-pollinated seeds year after year, seed libraries promote agricultural diversity and help preserve plant varieties that have adapted over time to the specific conditions of their local regions.

Biodiversity and sustainability aside, we believe that everyone, no matter their level of income or farming knowledge, should have the resources and opportunity to grow their own food. Schoolcraft County is a food desert. 17.2% of residents are food insecure. 25% of residents are above the SNAP threshold of a 200% poverty level. It's important to us to lift up those members of our community who might not otherwise have access to affordable produce. Our goal is to bring food security to Schoolcraft while simultaneously fostering community engagement, education, and self-empowerment.

We need your help to bring this project to fruition. Are you interested in donating your open-pollinated seeds? (**No hybrids or GMOs, please.**) You can do so at any time by dropping them off at our office or mailing them to PO Box 250, Manistique, MI 49854. All vegetables, flowers, and herbs are accepted. Please be sure to fill out a donation form (available in our office and on our website) and include it with your donation. Thank you for your support!

Terms to Know

Open-pollinated: Plant varieties resulting from pollination between the same or genetically similar plants; seeds from open-pollinated varieties will produce plants like the parent plants (also called "true to type")

Heirloom variety: An open-pollinated cultivar that has been grown or shared from generation to generation within a family or community

Hybrids: Plant varieties resulting from pollination between genetically distinct parents; seeds from hybrid plants may be sterile or different from the parent plants

Want to learn more about seed saving? Visit our website for guides to get started.

Questions or comments? Please contact our Communications Coordinator Sara Solberg at sara.solberg@macd.org.