

“I want to know my landscape is thriving”

FAVORING NATIVE PLANTS ON LOTS OF ALL SIZES

BY GUS STEEVES
CORRESPONDENT

BRIMFIELD — Dan Jaffe-Wilder is a huge advocate of helping land go wild. Whether it’s a garden, an acre, the 19 acres he recently bought in Brimfield, or the 8,000 acres he helps manage for Norcross Wildlife Sanctuary in Wales, the difference is often in approach, not objective.

A garden, he notes, is easy to manage; an acre is barely possible, and “the big places” are well beyond that.

“Even a lazy gardener is doing a whole lot more than we can do on 8000 acres at Norcross,” he told a few dozen conservation commissioners during an online Mass Association of Conservation Commissioners “Lunch and Learn” talk last week.

“In some cases, the management is next to nothing, or is nothing.” It can be as simple as clearing a space around an uncommon plant or tree to give it a better chance against very common ones; on his land, for example, he’s trying to promote wild blueberry in thickets of laurel and shagbark hickory in copses of black birch. (It’s not coincidental the promoted plants are edible.)

“I want to know my landscape is thriving,” he said, noting he favors “plants that are bringing in habitat and feeding us,” as well as other species.

The key is working with what’s there, not trying to force it into something it’s not. Where possible, Wilder recommends starting with a soil test; it’s “one of the best things you could possibly do” to avoid planting failures, but he suggests ignoring the amendment recommendations such tests

usually provide. Instead, select plants that thrive in that kinds of soil.

Case in point – thin soil, which is common around here. He dubs that “your friend” because “things grow more slowly in thin soil,” including the invasives and weeds. Native plants have adapted to such soil and will outcompete the weeds; some natives, such as goldenrod and bee balm, are also very important habitat plants for a large number of insects and birds.

When promoting natives in such areas, Wilder encourages planting them in blocks, with many of a few species together, because “we don’t have time to do the whole meadow.” To help them along, Norcross mows a third of the meadow each spring, although their goal is to eventually be able to have a controlled burn every five to eight years.

You can’t do that with a rich-soiled, moist meadow; such places have a lot more nutrients and plants of all kinds (welcome or not) grow faster. Invasives tend to get started before the natives there, as they seep in by air and water; controlling them and “pushy” natives requires fall mowing and some brush-cutting. For Wilder, the goal there is to favor uncommon natives while keeping other species “in amounts that are happy and thriving.” In one field at Norcross, they found 12 gentians two years ago and have since increased that to 125. If you can establish “thick, healthy patches of native species,” invasive seeds won’t have soil in which to root, he observed.

For really big places, Wilder’s goal is to “look at the larger picture,” to see what kinds of habitat the region as a whole needs. One that’s uncommon in southern New England is what’s termed “early successional” meadow and woodland. Many in our area know what that looks like: the strip of “tornado alley” from West Springfield to Southbridge, where bushes and young trees are now taking over from the

mature ones the tornado of 2011 wiped out.

Although dangerous to hikers, the tangled masses of downed trees in that strip are ideal, even necessary, habitat for some species. Wilder urges people to maintain smaller examples of such woodpiles on their land.

Creating the earlier, meadow stage can take some work. Wilder said Norcross removed all the trees in a few selected sites and mowed the grasses very low to give “native annuals and short-lived perennials” a chance to get started. Such succession takes years. In three or four, the first species “get out competed,” and long-lived perennials like goldenrod start to take over. Eventually, those give way to low bushes, then trees of various species.

At the end, Wilder took a few questions. One sought suggestions for challenging the common attitude that favors well-mowed “postage stamp” lawns.

Often, he said, people do favor habitat; they just need education. One way to do that can be to put up signs indicating the parcel is habitat, while mowing paths to show it’s “a purposeful thing,” he said.

“Leading by example is so important,” he added, noting people need to “see value in this kind of landscape.”

Similarly, ecology advocates can plant native wildflowers in visible public places with signs saying why they matter.

Regarding another question, Wilder noted they sometimes have to use herbicides to control invasives. One effective organic type on plants (but not roots) is horticultural vinegar, but he said that’s very caustic, requiring safety gear and a pesticide license to use. It’s far stronger than household vinegar, at 30 percent acid vs 5 percent, but has no long-term ecological impact.

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TOURNAMENT

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ty and the example they are setting for future leaders.”

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GOOD NEWS

Taking advantage of QCC’s presence in the South County Region

WORCESTER — A local Southbridge family has found a way to higher education thanks to Quinsigamond Community College’s presence in the Southbridge community.

QCC 2021 nursing graduates Cassara Casey and Kirstianna Ferschke are part of a large family who found their local community college to be just the resource they needed to obtain a higher education. Ms. Casey was the first to head to college in 2008, choosing QCC for its affordability and accessibility. Her sister Kaitlynn Ferschke followed suit, graduating in May 2016 with her associate degree in Early Childhood Education (ECE).

“Calissa is the second youngest and she starts this fall for ECE at QCC,” Ms. Casey said, adding, “My mom has also taken classes at QCC.”

Today, QCC at Southbridge is even closer to the communities it serves with its move in the summer of 2020 to a well-known and recognized central location, Southbridge High School.

“Broadening the footprint of QCC makes it more accessible not only Southbridge, but also to the surrounding communities. Also, by virtue of our location, Southbridge High School students can easily take part in QCC’s Early College Program,” said QCC

President Luis G. Pedraja, Ph.D.

Currently QCC is registering students for the fall semester. Students can set up appointments with a variety of offices through the QCC’s new Easy Queue (EZQ) system (www.QCC.edu/EZQ). This new system enables students to save time by joining virtual waiting rooms for the offices they need to meet with such offices as Admissions, Advising and Financial Aid. Through a text messaging system, students will receive reminders and wait time updates as their appointment gets closer, saving them time from waiting in a physical line. When a student’s appointment time is ready, they will receive notification and can then proceed to the designed office.

In addition to this new support service, QCC will continue to offer remote support services and online courses, as well as in-person services and courses beginning this fall.

“There are so many resources going to a community college. Ms. Casey said. “I like that QCC is more of a community.”

For more information about QCC, contact Josh Martin, Director of Institutional Communications at 508-854-7513 or jmartin@qcc.mass.edu.



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Friday’s Child

Hi! My name is Jayven and I like to play board games and football!

Jayven is an inquisitive boy of African-American and Hispanic descent. He loves board games and is always happy to play one, either with his friends or with an adult. Jayven also likes to be outside, and his favorite outdoor activity is playing football, which he is currently doing with Pop Warner Football. Jayven likes playing football so much that when he grows up, he would like to play for the NFL. Just in case he isn’t drafted, though, he is also considering careers as a detective or as a piano teacher. Jayven is currently doing well in school.

Legally freed for adoption, Jayven is looking for a loving and patient family of any constellation, with or without other children in the home. Jayven is very close with his young brother and has expressed a desire to be a role model for him. An ideal family for Jayven will be open to helping him maintain this relationship.

Jayven
Age 14

Who Can Adopt?

Can you provide the guidance, love and stability that a child needs? If you’re at least 18 years old, have a stable source of income, and room in your heart, you may be a perfect match to adopt a waiting child. Adoptive parents can be single, married, or partnered; experienced or not; renters or homeowners; LGBTQ singles and couples.

The process to adopt a child from foster care requires training, interviews, and home visits to determine if adoption is right for you, and if so, to help connect you with a child or sibling group that your family will be a good match for.

To learn more about adoption from foster care, call the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE) at 617-964-6273 or visit www.mareinc.org. The sooner you call, the sooner a waiting child will have a permanent place to call home.

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