

WILD ONES JOURNAL
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A VOICE FOR THE NATURAL
LANDSCAPING MOVEMENT



Photo by Bette Kauffman, Wild Ones Western Gulf Plain Chapter

A Message from Wild Ones Education and Program Coordinator



By Sara Rassing

In the cycle of seasons, spring is another season of change. Sure, you can see this in our gardens and landscapes, but as I write this, I'm reminded of the movie "Groundhog Day." This cinematic masterpiece uses the backdrop of an early spring day to explore themes of transformation and self-reflection, as the protagonist experiences change in a very literal sense through repeated days. As you will read in this issue of the Journal, transformation, movement and change are constant themes for Wild Ones.

Monarchs very literally embody transformation through metamorphosis. Read more in the latest installment of our butterfly and pollinator series, supported by Monarch Joint Venture, which can be found on [Page 10](#). Besa Schweitzer sheds light on the personal impact of tagging these remarkable insects with her mentor and the guidance of Monarch Watch, a community science initiative dedicated to the research, conservation and study of monarch butterflies.

Witness the subtle yet profound movements shaping our natural world, and incredible role ants play in the lifecycle of native wildflowers in "Ants are Superheroes in the World of Native Wildflowers" by Kim Strader, highlighted on [Page 30](#). Strader describes the symbiotic relationship between ants and plants, where ants, often unseen agents of change, help the movement and dispersal of seeds across forests and meadows.

On [Page 35](#), you will learn what it takes to be a "true" pollinator. A pollinator is an animal that moves pollen from the male anther of a flower to the female stigma of a flower. It is a process that is critical to species and ecosystem health and resilience.

And finally, you might notice a few changes in the Journal as well. In an effort to keep the Journal relevant and engaging for our readers, the scope and focus of the Journal has changed over time. Complete the [Journal Feedback Form](#) and help guide the direction. Members are always welcome to send their thoughts and comments to support@wildones.org. And finally, we are always looking for contributors. You can read more about the [submission guidelines on our website](#).

What happens with all this movement? Seeds spread, new flowers bloom and Wild Ones continues to reshape our own and others' minds about natural landscaping. And of course, as we all know, the beauty of native plant gardens and landscapes stems from their ever-changing nature.

P.S. For those that don't follow the tradition, Punxsutawney Phil's prediction this February indicates an early spring, so you can look forward to a change in weather coming to your area soon.

Sara is a biologist and administrator in higher education. She started part time at Wild Ones this past summer and supports the mission through her active involvement in the development, strategy, reporting and budgeting for programs such as the Lorrie Otto Seeds for Education Grants, Native Garden Designs, Wild for Monarchs, Wild Ones Journal and educational webinars.



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Established in 1977, Wild Ones is a national nonprofit organization of members who teach the benefits of growing native plants and work together to grow and restore natural landscapes. Wild Ones' definition of a native plant: A native plant is a species that occurs naturally in a particular region, ecosystem and/or habitat and was present prior to European settlement.

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“Perfection”

Standing tall against dark green blades, the freshly opened Louisiana blue iris (*Iris giganteaerulea*) is queen of the wild-flowers. Photo Contest submission

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Chapters share the bounty of native plants



Capital Region member Chris Burghart at SoBro, one of the first installation events where they arranged the large rocks and their chapter provided native plants. Photo by Kristi Shepler

Sharing plants and seeds is a great way to spread the word about native plants throughout any community. Here is how three Wild Ones chapters from different areas of the country — Capital Region NY, New York; St Louis, Missouri; and Front Range, Colorado — have fulfilled the mission to “connect people and native plants.”

Capital Region NY, New York

By Kristi Shepler

The Wild Ones [Capital Region NY \(New York\) Chapter](#) has successfully formed partnerships with established

organizations that help it share plants and seeds with others in their area. Some organizations have similar missions to Wild Ones, but the chapter found they don't have to be environmentally related to be effective.

An early partnership with the [Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center](#) helped the newer chapter reach the southern portion of its range. The nature center already had a successful native plant pre-sale and had low stock, so they asked the Wild

Ones chapter to bring plants, with their popular natives quickly selling out. The chapter reached about 200 people that first year and even more people the second year. Now the chapter has an official partnership including a Memorandum of Understanding that Wild Ones Wild Lawyers helped develop.

But that partnership rippled through other chapter events. With the nature center's help, the Capital Region NY Chapter was able to offer



More than 260 people participated in the Denver seed swap coordinated by the Front Range (Colorado) Chapter.

free native plants at the annual Capital Region Flower & Garden Expo, which attracted more than 17,000 visitors in three days. While the expo focuses on traditional gardening methods, it also includes an ecological landscaping demonstration garden, educational displays and some natural landscaping presentations. The Capital Region NY Chapter was so well received by attendees that they are doing it again in 2024!

The chapter's seed swap started small because of COVID restrictions with several members bringing in seeds while wearing masks and social distancing. But the seed swap has also expanded, doubling attendance yearly, thanks to additional partnerships.

Botanist Steve Young introduced chapter members to the New York

Flora Atlas (NYFA), teaching them how to identify plants native to New York. And with help of the NYFA and support from Young and the Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center, their seed swap has expanded into the annual Native Plant Celebration, which also offers native plant-inspired crafts and propagation methods.

The Capital Region NY Chapter also formed a partnership with the Schenectady Historical Society, which hosts the Festival of Trees, a month-long holiday event. Chapter members made decorations out of natural items at their Native Plant Celebration and then decorated a tree for the festival. It also gave them the opportunity to distribute 30 jars of native seeds promoting their chapter and mission.

A city that prioritizes sustainable

living, Saratoga is in the northernmost section of the chapter's range. The Capital Region NY Chapter partnered with SoBro Conservancy of Saratoga, a new local nonprofit, by donating native plants to their project. Converting an abandoned gas station lot on a busy intersection to a community garden demonstrates how beautiful native plants can be in any setting. The chapter also continues their work at Sustainable Saratoga's Pollinator Palooza event, giving the chapter another opportunity to sell plants and share their mission.

Front Range, Colorado

By Peggy Hanson

The Wild Ones Front Range (Colorado) Chapter has also been partnering with nonprofit organizations to host plant and seed swaps for several years. What was once a Front Range



Front Range (Colorado) Chapter volunteers collect seed to create a base inventory.

member activity quickly revealed itself as a wonderful public outreach opportunity to introduce people to native plants and give everyone access to a wider variety of native plants. Since increased access means more native plants in the landscape, chapter leaders made swap events a priority in their mission.

In 2023, the Front Range Chapter was a leading partner in two native plant swaps and several seed swaps along the Front Range, spanning about 200 miles south to north.

Last year 560 people attended their plant swaps and over 500 attended or participated in their seed swaps. In June, members and partner organizations grew or salvaged from gardens about 7,500 native plants to provide a base inventory at two swaps in Denver and Fort Collins.

In November 2023, they again partnered with nonprofit organizations to hold seed swaps in three cities along the Front Range: Denver, Colorado Springs and Fort Collins. The seed swaps had about 150 native species. Newcomers were welcomed and oriented on how to select seed and grow native plants for their gardens, while seasoned gardeners delighted in the wide selection to expand the colors, textures and variety of forage in their gardens. Community activists collected seed for community and school gardens to improve public spaces. It meant more natives in Front Range landscapes thanks to the amazing volunteers who filled 90 shifts to provide a base inventory of seed and plants, 50 shifts to clean seed and 60 shifts to promote and put on these free

events. Publishing a flyer and creating a Facebook event in advance of the swaps, as well as periodically posting on the preparations, teasers on inventory, etc., is very helpful in getting people interested and keeping the event on their radar and in their calendars.

Access to native plants is a major barrier in the Front Range as there are relatively few nurseries that carry a variety of native plants. The chapter's swaps provide a central location for people to obtain a variety of plants and seeds for free, as well as get resources to help them succeed in propagating or landscaping with them. The chapter continues to see an increase in attendance each year.

Another happy outcome of plant and seed swaps is the community building and education that takes



Members share plants at Wild Ones St. Louis (Missouri) Chapter garden gatherings.

place in a full-cycle process: plants lead to seeds lead to plants. The Front Range Chapter continues to leverage swap events and provide volunteer opportunities to help build a robust base inventory so swap participants needn't bring seeds or plants to take seeds or plants. Everyone is encouraged to plant extra seeds and grow them to share at future native plant swaps.

St Louis, Missouri

By Donna Short

The Wild Ones St. Louis (Missouri) Chapter has grown significantly in recent years as more people became aware of the importance of native plants. Often newcomers are stymied on where to start and the experienced are looking for something new. Sharing plants and seeds provides something tangible to start or expand their gardens.

Annual seed exchange

Over 100 native plant enthusiasts

gathered in November to share seeds. Though it's called an exchange it is not necessary to bring seeds to participate.

Kevin Mowery, who individually provided 320 packets of 46 varieties of native seeds, demonstrated how several everyday containers such as milk cartons, berry containers, water, soda, juice bottles, etc. can be re-used to successfully start seeds outdoors in the winter. The chapter also distributed some bulk packages of seeds for larger plantings. Chapter members were available to answer questions and make recommendations, while information sheets on the germination requirements of each seed type were also available. In total, more than 600 seed packets of over 75 native varieties of wildflowers and shrubs were distributed. The remaining seeds were donated to various free seed resource groups in the area.

Chapter members also gather

monthly and tour an area garden. A table is dedicated to plants brought in by members to share.

Community tabling events

The chapter provides information tables at community events such as seasonal festivals. Bareroot plant giveaways have been successful in attracting visitors to their table. The chapter displays a photo of the plant and recommendations for growing conditions. They've found that bare-root plants require minimal preparation and are easy to transport. Chapter members were alerted to a problem with jumping worms in the area a few years ago and they avoided spreading this problem by sharing bareroot plants or plants grown in potting soil.

Member Besa Schweitzer set up a Facebook page for plant and seed sharing and plant ID questions. The page has more than 8,000 members community-wide and covers a wide range of topics from techniques for eliminating invasives to landscaping ideas and material sources in addition to plant swaps and giveaways.

People make connections and make new friends when they visit for a swap or share their questions and concerns on the page, fostering a feeling of community. Often, it's a way to find native species that aren't available in stores. One person's surpluses may be a new gardener's starter plants, providing a way to enter the native landscaping movement without making an investment.

Annual seedling order

The Missouri Department of Conservation offers an annual order of bare root seedlings of many common native trees and shrubs, which they propagate. The minimum order is 10 seedlings of a species; we recognize that many home landscapes cannot accommodate so many plants of the same species. So our chapter places bulk orders based on member preferences. After members get first pick, we sell the surplus seedlings to the public.