

a voice  
for the natural  
landscaping  
movement



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For more information, or to join  
Wild Ones Natural Landscapers,  
here's how to reach us:

**Phone**

(920) 730-3986  
(877) 394-3954 (Toll-Free)

**Mail**

PO Box 1274  
Appleton, WI 54912-1274

**E-Mail**

ExecDirector@wildones.org

**WebSite**

www.wildones.org

Celebrating natives  
plant and natural  
landscapes  
since 1979.

## The Grapevine

By Maryann Whitman

### **Dandelion: Friend or foe?**

It seems that the lowly and much maligned, alien dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) does benefit the soil in which it grows. It prefers to root in decalcified, poor soil. Its strong taproot then breaks into the soil and, from below the hard pan, brings up calcium and other minerals, which become available to other plants when the dandelion dies. I suppose what this means is that you should compost the dandelions you pull, after removing the seed heads.

Dandelion seed, by the way, is somewhat different from most other seeds. It contains an asexually produced embryo that is a clone of the mother plant (you might say that you're killing the same plant over and over). Since the embryo is genetically identical to the mother plant, which survived and reproduced in a given region, the embryo stands a much greater chance of survival than might a sexually produced seed.

Members of the families Rosaceae and Asteraceae are also capable of this sort of reproduction, called apomixis, which is independent of fertilization. You can check this for yourself in Peter Raven's sixth edition of *Biology of Plants*.

### **Storing past issues**

What do you do with your old copies of the *Journal*? Do they end up in teetering piles on shelves, under your bed, or next to your favorite chair? I know some of you tenderly punch holes in them and store them for posterity in three-ring binders. But, do you find that in punching the holes you lose parts of some words, and find yourself wondering whether the word was (sp)eak, (st)eak, (str)eak, or (l)eak? You need suffer no more. Donna VanBuecken, our executive director, is working on making available to us (for a modest sum), attractive three-ring binders which contain special, thin magazine holders that will do away with the need to punch those pesky holes.

### **Gift memberships**

When the Oakland (MI) Chapter of Wild Ones started and didn't have much money in its treasury, someone suggested we "pay" guest speakers by giving them Wild Ones memberships. We still do that.

A Wild Ones membership also can be the perfect housewarming gift for a brand new homeowner. Or, if you've just sold a home which is naturally landscaped, how about leaving behind a Wild Ones membership (and *Journal* subscription) to encourage the new owners to maintain that natural yard.

Donna VanBuecken tells me that some of our members also use gift memberships as birthday or simply I'm-glad-you're-my-friend gifts. What a great idea!

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The Rock River Valley (IL) Chapter is developing a program for members' children and grandchildren. Here the "Wild Sprouts" take a break from learning all about seeds in April.

### Wild Sprouts

Kim Lowman Vollmer, the Kids' Committee Chair of the Rock River Valley (IL) Chapter sent us this inspiring bit of news. (The Rock River Valley Chapter has 134 urban, suburban, and rural member households.)

"Because children are our future and all too soon they will be in charge, it is important for them to have respect for and love of nature. As Wild Ones members we can help children become responsible protectors of earth.

"Therefore, it seems important to include children in nature activities. Last fall our chapter began this process when we had our first activity for members' kids, grandkids, and young friends. We had a wonderful time collecting seeds, learning about all the ways seeds travel, how to germinate them, and to identify new plants.

"Based on our initial success, we formed a Kids' Program Committee. In addition to educating and inspiring our own children and grandchildren, we hope to be a resource to other educators/organizations in our community.

"With Earth Day activities in the air we had our first Children's Activity for the year on April 28. On a cold blustery day we spent two hours hiking, investigating, learning, and enjoying nature with five enthusiastic four- and five-year olds. The children, with the help of

the adults, identified 25 species, most of them in bloom. Everyone had a great time and the kids all left with smiles.

"Up-coming activities include Binoculars-to-Berries in late June, Insect Investigation in August, and Seed Collecting in October. We may even attempt a community service/ stewardship project. Our young environmentalists are called the Wild Sprouts."

### Rescue or salvage?

A friend recently asked me this question: When we dig plants from a site about to be bulldozed, are we performing a rescue or a salvage operation?

He argued that if the plants are replanted in isolated places, never to communicate with another of their own kind, which is what we do when we plant them in most urban and many suburban gardens, it is a salvage operation.

On the other hand, if the plants are moved to a protected natural area, where they grow with other members of the same species and within a natural community, the genotype of the stand is enriched and the plants' life spans will be longer. This, he argued, is a true rescue.

What do you think?



Residents' condominiums overlook the savanna at the Evergreen Retirement Community in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

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### Local miracle under the oaks

One of the places where the Fox Valley Area (WI) Chapter meets is Evergreen Retirement Community, a non-profit, full-spectrum housing complex for the elderly in Oshkosh.

Along one side of the site is a lovely six-acre oak-hickory savanna. As most readers know, an oak-hickory savanna is a rare, ecosystem which is threatened around the globe. Some chapter members have worked hard to remove the invading buckthorn, releasing the shooting stars, wild geranium, fringed loosestrife, Michigan lily, starry Solomon's plume, wood violets, great blue lobelia, and other flora which are part of the natural community.



Delicate surprises, such as wild geranium have been found in the oak-hickory savanna adjacent to the retirement community.

The challenge now is to manage the buckthorn and remove as much of it as possible. In order to do this the savanna has been divided into smaller parcels that an

individual "steward" might adopt and manage. The idea is that many hands make light work and that a sense of ownership keeps a volunteer enthusiastic about a project. Stewards will work independently after training and will probably spend about 40 hours volunteering during this growing season. A sign in each area will name its particular steward.



Shooting star have also been found nearby.

Evergreen's management is very excited about and involved with this project. The area, which is too low to develop and borders Sawyer Creek for more than 1,000 feet, is open to the public and has paths through it.

For more information, please contact Steve Maassen at 920-233-5914, or [maassen@charter.net](mailto:maassen@charter.net). Steve serves as Seeds for Education Director on the Wild Ones Board of Directors.

Maryann is a member of the Oakland (MI) Chapter and the Journal's feature editor. To submit items, please contact Maryann at Wild Ones Journal, PO Box 231, Lake Orion, MI 48361 or [featuresedit@wildones.org](mailto:featuresedit@wildones.org).