

Wild Ones Question & Answer Game

St. Louis Earth Day Festival, 2010

by Francine Glass

How can we further our educational mission to focus more on public education? How can we promote membership during the 2010 Grow Wild Ones Campaign? These questions were the focus of a brainstorm session at the January, 2010 St. Louis Chapter Board of Directors meeting. One of my ideas was to participate in the 2010 St. Louis Earth Day Festival in Forest Park by hosting an educational booth and giving away native shrub seedlings from the Missouri Department of Conservation. I volunteered to research the event and organize the booth.

According to the festival website, the festival is the oldest and largest environmental event in the Midwest ; the 2009 festival featured 250 vendors/exhibitors and attracted 25,000 attendees. That's a lot of people to educate! And an ideal way to reach a large number of interested people in a few hours time.

After receiving approval from the chapter Board of Directors and completing the application process, I focused on how to attract some of the 25,000 attendees to our booth; how to engage them with our educational message. As a friend barnstormed with me, we concluded that in this type of event the best way to educate is by means of offering something visual, interactive and fun.

I wanted to visually teach the benefits of native plant landscaping, educate about the resources in our area, show what Wild Ones has to offer. I wondered how I could do so in a fun and interactive way. After much thought, the idea progressed to include posting colorful quiz answers for all to see while asking each booth passerby to draw one question card from a deck.

The festival day was cold and rainy. Who would come to an outdoor event on such a day? I was pleasantly surprised that despite the weather the event was well attended. People were attracted to our booth by the brightly colored "answers" on the table and the activity of members wrapping seedlings for individual give-aways. One of our members had made a lovely poster sized announcement of the upcoming Spring Wildflower Sale at Shaw Nature Reserve and another poster of Wild Ones chapter 2010 meetings. These along with our banner also attracted people and encouraged questions.

We asked each passerby if they would like to take our one-question quiz and win a shrub seedling. A photo of the shrub was on display. Many people said they wouldn't know the quiz answer, but when we told them the answers were displayed on the table, they laughed and wanted to participate. They were asked to pick a card from a deck of question cards. We helped some people find the answer. Many other participants were knowledgeable about native plant benefits. Those who were unfamiliar with native plants were interested to learn more.

One question was “name a benefit of growing native plants”. There were numerous correct answers to choose from including “flourish without fertilizer”, “contribute to biodiversity”, “conserve water—water only during establishment and drought”. Other questions included benefits of membership in Wild Ones; definitions of native plant, invasive species, rain garden; websites of our Wild Ones chapter, Shaw Nature Reserve, Grow Native!

Because the “answers” were posted in large black letters printed on yellow paper for all to see, one teacher joined Wild Ones on the spot because she saw the answer “mentors advise you”. She wanted someone to advise her starting a new native landscape at her school. Our chapter Vice President, who teaches in the same school district, offered to help. Although the goal of the event was to educate the public about native plants, we attracted a few new members as well.

Volunteers and attendees alike had fun with the quiz. It was an interactive way for us to promote environmentally sound landscaping practices, encourage biodiversity through the use of native plant landscaping. With the seedlings we handed out information which described the plant characteristics and required conditions. Listed also on the handout were three websites: www.stlwildones.org, www.grownative.org, and www.shawnature.org. We gave away 300 seedlings, interacted with approximately 500 participants. Not bad for a day’s work.

PICTURE	COMMON NAME(S)	SCIENTIFIC NAME	CLUE
PHOTO	Wild Columbine Rock Bells	<i>Aquilegia canadensis</i>	This flower can be pollinated only by creatures with long tongues such as hummingbirds, moths and butterflies.
PHOTO	Virginia Bluebells Oysterleaf	<i>Mertensia virginica</i>	This ephemeral disappears after it has finished blooming but reappears every spring. .
PHOTO	Purple Coneflower	<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>	Preparations of roots of this plant can be found in capsule and tincture forms at your local pharmacy. It is thought to enhance the immune system.
PHOTO	Rattlesnake Master	<i>Eryngium yuccifolium</i>	Its scientific name indicates that its foliage resembles yucca leaves .
PHOTO	Butterfly Milkweed Pleurisy Root	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	The brightly colored flowers of this plant are often surrounded by butterflies, bees and other insects.
PHOTO	Bottlebrush Grass	<i>Elymus hystrix</i>	The common name for this plant suggests is resemblance to a common kitchen utensil.
PHOTO	Obedient Plant False Dragonhead	<i>Physostegia virginiana</i>	The flowers are so obedient that they will remain in a new position when rotated around the stem.

