



# the Bluestem Banner



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Tallgrass Ontario

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*Tallgrass Ontario will identify and facilitate the conservation of tallgrass communities by coordinating programs and services to provide assistance to individuals, groups and agencies.*

**Tallgrass Ontario thanks:**

The Ontario Trillium Foundation,  
Habitat Stewardship Program,  
Endangered Species Recovery Fund,  
HIVA Environmental Fund,  
Ministry of Natural Resources,  
Environment Canada &  
Our members for their generous support.



*Kenesserie Tallgrass Prairie –Howard Township, Chatham-Kent*

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Go to [www.tallgrassontario.org](http://www.tallgrassontario.org) to download the Bluestem Banner in colour.

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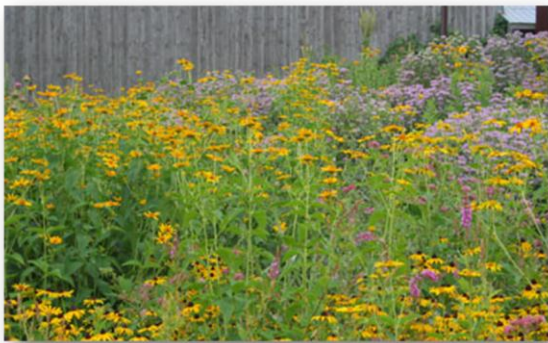
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### Planting for Bees –Carol Dunk

When you plant an apple tree or zucchinis, do you just assume you'll get fruit? Did it slip your mind that for fruit to appear, pollination must occur? No bees, no fruit.

Our native pollinators, the ones that pollinate your tomatoes and many other food plants are decreasing across North America and around the world. Pesticides and disease are possible causes, but one of the biggest causes is loss of habitat. Gardeners everywhere have been spurred into action to help native bees. They're creating habitat by planting for bees in their gardens, in vacant lots, in community gardens, among their crops, and along roadsides.

Your garden can become a haven for bees by providing a source of nectar and pollen, the primary needs of bees.



Photos courtesy Carol Dunk

The plants you choose to put into your garden are important to bees. Did you know that many of our "must haves" or favourite garden plants are highly hybridized and not at all attractive to bees?

Hybridizers often sacrifice the nectar and pollen qualities of a plant for more petals, a different shape or size and different colours. Those nifty new plants we buy may have very little bee appeal.

Our Ontario native plants, on the other hand, have been here for thousands of years, and our bees are accustomed to them. Some native bees are so choosy that they won't go near a non-native plant; others are willing to give some non-natives a try. You probably know of one or two non-native plants that you already have that are bee magnets, but on the whole native bees prefer native plants.

The native Ontario plants you put in your garden will be far and away bee favourites. Does this mean that you should give up your favourite hybridized plants and plant only natives to

accommodate bees? Emphatically NO! A great idea is to intersperse natives with your other plants or to set aside a part of your garden for native plants only.



When you plant for native bees, you will want to provide sources of nectar and pollen from early spring to late fall. This is a bit of a challenge, but there is lots of information on the web and in reference material to help you choose bee plants by season.

Here's a start. For spring plant a flowering shrub such as New Jersey Tea or Chokecherry. Wild strawberry, rock cress and muscari are good early spring sources of pollen. Summer is the easiest season to cover. In summer include such plants as Liatrus and Helenium. Almost all the composite flowers are bee bait. In Fall, you might choose Joe-Pye-Weed, Goldenrods and Asters.

Your native garden needn't be a "duty" patch. It will evolve into a beautiful component of your garden. So this year begin your bee planting. Step one is to realize the need and to establish the will to garden for bees. But I warn you, once you start planting for bees, you will find it hard to stop. Caring for bees is addictive.

You can start your native plants from seeds purchased from Tallgrass Ontario. Visit our website and see the excellent selection of seeds gleaned from wildflowers here in Ontario.

[http://www.tallgrassontario.org/seed\\_packets.html](http://www.tallgrassontario.org/seed_packets.html) or pollinator mixes

[http://www.tallgrassontario.org/pollinator\\_packets.html](http://www.tallgrassontario.org/pollinator_packets.html)

*Carol Dunk is a member of the Board of Directors at Tallgrass Ontario.*

Please visit the Tallgrass Ontario web site at <http://www.tallgrassontario.org/index.html>

We provide comprehensive information about the creation and care of tallgrass prairie - how to plant, establish and maintain and information on Ontario native plants.

**Pollinator Packs:** Please help our bees. The pollinator crisis is caused in part by loss of habitat and lack of floral diversity. You can make a difference by planting native bee friendly flowers in your garden and encouraging your friends to do so as well.

**Support Monarch Butterflies – Buy a TgO Pollinator Pack today**

**TALLGRASS ONTARIO SELLS POLLINATOR SEED PACKS –INDIVIDUAL SPECIES OR SPECIES MIXES. PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE AND PLACE YOUR ORDER ON-LINE.**



#### **Tallgrass Ontario's Goals**

1. Ensure Organizational Capacity;
2. Facilitate the creation and restoration of tall grass communities;
3. Increase public awareness and stewardship of tall grass communities;
4. Identify and secure existing and potential tallgrass communities across the province;
5. Promote research and knowledge transfer of tall grass communities.

#### **Membership**

**Tall Grass Ontario is always actively seeking individuals that would like to learn the roles of a board of director and work to achieve a position on the board.**

**The first step in the TGO volunteer path is to become a member. A General Membership is \$20 per calendar year, a Student Membership is \$10.00 annually and a Lifetime Membership is \$100.00. All memberships entitle the member to voting rights in the organization.**

**You can donate to Tallgrass Ontario by visiting [CanadaHelps.org](http://CanadaHelps.org). You can become a member by visiting our website at <http://www.tallgrassontario.org/memberships.html>**



### Planting a Pollinator Packet: A Journal and Guide –Leo Lepiano

After introducing a Swamp Milkweed plant (*Asclepius incarnate*) to my front garden four summers ago and watching as butterflies and bees picked it out from amongst the other non-native and ornamental plants as their preferred destination, I was convinced that the whole garden should be native species. However, it was not until I came across Tallgrass Ontario and their Pollinator Packets last year that I had a way to put my plan into action. At the beginning of 2013 I ordered a packet for my front garden, and, inspired by this choice my mom shortly purchased her own packet to plant on a friend's property in the Caledon region of south-central Ontario. Our experience with the two plantings was very positive (the Caledon property was planted on May 7th, and my Toronto property about two weeks later). We did not know what to expect, or really what we were doing, so we had quite an education watching worrying and delighting as the Spring and Summer went by. As the TGO website states "root systems must develop before the plant grows", and we were not expecting any flowers in the first year. As you will see, a few species gave us a pleasant surprise.

My experience prompted me to write this article, really a journal of observations as well as a guide, to both encourage and help those who think they may like to do a TGO Pollinator Pack planting of their own.

**Advice on planting\*:** do not let the small size of many of the seeds fool you, the pollinator packets provide ample seed to cover the areas that **the TGO website suggests**. Many of these species not only reach great heights, but also cluster into large clumps requiring lateral space. The space allowed by my front garden was quite a bit smaller than the packet was designed for, and though the planting has been a success I've had to deal with overcrowding; expanding my garden and moving plants to new spaces at the end of September (and likely again in the Spring). Though transplanting is possible with some of the species, it is not desirable for any of them since they put a lot of their energy during their first years into developing their root systems. Some species, like *Desmodium canadense* grow impressive taproots that are very difficult to extract without damage.

A second, and related piece of advice for planting the seed is to mix it "with sand or wheat bran." This **advice is already given on the TGO website**, and my own experience attests to its importance. Broadcasting by hand is just too uneven if done without mixing the seed, resulting in dense patches of growth where plants choke each other out. As for competition from weeds, I will spend some time talking about that later.

\*My planting experience is with garden plots that could be easily cleared of existing plants. For any large scale, non garden-plot planting you should seek advice and assistance from Tallgrass Ontario.



Above: *Desmodium canadense* at three stages of its development (June 25, July 9th and August 27th).

**Showy Tick Trefoil, *Desmodium canadense*:** This was an especially interesting plant to watch because of how much its appearance altered over the course of the summer. The first true leaves of Showy Tick Trefoil are not conducive to immediate recognition; they emerge individually (and not in threes as the name trefoil suggests) and are circular (orbicular). As the plant ages, the structure of the leaves changes; they begin to emerge in the familiar grouping of three, and their shape transforms from orbicular to lanceolate (see photos above)



In the larger garden, where there was less competition for light, we were rewarded in early September when a few of the *Desmodium canadense* made it to flower (see photo at left).

**Common Evening Primrose, *Oenothera biennis*:** This species provided another welcome surprise. As well as germinating prolifically (the most abundant species in both gardens), in contradiction to the specific name (*biennis*, as in biennial) and the literature, all but a few of our plants of this species in both gardens grew beyond the rosette stage, putting up large stalks laden with flowers despite it being their first year. Perhaps this was due to a frost after the seeds had germinated, tricking the plant into thinking it was in its second year. Whatever the reason the four-petaled yellow flowers were a welcome surprise from when they first appeared in late July through the last blooms in October.

Along with pollinators the *Oenothera biennis* attracted the unwelcome Japanese Beetle (*Popillia japonica*), which began skeletonizing the foliage (to little visible effect and no consequence to the plants), we got a lot of pleasure watching these blossoms spring open on warm summer evenings as well as the accompanying aroma. With any luck if the *Popillia japonica* return next year some of their predators, like the anchor bugs, will join the growing

community of our pollinator-patches.



Above left to right: An *Oenothera biennis* on August 30th; A bee enjoys a blossom on September 18th; A young *Oenothera biennis* growing beyond the rosette stage, June 25th. Notice the distinctive pinkish-white midribs.

**Tall Coreopsis, *Coreopsis tripteris*/Lance-leaved Coreopsis, *Coreopsis lanceolata*:** I have grouped these two members of the *Coreopsis* genus together because in my experience their positive identification was dependent on one another. Since the basal rosettes and the leaves are quite similar, it's not until the *tripteris* plants developed more of a structure that I was able to tell the two species apart. Both species of *Coreopsis* develop some leaves that are tripartite; however, the three parted leaves of *Coreopsis lanceolata* are close to hastate, the bottom two parts forming a horizontal cross (like the hilt of a sword or some lances) to the vertical middle leaf, itself lanceolate. These leaves appear within the first few weeks of the seedlings' growth. In contrast, *Coreopsis tripteris* tripartite leaves are more like three individual leaflets (rather than lobes) reminiscent in shape to a bird's foot, and appear after the plant has achieved more of its vertical structure. Note that some of the leaves on *Ratibida pinnata* can be very similar to *Coreopsis tripteris*, but some will have more than three (often five or six) lobes. As expected, neither species in the genus *Coreopsis* flowered in the first year.



Comparison of the tripartite leaves of *Coreopsis lanceolata* (above left) and *Coreopsis tripteris* (above right).

**Roundhead Bushclover, *Lespedeza capitata*:** Though (as expected) none of the *Lespedeza capitata* planted made it to flower in the first year, their first year growth was noticeable and attractive. Unlike the *Desmodium canadense*, the *Lespedeza* displayed their distinctive three leaved arrangement (resembling many species in Legume family) from their very first true leaves. The young plants were lost to sight amidst the taller species as the summer went on (they could still be seen if plants were moved), but with any luck their root systems are strong enough to ensure that in years to come Roundhead Bushclover will add its beautiful white and red/purple inflorescences to our pollinator-patches.



Far left: The structure of the young plant, with its alternately arranged leaves.  
Left: the distinctive three-leaved arrangement of *Lespedeza capitata*.  
(Both taken on June 25th).

*This article will be continued in the next edition of the Bluestem Banner. Please check back for more photos and to find out what other species produced flowers in their first season!*

*Leo Lepiano is a member of Tallgrass Ontario and resides in Toronto*