



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:

Habitat Stewardship Program, Endangered Species Recovery Fund, Land Stewardship and Habitat Restoration Program, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Environment Canada, & Our members for their generous support.



Compass Plant (Silphium laciniatum)

Go to www.tallgrassontario.org to download the Bluestem Banner in colour.

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Shifting the Paradigm – Bringing Native Plants into Our Urban Landscape- Dan Stewart

It is well established that our province is home to an immense variety of indigenous plant life. Ontario is home to wildflowers of myriad colours, shapes and sizes, tall swaying grasses and broad shade-giving trees. Compared to their non-native counterparts, native plants provide preferred habitat for wildlife including pollinators (with which they have co-evolved) and have immeasurable value as part of regional and global biodiversity. Readers of the Bluestem Banner know that tallgrass prairie and oak savanna are rare native ecosystems in Ontario and represent an important component of the landscape's pre-settlement legacy. Given a look at our modern streetscapes and parklands, one may notice the comparative lack of native vegetation within our settled areas. Why plant non-native Norway Maple (*Acer platanoides*), Silvergrass (*Miscanthus sp.*), and Ox-eye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) instead of comparable native species like Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*), Big Bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), and Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*)? Many have been asking similar questions, and on March 7th, 2018 forerunners of Ontario's horticulture sector convened to discuss the status of native plants in the marketplace and strategies for increasing awareness and enthusiasm for planting native species in urban gardens, parks, and streetscapes.



Megan Leslie (President & CEO of WWF Canada) provides introductory remarks (Photo: Pete Ewins, WWF Canada)

The *Shifting the Paradigm Forum* hosted by the Carolinian Canada Coalition and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Canada, an all-day event at St. James Cathedral Centre in Toronto, was well-attended by a mix of professionals from landscaping/horticulture, ecology, urban planning, First Nations, and investment/finance backgrounds. The diverse set of attendees spurred lively discussion on four panels held that day addressing topics such as obstacles to the native plant supply chain, challenges in converting attitudes/awareness of native plants, and opportunities for investment in the native plant industry.

There is no shortage of challenges facing native plant nurseries in the province. Attitudes toward horticulture are often deeply held and personal, and as such gardeners are most likely to continue to cultivate the same plants over their lifetimes and pass those beliefs on to the next generation. The complications that may accompany learning how to properly cultivate new plants can be enough to discourage exploration in gardening with native species. Additionally, gardeners are not always educated about which plants are considered native or non-native. Although one may have an interest in native gardening (especially in the context of habitat for pollinators, which seemed to be a trending topic at the forum), frequently people do not know where to start.

To this end there were several interesting ideas from the panelists. Tony DiGiovanni (Executive Director, Landscape Ontario) suggested that encouraging "fusion gardening" may be a reasonable method of converting the public to native plants. This involves introducing native wildflowers among more traditional non-native species as a means of gradually increasing exposure to native plants without overwhelming skeptical gardeners. It was also suggested by Patricia Landry (Parks Programming Officer, City of Toronto), that with proper marketing and signage it can be made clear to the consumer which plants are native. Additional information such as benefitting pollinators and photos of the plant at flowering time can also generate interest. The idea of commercial nurseries featuring an exclusive native plant section, similar

to how a supermarket features an “organics” section, seemed particularly well received by the audience.

Perhaps the centrepiece of the day was the second panel populated with owners of native plant nurseries themselves, moderated by gardening guru Lorraine Johnson (author of *100 Easy-to-grow Native Plants*). Many of the discussion topics were prefaced by Allan Arthur (owner of St. Williams Nursery & Ecology Centre) who as a keynote speaker and operator of the largest native plant nursery in the province, provided a detailed overview of the state of the native plant industry earlier in the day. The conversation largely focused on the logistical challenges in anticipating demand within a relatively small sector (roughly 10% of the horticulture sector, according to Arthur), and particularly the resulting strain on small-scale operators. Native plant seed often needs to be collected from wild populations and then cultivated, re-planted, and grown again (sometimes for several cycles) to sufficiently scale stock for market. As a result, there can be a lag of up to a few years between the initial demand and availability of adequate supply, however the lifespan of a market trend can be much shorter than this period of time.

Vic Bernyk (Native Trees and Plants) shared a story about a colleague who one year rapidly sold his entire supply of Southern Blue Flag Iris (*Iris virginica*) because the species had been featured in a home and garden magazine. To meet demand, he greatly increased his Southern Blue Flag Iris stock for the following year, only to struggle selling the product as the trend had ended as abruptly as it had begun. For small, independent operators (all members of this panel), such losses can be detrimental to the bottom line. Generating consistent demand for native plants may be remedied by widespread use in urban contexts, however achieving that widespread distribution requires a supplier’s potentially risky investment in additional stock – a “chicken-and-egg” scenario indeed.



Tony DiGiovanni (Executive Director, Landscape Ontario) speaks at the forum’s first panel (Photo: Pete Ewins, WWF Canada)

Based on the day’s discussions it was clear among the converted that an urbanscape at least partially consisting of native wildflowers, grasses, and trees is a feasible goal. It was acknowledged that in some locales such as boulevards and parking lots, environmental challenges like salt spray and wind exposure may forever preclude most native plants, however it was agreed that beyond these harshest places there are major opportunities for native species. The horticulture and investment sectors showed interest in improving market demand for native plants, and certainly in supporting a fully-fledged native plant industry once consistent demand is established. Andre Vashist (VERGE Capital) and Matthias Pries (MaRS Centre for Impact Investing) sat on the first and third panels (respectively) and demonstrated open minds toward investment and acceleration of native plant businesses where opportunities exist. An investors’ (“social finance”) reception was held after the main forum to extend financing discussions among attendees with entrepreneurial interest. With horticulture, ecology, planning, First Nations, and investment backgrounds converging in one room, the sense of momentum for the native plant cause was palpable.

Opening and closing thoughts were provided by Dr. Dan Longboat (Roronhiakewen (He Clears the Sky)), Associate Professor and Director of the Indigenous Environmental Studies and Science Program, Trent University), who took time to reflect on the crossroads we are facing as a society in the face of environmental crisis. In quoting an elder from British Columbia, Dr. Longboat remarked “If you’re going to live here,

live here like you're going to stay", which felt like an encompassing sentiment for the forum's discussions. At that moment it felt possible that native plant gardening could be a small part of a larger movement toward keeping our planet a sustainable place to live.

Dan Stuart is a Terrestrial Ecologist with Azimuth Environmental Consulting, Inc. in Barrie, Ontario. Dan is the Past-President of Tallgrass Ontario and a member of the Board of Directors.



Prescribed Burn Training Opportunities

Tallgrass Ontario is providing an **email network** to communicate with interested qualified Low Complexity Prescribed Burn Workers (RX100). Information will be **shared** about **upcoming P.B.s** and additional training opportunities.

If you are an L.C.P.B Worker, or know of someone who is, **email Tom Purdy** at info@tallgrassontario.org with a valid email address.



 A background image of a prairie field with yellow Black-eyed Susans and orange Gaillardia flowers.

*Give the gift
of a Prairie...*

All donors will receive a Charitable Tax Receipt

...visit the Tallgrass Ontario Donation Page at ...

www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/tallgrass-ontario/

Compass Plant- Photo left and on page 1 taken at Kenesserie Tallgrass Prairie, Chatham-Kent.

This flowering plant is in the Aster family and is native to Ontario. "The common name *compass plant* was inspired by the "compass orientation" of its leaves. This orientation reduces the amount of solar radiation hitting the leaf surface. Vertical leaves facing east-west have higher water use efficiency than horizontal or north-south-facing blades". This adaptation provides advantages in dry soils. This plant is visited by pollinating insects including several specialist feeders of compass plant.

The specimen on the left reached a height of 9 feet. Note the unusual leaf shape at the bottom of the photo.

For more information about Ontario native plants and Tallgrass Prairie, see our website <http://www.tallgrassontario.org/index.html>

The Bluestem Banner is published 4 times per year by Tallgrass Ontario. The next edition will appear in September.



A message from the President



Tallgrass Ontario is a leader in restoring and protecting rare grasslands across Southern Ontario. We work with landowners, foundations, municipalities, provincial and federal funding agencies to provide habitat management services and to improve Tallgrass Prairie ecosystems. Information about our efforts can be [found on our website](#).

In the three-year period ending in 2015 we provided hands-on maintenance on 43 privately-owned grassland sites in Southern Ontario. In 2018 Tallgrass Ontario has 4 projects in progress focusing on maintaining existing grassland in a healthy state, protecting rare plants such as *Bird's foot violet* and *Slender bush clover* and enhancing habitat for pollinating insects including Monarch butterflies.

Please consider donating to Tallgrass Ontario. Your donation will support:

- ❖ Updating our recovery plan which will assist TgO in protecting and restoring more remnant prairies in Southern Ontario,
- ❖ Production of information booklets supplied for events and meetings to educate the public about the rarity of these ecosystems and the steps required to protect them,
- ❖ Boots-on-the-ground maintenance to ensure grasslands and savannahs remain healthy. This work includes prescribed burning, invasive species removal, control of competing native vegetation, enlargement of remnant tallgrass areas, mowing of sites where prescribed burning is not possible and other management activities.

Tallgrass Ontario is an all-volunteer organization which relies on member donations and government grants to carry out our important work. Our administration costs are among the lowest of Canadian environmental charities.

Your donation in any amount is greatly appreciated. Together we can make a difference restoring grasslands where they are in decline and maintaining them where they are still found. By donating you will be helping our efforts to restore and protect these rare landscapes.

Donating is easy – go on-line to our website and donate at Canada Helps at <http://www.tallgrassontario.org/> . The Canada Helps button is on the upper right side of our home page.

Sincerely,
Steve Rankin
President, Tallgrass Ontario



Become a Member

Tallgrass Ontario's Goals

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

Membership

Tallgrass Ontario is always actively seeking individuals who would like to learn the roles of a TgO Board member and work to achieve a position on the TgO 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.

Tallgrass Ontario is a Registered Canadian Charity. You can donate to **Tallgrass Ontario** by visiting <https://www.canadahelps.org/dn/13376>

You can become a member by visiting our website at: <http://www.tallgrassontario.org/memberships.html>

