



# What's Growing On? The Fletcher Wildlife Garden Newsletter

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## Anatomy of a Plant Sale

*The main source of funds for FWG, learn how our plant sale operates from start to finish.*

Every first Saturday in June, people descend on the usually quiet parking lot of the Interpretation Centre. Their goal: invite more pollinators, birds and native fauna to their homes by using native plants. Indeed, the FWG plant sale is one of the best sources of native plant species in the Valley and one of the few that uses seeds collected from our growing and biotic region.

Every summer and fall, we collect seeds from our own garden and woodlands. Most native plants NEED winter to germinate, so we simulate the cold temperatures by placing them in baggies with vermiculite—a natural substance that holds moisture to keep seeds hydrated. We then pop them into the refrigerator until early spring!

In March, the seeds and vermiculite go into containers to germinate at room temperature indoors. Each little seedling is then carefully placed into a cell filled with potting soil, and placed beneath lights to simulate longer days—we do need to speed up the process! The plants stay in cells until they are large enough for transplanting into pots. We use a mix of potting soil and topsoil to get them used to the more “difficult” conditions of natural soil! This potting is a lot of work as there are so many plants and each one must be gently tucked in just so.

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Collecting seed!



### Contact Us!

FLETCHER WILDLIFE GARDEN

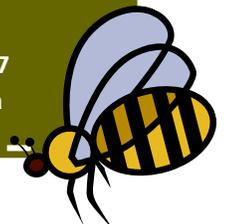
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**FWG IS ENTIRELY MAINTAINED BY VOLUNTEERS, AND WE NEED MORE HELP! PLEASE JOIN US TUESDAY MORNING, WEDNESDAY EVE OR FRIDAY MORNING! MAKE IT REGULAR OR ONCE AND AWHILE - WE WOULD LOVE TO SEE YOU!**

## Plant Sale, cont'd.

We ensure that flats are labelled and, then, depending on weather, they either go back on to light tables or outside into the nursery. We have to protect them from little animals hunting for extra snacks and keep them watered. We also pot up bare root shrubs and trees to grow, sell or use around Fletcher.

On sale day, volunteers set up the site and move out the plants, and everyone pitches in for the manic 3 hours of selling, garden tours and traffic direction. The money we make from the sale is all used for the Fletcher Wildlife Garden projects.

But the work never stops—already we are collecting seeds for next year and hoping everything germinates. See you next spring!

### POT DONATIONS

AT FWG, WE ONLY USE 4" SQUARE POTS AND LARGE, ROUND BLACK POTS FOR SHRUBS OR TREES. WE ALSO USE NURSERY TRAYS.

ANYTHING ELSE CAN BE RECYCLED AT A LOBLAWS STORE!



## WANTED: Items FWG Could Use!

The Butterfly Meadow Group is looking for used pool liners for their work. Contact: [dlepagehibou@sympatico.ca](mailto:dlepagehibou@sympatico.ca)

We ALWAYS need more volunteers! Flexible hours, duties and levels of exertion. Be it a family day or a solo operation! Join a group or bring friends for a one-off bee. Mail us: [fletcher@ofnc.ca](mailto:fletcher@ofnc.ca)

**\*\*\* WE STILL HAVE PLANTS FOR SALE! CHECK THE INVENTORY LIST ON OUR WEBSITE AND CONTACT [FLETCHER@OFNC.CA](mailto:FLETCHER@OFNC.CA) WITH YOUR ORDER AND WHEN YOU CAN COME BY TO PICK THEM UP. EACH POT IS 3\$. \*\*\***



Volunteers spend several days potting up transplants. Each session is 3 hours long. It can take a single person almost an hour to pot up an entire flat of cells! Mixing soil, wetting it to the correct consistency, filling pots, extracting plants from cells and planting them properly, watering, labeling and then on to the next tray!



Our upper nursery is in serious disrepair but still provides wonderful service. We use a shade cloth to protect our wee plants, as direct sun can be too stressful while they produce more roots. We have to contend with chipmunks, rabbits and other visitors who think we have laid on quite the buffet! We have no automatic watering system yet, so volunteers must come in regularly to ensure nobody gets too parched!



But at the end of day, seeing all these wonderful plants ready to go out and create new native habitat is heartening! All we need to do now is encourage people not to judge our little friends on their size and funny names—like Hairy Beardtongue, Sneezeweed or Figwort!



## For Sale!

We have two beautiful, backyard birdfeeders for sale to raise funds for FWG! Hand-made by Mr Gord Belyea, they are finished and painted recycled wood—with a special rough perch specially for bird feet! We use these feeders around the FWG, and the chickadees certainly approve! Each is selling for \$30; if interested, please contact us at [fletcher@ofnc.ca](mailto:fletcher@ofnc.ca).



## Science Corner: Chatty Plants



*So then I said, . . .*

Do you talk to your houseplants and curse the weeds in your garden? What do you think they might be saying in response? Scientists are gradually learning that what seemed the realm of science fiction could be science fact: plants communicate in their own language. Ian Baldwin, a researcher at the Max Planck Institute in Germany, and his team learned that the wild tobacco plant, *Nicotiana attenuata*, has its own vocabulary of hormone-like exudates – small ribonucleic acids (smRNA). The exudates changed in response to stimuli, such that after an insect attack the plant regulated defence genes differently and attracted the attacking insects' own predators. Nearby plants of the same species picked up on the hormonal cues and were able to respond similarly.

Plants also recognize themselves, siblings and other species, changing their root structure or growth pattern in response. A 2007 McMaster University experiment found that the Great Lakes sea rocket, a beach weed, grew normally when surrounded by other sea rockets. However, when growing near other species it would develop a more extensive root system and steal all available resources, forcing a die-off in neighbours. More recently, a joint 2010 University of Delaware/McMaster University study reinforced these findings with a different plant, *Arabidopsis thaliana*. Able to recognize its own roots, those of kin and those of strangers and mediate its root development accordingly, *A. thaliana* needed to actively secrete exudates to accomplish this communication.

Now, if we could only figure out how to say "GO AWAY!" in Dog Strangling Vine...

## Activity: DSV Clearing



The Tuesday Invasive Species Group has been hard at work cutting down Dog Strangling Vine/Pale Swallowwort near the red barn. This year, the DSV seems particularly aggressive and dense—from a Yorkie swallower to Great Dane devourer! The best time to cut is when it is in fruit, but there is so much this year anything is better than nothing to slow it down. Since the roots remain, it will grow back, but at least this patch won't seed. If you can help AT ALL with DSV control, PLEASE contact us. It takes many person hours to slice and dice. Drop a line: [fletcher@ofnc.ca](mailto:fletcher@ofnc.ca) or come Tuesdays at 9:30 am.

## Nature Notes: In Bloom

This lupine, photographed by Christine in the Butterfly Meadow, is not native. But lupines attract a wide variety of pollinators and flower earlier than many native meadow plants, adding some welcome colour to the garden. You can also find them in our Back Yard Garden, where they self seed profusely in the Heritage Bed.



## Nature Notes: Bug of the Month



These male and female crab spiders (*Misumena vatia*) were found on a Highbush Cranberry (*Viburnum trilobum*) in the Butterfly Meadow. Males of this species are rarely seen, and you can see why! They are minute. Yes, that is the male on the abdomen of the female! The female measures about 8-10 mm, while the male is 3-4 mm. When Christine first saw the female, she thought she had a speck of dirt on her back, the male looked that tiny. Only when she took a shot and then reviewed the image in the camera did she realise she was looking at a mating pair!

## Nature Notes: Bird of the Month



Many birds are nesting now. Tree swallows have chosen their nest boxes, as have some chickadees. Song sparrows and yellow warblers are also nesting or building nests at present.

Please stay on the trails and keep your dogs from running into the high grass—help our broody bird friends and their offspring enjoy the FWG as much as we do!

## Nature Notes: Critter of the Month

This beautiful adult fox was observed by Ben Mancini at the garden on June 2nd. Diane also saw a fox in the same general location. Our PriceWaterhouseCooper volunteers also had the treat seeing a fox near the butterfly meadow while sifting soil for DSV. That is good news, as foxes haven't been quite as common at FWG as they were a few years ago. (Photo B. Mancini)



## Knowledge Note: Using Native Plants Effectively in Plantings

A solitary native plant can look raggedy and like a weed—their beauty to the casual observer and their power to attract wildlife comes in numbers. At the plant sale, some people reacted to this suggestion like we were trying to make an extra buck, but you only need to visit the Backyard Garden for proof—the patch of Golden Alexander is a strong green focus, while the Pearly Everlasting or Pussytoes would look simply silly with one plant. Native plants can also take time to get established before taking off or spreading, so you may be stuck with a scraggly token to nature longer than bargained for!

The cluster principle is the same even for traditional ornamentals—just look at any new commercial development and how odd the beds appear with all that space between plants. People often think plants will expand more than they ever do. So, for a lush garden, accept that you'll likely need to plant more! Remember, you can always donate excess back to FWG for the plant sale, years later.