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Seeing the Forest for the Shrubs

By Dena Serrato, *Certified Green Industry Landscape Designer*

When most people think about the native plants of Tenhave Woods, the majestic oak, maple and beech trees may come to mind, or perhaps they think about the beautiful display of spring wildflowers. My personal favorite plants are the ones that grow in between the trees and flowers; the diverse community of beautiful native shrubs and small trees. I love walking under the arching branches of common witch-hazel, enjoying the pretty flower and berry clusters of viburnums and dogwoods, and marveling at the amazing blaze of fall color on the sassafras and sumac. I remember, a few years ago, taking a walk along the Swamp trail on a fall afternoon. I noticed a medium-sized shrub with bright red berries and shiny leaves. It was a plant I had not seen in Tenhave before, and then I realized that it was Michigan holly. It was a surprise because it was not on our Flora list, so I contacted Bob Muller with my discovery. After verifying my find, we speculated that it had always been there, but started to flourish only after the ash trees had fallen and exposed it to more sunlight.

No matter what the season, native shrubs and small trees ("native woodies") are full of delight and discovery. Every natural plant community in Michigan has its different woody plants that are adapted to the unique growing conditions of its unique environment. By providing food, shelter and places to raise young, they are vital to the health of the native insects and animals of every habitat.

I first started learning about the role they play in nature shortly after I bought my home in Royal Oak in 1995. I live in the Vinsetta Park sub and am blessed with a 1/3 acre lot. I decided that I wanted to create a Backyard Wildlife Habitat certified by the National Wildlife Federation (NWF). I started by taking classes in Ecological Gardening offered by Southeastern Oakland County Water Authority (SOCWA) and Michigan State University Extension. I quickly found out that native woodies are some of the most beneficial and beautiful plants a gardener can have. Being the plant-obsessed gardener that I am, I set out to fill my yard with as many different native woodies as I could. All these years later,

I now have established my own NWF certified habitat with close to 50 varieties of trees and shrubs native to Michigan and to the northern half of the eastern United States. Everything ranging from low sweet blueberry that only grows to one foot high with fruit that I have to fight the squirrels for, to a large thicket of purple flowering raspberry with rose-like blooms and sugar maple-sized leaves, to a species of special concern in Michigan, dwarf hackberry, have become established and are thriving.

I am a professional landscape designer and often include native woodies in my landscape plans. Most of my clients are not aware of their benefits, but once I explain their aesthetic beauty and versatility, they welcome the addition. In fact, some of the most popular landscape plants are mass-produced cultivated varieties (cultivars) derived from native plants such as flowering and red-osier dogwood, redbud, sugar maple, serviceberry, and smooth hydrangea. One of the things I like about them is that native plants in general can thrive in difficult site conditions such as dry shade or wet sun, so long as you match the right plant to the right place. A backyard where grass can't grow under the dense shade of maple trees can be transformed into a garden full of color, texture and four-season interest. For example, I have fragrant sumac, American bittersweet and Virginia creeper vines, common snowberry, red-berried elder, and maple leaf viburnum growing under the shallow-rooted Norway maples on my property. On the other hand, some of my clients in Ferndale and Pleasant Ridge have yards with the sandiest of soils and full sun. Native woodies that would work in such conditions include eastern red cedar, wafer ash, American hazelnut, chokecherry and sweet-fern. A sunny but soggy backyard could be planted with black chokeberry, Michigan holly, black currant, buttonbush and red-osier dogwood.

By now I am sure that you may have questions about native woodies, the plant communities they inhabit, and how to successfully grow them in your yard. The first step is to learn as much as possible about them in order to understand which plants are truly native to our area, and

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how to include them in a residential setting. For resource information please see page 3.

Perhaps the most compelling argument for growing native plants is that it is our responsibility to wildlife and to the environment. Urban sprawl has destroyed most of the wild places in our region, so now our yards must become the new wild places. Birds not only eat seeds, nuts and berries, they also eat the insects that feed on woody plants, and build their nests in the canopy. Many native woodies are the host plants for native insects (where they lay their eggs). Prickly ash, spicebush, and wafer ash are some of the plants that our beautiful native Swallowtail butterfly caterpillars feed on. Hackberry is the host plant for many different butterflies and moths. Without host plants, we will not be able to support these insects in our yards. Many mammals use native woodies for food and shelter as well.

We too can enjoy the fruit and nuts of native woodies. In my backyard I grow and eat paw paw, American hazelnut, currants and gooseberries, black raspberries, blueberries, and thimbleberry. It is so much fun to take a stroll through my garden and have tasty nutritious food within an arm's reach.

A debate exists about where gardeners should purchase native plants. It revolves around whether the cultivars and hybridized plants that most garden centers sell are as beneficial to wildlife and the environment as their wild counterparts. These plants may have modified flowers (double instead of single, or a different color) that insects may not be able to recognize or use. The nectar, pollen and fruit may not be as nutritious. For example, plant breeders have been introducing many cultivars of eastern ninebark with chartreuse, burgundy and copper foliage and a compact form. Will the insects that nectar and feed on ninebark recognize these cultivars? Native plant enthusiasts believe that we should patronize nurseries that only sell plants grown from locally (and legally) harvested wild plants. If you would like to grow true Michigan native plants, visit the Michigan Native Plant Producers Association (MNPPA) website: www.mnppa.org. It consists of a group of 12 nurseries, some of which are within an hour of Royal Oak. Since the native woodies they sell are grown from seed, a gardener has to be willing to grow plants that are much smaller than they are used

to buying from traditional nurseries. For example, my paw paw trees started out as two foot tall plants that I had to protect from rabbits with tree shelters. Most plants become established very quickly and catch-up in size within a few years. If you would like to see what the young plants look like, visit our Arboretum adjacent to the Royal Oak Senior Center. We have been planting many native woodies there over the last few years.

Being a professional landscape designer, I always encourage people to consider hiring someone who specializes in the design and installation of native plants. Home gardeners can feel overwhelmed trying to understand factors such as the mature height and width of native woodies. A common mistake a gardener can make is to plant them too close together or to the house and have them look overgrown in just a few years. It is essential for do-it-yourself gardeners to take the time to become educated about the growth habits and culture of native plants before designing and planting their gardens. Although native woodies have to be given thoughtful, educated design considerations, I do not want to scare people off from including them in their landscapes. They have proved to be some of my very favorite plants in my garden, even though I grow woody plants from many different countries and regions in addition to the natives. They have helped me to appreciate the natural history of Michigan and to observe close-up the amazing diversity of the natural world.

I encourage you to share in the fascination I feel throughout the year by taking a walk on the wild side and grow native woody plants in your home landscape.



Dena Serrato's NWF certified backyard habitat

SPEAKER PROGRAMS

Our monthly general meeting/speaker programs (September to May) are now held at the **Royal Oak Middle School** (formerly Dondero High School) which is located at 709 N. Washington. We meet in the auditorium or "Gathering Place", both of which can be reached via the school's southeast entrance. Our June program is held at the Senior/Community Center located at 3500 Marais. At our monthly Wednesday meetings, we present speaker programs that are usually slide shows focusing on various natural history topics. **Please note that the April, 2013 program is being held on the 2nd Wednesday of the month. Also, the May program will be held in the Gathering Place.** If you watch nature programs on PBS or the Discovery Channel, this is better because you can meet with the speakers afterwards and ask questions. The general meeting begins around **7:25 pm**, with the speaker program following several minutes later.

"Tenhave Woods Through a Camera Lens" is being held on Wednesday, **March 6th**. Mary Fredricks, a Nature Society member, grew up just blocks away from what is now Tenhave Woods. She still spends time in it, but instead of playing, she takes pictures, lots of them. Enjoy an evening exploring this wonderful woods from her unique perspective as she shares some of her favorite moments and discoveries.

"Wolves: Myth, History and Ecology" is being held on Wednesday, **April 10th**. Although frequently a source of controversy, wolves are a valuable keystone species, and have inspired many legends and well-known stories. Join Stephanie Schneider, Yellowstone National Park Interpretive Ranger, to discover why this highly social animal is essential to Yellowstone's ecosystem.

"Tenhave Woods a Changing Upland Forest" is being held on Wednesday, **May 1st**. When you walk along the Sandbar Trail from the south to the north in Tenhave Woods, it changes from an Oak forest to a Beech Maple

forest. For those of you that have been looking at Tenhave for 40 years it has always been like this. The question is why nothing seems to be different in the environment, but the forest makeup changes. In the summer of 2010, research was done on these different areas to try and determine why they were different and how they would change in the future. Bob Muller, Royal Oak Nature Society naturalist, will explain what we found out and how this will change the look of not only Tenhave Woods but many neighborhoods throughout Royal Oak in the future.

"Nature Society Year in Review" is being held on **June 5th**. This year, our June program **will be held at the Royal Oak Senior/Community Center** (3500 Marais) instead of at the Middle School. We will talk about what has been going on with the Nature Society, Tenhave Woods, Cummingston Park, and our future arboretum in Worden Park East. A photo show will depict some of those activities. We will finish off the evening by talking about some things we are planning to do in the future.

Resource Information For Native Shrubs & Small Trees ("Woodies")

Below are some resources for questions about native woodies, the plant communities they inhabit, and how to successfully grow them in your yard.

Some great Web resources come from city and state sites such as :

- City of Ann Arbor: (www.a2gov.org/government/communityservices/ParksandRecreation/NAP/NativePlants/Pages/NativePlants.aspx)
- Michigan Natural Features Inventory, (www.mnfi.anr.msu.edu) .

My favorite resource is still books:

- *Landscaping with Native Plants of Michigan* by Lynn M. Steiner,
- *The American Woodland Garden* by Rick Darke
- *Native Trees, Shrubs, and Vines for Urban and Rural America* by Gary L. Hightshoe

One of the best ways to learn about native plants is to get out in nature to see how they grow.

- Join the Nature Society on one of our free nature walks, or
- Participate in programs held by the:
 - ◊ Michigan Botanical Club, (www.michbotclub.org)
 - ◊ The Stewardship Network, (www.stewardshipnetwork.org/site/c.hrLOKWPIFuF/b.1361967/k.755C/The_Stewardship_Network.htm)

NATURE WALKS

CUMMINGSTON PARK: Park and meet at Leafdale & Torquay

TENHAVE WOODS: Park in Marais/Lexington lot and meet at the Lexington entrance (300 feet east of parking lot). For the Owl Hoots & Full Moon walks, park and meet at the Marais/Lexington lot.

ARBORETUM: Park and meet on the north side of the Royal Oak Senior/Community Center (3500 Marais)

Wearing boots while in the parks is recommended in the winter & spring months. Using insect repellent and dressing

Please join us for our **7th Annual Open House** being held on Saturday, **April 27th**. Programs & walks are listed below.

"Owl Hoot" is being held at **Cummingston Park** on Friday, **March 1st** and at **Tenhav Woods** on Tuesday, **March 26th**. Both programs begin at **7:30 pm**. We will walk into the park and attempt to lure in or have screech & great horned owls answer tape recordings of their calls.

"Almost Spring Walk" is being held on Sunday, **March 17th**, beginning at **2:00 pm** at **Tenhav Woods**. We will be looking for the first signs of the reawakening of the Tenhave plant community.

"Pond Life" programs will take place at **Tenhav Woods's Dragonfly Pond** and will be held on :

Saturday, **April 6th** at **10:00 am**

Saturday, **April 27th** **1:00- 3:00 pm (Open House)**

Sunday, **May 19th** at **2:00 pm**

We will be sampling the vernal pond for what is living in it. There will be viewing trays available to examine what we find. For those interested small aquarium nets will be available for you to catch your own pond life and have us identify. Come and learn about the interesting aquatic wildlife of Dragonfly Pond.

"Spring Wildflower Walks" will take place at **Tenhav Woods** and be held on:

Saturday, **April 6th** at **12 noon**

Sunday, **April 14th** at **2:00 pm**

Saturday, **April 20th** at **10:00 am**

Saturday, **April 27th** at **1:45 pm (Open House)**

Some of the wildflowers we will be looking for are Spring Beauty, Trout Lily, Bloodroot, & Spicebush, Red & White Trillium, blue & yellow violets, Spring Beauty, Wood Poppy, Jack-in-the-Pulpit, Wood Anemone and Wild Geranium.

Other programs and nature walks being held during our **7th Annual Open House** on **April 27th** at **Tenhav Woods** are:

1:15 pm: "Tree Walk" Tenhave Woods has 43 species of trees. Come and learn about some of the common tree species of southeastern Michigan.

1:30 pm: "Nature Photography" with professional photographers, Pat & Ray Coleman,

DEER FENCE PROJECT UPDATE

Our Deer Fence project mentioned in our last newsletter (Winter 2012/13) under "What We Have Been Doing 2012/13" is completed.

Last October, over 40 volunteers took part in an Eagle Scout project where a majority of the existing six foot fences were extended to over 8 1/2 feet in height with wire strung between extended posts (see photo in our Winter 2012/13 newsletter). In November, the fence height extension project was completed. In December, gaps in the fence along Custer were repaired. By the end

of January, there was a minimum of 8 foot high fencing all around the perimeter of the park. On February 2nd, we had about 100 people form a line along the Normandy fence and walk slowly towards Lexington. Upon completion of the walk, it was determined that there were not any deer in the park. At that point, all the gates were closed and locked.

We will continue to monitor the park from now on to make sure that there are no longer any deer in the park.

A BIG THANK YOU TO OUR PATRON MEMBERS

A special thank you from the Nature Society goes out to our following 2012/13 Patron members for their generous financial contribution to us:

Nora Iverson & John Talbot

Richard & Pat Stoll

Richard Taylor

Barbara Grinke

Mary, Dennis, Regis Kleiss

Ilene Lanfear

Katherine & Larry Howell

Bonnie Michalak

Mary Fredricks

Carol Bradshaw

Jean Watson

Lance, Pamela, Jesse Lindell

Royal Oak Nature Society's 8th Annual/Soiree Fundraiser

WHEN: Friday, April 19th, 2013

WHERE: Royal Oak Elks Club (2401 E. 4th Street at Stephenson Hwy, Royal Oak)

TIME: 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

FOOD & DRINKS: Light refreshments & a cash bar

ACTIVITIES: Silent auction, 50/50 raffle and an awards ceremony.

TICKET COST: \$10 advance; \$12 at the door

WHERE TO PURCHASE TICKETS: Speaker programs, nature walks, from any Nature Society board member or sending a check in by mail.

MAILING CHECKS:

- Write check out for \$10/person
- Payable to the "Royal Oak Nature Society" with "Fundraiser Tickets" written on memo line
- Mail check to the Royal Oak Nature Society, 1600 N. Campbell, Royal Oak, MI 48067
- Ticket(s) will be waiting for you at the door

PURPOSE OF THE FUNDRAISER: To raise money for improvement projects in Tenhave Woods, Cummingston Park, and the Arboretum in Worden Park East

The Nature Society could use your help. We are looking for items that can be used for our silent auction. We also need people to supply and bring in food on the night of the fundraiser. To cover our expenses, we are trying to find businesses/groups who might be interested in becoming a table sponsor for our April fundraiser. You would have your business/group name displayed on one of the tables and would be able to put your advertising material out in the center of it. Your business/group name would be prominently shown on signage, in our program guide and in our fall newsletter. As a table sponsor, you would get two free tickets to the fundraiser. Cost is \$100 for a table. If you know of anyone who might be interested in helping us out in any of these ways, please contact us at 248-246-3380 & leave a message or e-mail us at naturesociety@ci.royal-oak.mi.us.

This event is a great way to show your support for the Nature Society. You get to bid on over 140 items while enjoying great food and drinks along with getting to chat with your friends and other Nature Society supporters in a relaxed atmosphere. So, this is an cordial invitation to join us on April 19th. Hope to see you then!

Please check out our Facebook page & become a fan of the Royal Oak Nature Society.

Page: <http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Royal-Oak-Nature-Society/228095233882566>



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Royal Oak Nature Society Membership Form

Please make check payable to: **Royal Oak Nature Society**
MEMO: Membership

Mail completed form & check to:
Royal Oak Nature Society
1600 N. Campbell Rd.
Royal Oak, MI 48067

Names (household members): _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

1 year Household Membership
(September-August)

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ General (free) | Receive newsletter |
| ☐ Associate (\$5) | by: |
| ☐ Supporting (\$10 & up) | ☐ Regular mail OR |
| ☐ Patron (\$50 & up) | ☐ E-mail |

NATURE SOCIETY TEAMS

Please contact us if you would like to become actively involved with one or more of our teams:

Stewardship: Maintains a trail system and enhances the overall park experience at Tenhave Woods, Cummingston Park and the Arboretum.

Communications: Publicizes organizational activities to the general membership and public through various mediums and performs any other forms of communications required by the board.

Education: Provides outreach and liaison to outside individuals, groups and schools to promote environmental education.

Fundraising: Is responsible for the fund-raising efforts of the Nature Society, which includes the coordinating and organizing of the Annual Spring Fundraiser & other fund-raiser programs approved by the board.

Programming: Is responsible for setting up the speaker programs, workshops and all of the nature programs within Cummingston Park, Tenhave Woods and the Arboretum.

Ways & Means: Investigates means of grant solicitation and then follows through accordingly.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President: Don Drife (248-528-0479)

Vice President & Arboretum Stewardship: John DeLisle (248-672-7611)

Treasurer & Ways & Means: Helen Cost (248-549-9423)

Recording Secretary: Nancy Vickers (248-549-5366)

Communication & Newsletter: Ted Vickers (248-549-5366)

Education: Chris Ethridge (248 229-9335)

Program: Bob Muller (248-398-0195)

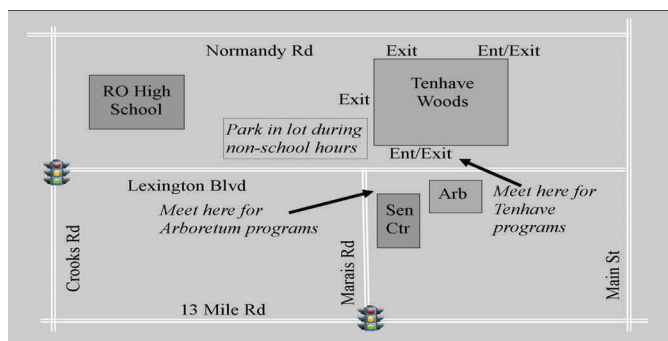
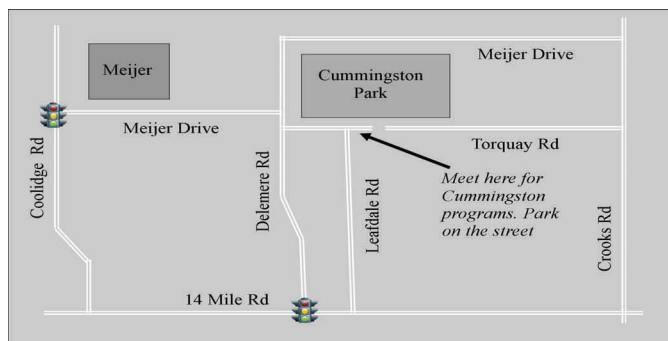
Tenhav Woods Stewardship: Dena Serrato (248-542-2820)

Troop/Pack 1627 Representative & Engineer: Richard Stoll (248-398-2437)

Cummingston Park, Tenhave Woods, and the Arboretum



Traffic Light



To locate and print out Tenhave Woods & Cummingston Park trail maps, please go to our web site (listed below under our tree logo), link on to "Park Locations" and then "Map for park trail locations"

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The Royal Oak Nature Society is a nonprofit education and stewardship group working within the city of Royal Oak's two nature parks, Tenhave Woods and Cummingston Park. Our mission is to foster awareness and usage of these two natural areas. We accomplish this by providing stewardship for the continuing improvement and maintenance of them. In addition, we are in the process of creating an arboretum in Worden Park East. We also offer a wide range of natural history educational programs.

The Royal Oak Nature Society
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www.ci.royal-oak.mi.us/nature



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