

My name is Deanna Stearns from Canton, Ohio. I am President of Garden Club of Ohio, Inc. Garden Club of Ohio, Inc. is comprised of 139 clubs, 3774 members, 4 affiliate organizations and 15 members-at-large. Our mission is to support endeavors in every aspect of gardening through educational programs, horticulture and floriculture. We will show by example a responsible stewardship of our land.

The organization has a complete horticulture committee among which consists of a Native Plant Chairman. Her committee's responsibility is to stimulate interest in Native Plants. She shares information with the membership through articles in our publication, *GARDEN GREETINGS*, preparing education exhibits at board meetings and/or at our convention, presents programs to individual clubs upon request, and maintains a file of information regarding native plants. We also share information throughout our region of seven states as well as with National Garden Club.

The first week of June each year G.C.O. celebrates National Garden Week. Our clubs provide information and the benefits of gardening as well as education of environmental efforts by posting events at the local libraries, giving seeds to the public, providing pamphlets and written information to the communities. This week is an opportunity to encourage pride in the community, interest new members and work with other groups to be part of those efforts. Throughout the state, our clubs sponsor workshops. Our clubs work with both elementary and high school students to make them aware of the many opportunities involved with gardens. This is a first step in opening the eyes of youth to employment opportunities in their future.

National Garden Club and G.C.O. provides cash incentives to clubs providing outstanding events during this week. I mention this activity only because if Ohio is in the position of having April as a Native Plant Month, we will be in a position to have similar events geared toward native plant conservation.

Variety might be the spice of life but choosing the right plant could also help protect life. It is our job as conservationists to educate ourselves about these choices. Since Ohio was first settled, non-native plant species have been routinely introduced to our state, often displacing valuable less aggressive native plants. Today urbanization and agricultural development continue to contribute to this loss of habitat, as well as the loss of valuable plant varieties. It is estimated that approximately 600 native Ohio plants are now designated as RARE.

We believe it is important to protect native plants and maintain the integrity of our complex ecosystem. We work with different plant societies to find selections of native plants chosen for their unique properties, their usefulness, historical value and potential use.

An example would be the Herb Society of America which has established the Native Plant Conservation Committee with the objective to "protect native plants and maintain the integrity of our complex ecosystem". They have recognized an urgent need to develop and implement an effective plant conservation program before more species become critically endangered.

For example, Monarda was a chosen native plant for investigation but which native cultivar? *Monarda punctata* (Horsemint), an endangered Ohio herb is favored by hummingbirds, was evaluated. *Monarda didyma*, (Bee Balm) is very popular as it has the largest and showiest flowers and hummingbirds love it as well. In spite of its name, bees totally avoid it because the flower throats are just too long and narrow

for their chubby bodies. *Monarda fistulosa* (Wild Bergamot) has a broader growing range than the other varieties and is considered to be far more useful. It tolerates a variety of soils and locations. It is also a very important nectar plant for bees, butterflies and hummingbirds. The selection of the correct native plant might seem tedious however, these native plant strategies protect and ensure long term survival of desirable native plant varieties.

We also believe by the passage of HB 59, having an Ohio Native Plant Month in April each year will be an opportunity to achieve the goals of protecting important plant varieties and “to increase public awareness of Ohio’s native plants and the many benefits they provide to pollinators, Ohio’s economy and the health of Ohio’s environment”. Garden Club of Ohio Inc. stands ready to celebrate, educate, and enjoy our native plants.