

My name is Deanna Stearns from Canton, Ohio. I am President of Garden Club of Ohio, Inc. We are comprised of 139 clubs with over 4000 members statewide. 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.

Our organization has a complete horticulture committee under the direction of our Native Plant chairman. Her committee's responsibility is to stimulate and create interest in native plants and to educate our membership and the public on the importance of Native Plants.

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

G.C.O. provides cash incentives to clubs providing outstanding events during this week. If Ohio designates April as 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 conservationist 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 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.

We believe by passage of SB-45, designating 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 the public awareness of Ohio's native plants and the many benefits they provide to pollinators, Ohio's economy the health of Ohio's environment". Garden Club of Ohio Inc. stands ready to celebrate, educate and enjoy our native plants.

Thank you for your consideration.