

Testimony in favor of April as Ohio Native Plant Month - Hope Taft ohiohoper@yahoo.com 2019

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee:

I am very excited that the idea of supporting what is best for Ohio and Ohioans is before you in the form of a simple bill to make April Ohio Native Plant Month.

It's a bill whose time has come.

While creating the Ohio Heritage Garden as First Lady, I remember the story of the effort it took to make the trillium, Ohio's native flower.

The Heritage Garden at the Governor's Residence still delights and inspires visitors with the large variety of native plants Ohio has. It contains nearly 600 of them of which nearly 60 are on the state or federal lists as being threatened or endangered. The Legislature recognized the importance of this effort and describes it in ORC 107.40 as Ohio's botanic garden of native plants:

- (2) The grounds as a representation of Ohio's natural ecosystems;
- (3) The heritage garden for all of the following purposes:
 - (a) To preserve, sustain, and encourage the use of native flora throughout the state;
 - (b) To replicate the state's physiographic regions, plant communities, and natural landscapes;
 - (c) To serve as an educational garden that demonstrates the artistic, industrial, political, horticultural, and geologic history of the state through the use of plants;
 - (d) To serve as a reservoir of rare species of plants from the physiographic regions of the state. These duties shall not affect the obligation of the department of administrative services to provide for and adopt policies and procedures regarding the use, general maintenance, and operating expenses of the governor's residence.

This effort to have you endorse a native plant month is an outgrowth of the Heritage Garden and a realization that more needs to be done to protect what is unique in Ohio's botanical history and landscape so in years to come we can be distinguished from every other state in the nation. As non-native invasive plants take over our natural areas, this could happen sooner than we expect.

It is also important that we encourage the use of native plants so the food chain we all depend on for our energy will remain strong and robust. At its beginning, it depends on native plants that host native wildlife to start the chain reactions that lead to the food on our tables.

The Ohio departments of natural resources and transportation both are starting programs that encourage the use of native plants because they too are realizing the need to support our natural species. A broad range of state and local organizations have endorsed this proposal. We don't want the Heritage Garden to be the only place in the future that some of Ohio's natural heritage can be seen!

Native plants need your voice so the destructive properties of invasive species can be halted before the task becomes too overwhelming. Some species in areas of Ohio are at this tipping point. The supporting groups of this legislation know 'plant blindness' or the ability to tell a plant that provides assets to the environment from one that doesn't is wide spread. Though education, we all can make wiser decisions.

I hope you will work hard to make this bill a reality before April 2019 so we can start the educational process that will make its implementation a reality. Your help is needed to make Ohio a national leader in encouraging

people to work with nature, respect its valuable place in our lives, and promote a future for our grandchildren that has the best botanical treasures the Ohio has to offer still around. Thank you for taking a leadership role.

Should you have any questions, please contact me at ohiohoper@yahoo.com. Thank You for your support.