Conservation at the Crossroads

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Marion County SWCD Wins NC Region SARE Professional Development Program Grant

By Kevin Allison, Urban Soil Health Specialist

Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) offers competitive grants to fund research and education projects that advance sustainable agricultural practices. They have grants for researchers, educators, and especially farmers. SARE's long history of projects has produced incredibly helpful resources, from on-farm documentation of farming techniques to books such as *Crop Rotation on Organic Farms*. This October, the SWCD begins a 3-year SARE Professional Development Program grant entitled **"Building capacity among Indiana conservation partners to leverage newly developed tools to assist small-scale soil health practitioners."** The goals of the grant include:

1) Build technical capacity within the Indiana Conservation Partnership to use the *Indiana Nutrient Management, Cover Crop, and Mulching Tools* for technical assistance to small-scale producers.
2) Deliver online and in-person training to Indiana partners and farmers.
3) Create YouTube videos, shareable PowerPoints and pdfs.
4) Train USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service partners in how to utilize the tools and resources for implementation requirement documentation for financial incentive programs.
5) Raise awareness about available resources through outreach.
6) Enhance the tools. Use both existing knowledge of needs and gather user feedback.
7) Maintain and utilize the SWCD Eagle Creek Demonstration Garden in Indianapolis for workshops.

READ MORE HERE

This Issue:

Project Highlight – Clearwater Cove

By John Hazlett, District Manager

Check Out Our Steam Steward Guide

In May 2024, a site visit was arranged with the Friends of White River and District staff to Clearwater Cove, a condominium community located just downstream of the 82nd Street bridge over White River in the Keystone at the Crossing area on the northside Indianapolis at the request of several property owners interested in a restoration project. The FOWR Watershed Restoration Specialist Sarah Beckerman created a multi-faceted restoration plan that included clearing invasive honeysuckle and planting native grasses and seeding along the river bank.

Fast forward to September when our key district partner Indy Urban Acres offered several flats of native grasses and sedges for local restoration projects. In mid September, District Manager John Hazlett led an enthusiastic group of volunteer property owners to remove honeysuckle and install over 300 native plugs along a one hundred foot stretch along the top of the banks of the White River. John followed the property's landscaping crew as they cut back honeysuckle and painted the cut stumps with water-safe glyphosate. The species installed by volunteers included Bottlebrush Grass, Beak Grass, Switchgrass, Riverbank Rye, Virginia Wild Rye and various native sedges many of which are included in our Stream Steward Guide funded by the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust. Though it was very dry the volunteers were able to setup a watering system for the plugs which will establish in the Spring.

The next step in the project will be treating winter-creeper and vinca vines this winter along with installing native seed donated by Wild Ones of Greater Indianapolis (see Wild Ones on p 4 for more information). We look forward to watching this project evolve and thank you to the many hands and minds that made it happen!

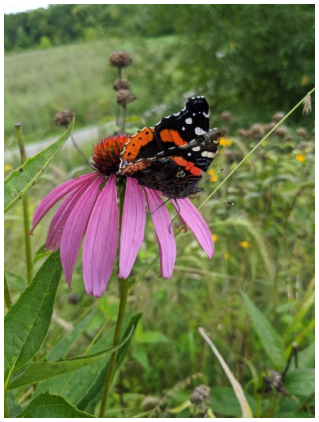
Native Plants for Our Pollinators

By Rob Kendall, Urban Conservationist

On August 25, 2024, the Marion County Soil and Water Conservation District (MCSWCD) and the Department of Public Works (DPW) had a table at the 31st Annual Bug Fest at Southeastway Park, an event celebrating the importance of insects and all things buggy since 1992. The event featured stations such as Critter Crafts, a Walk-Through Butterfly Tent, Bugs Up Close, Aquatic Insects, and Meet an Entomologist. MCSWCD and DPW collaboratively tabled at the Pollinator Pod station, where we informed a portion of the approximately 2,300 participants about native plants and the insects that depend on them. The focus of our table was to encourage the planting of native plants to support Indiana's native pollinators. Native plants have co-evolved with other plants, animals, fungi, and bacteria, as well as the climate, light, and soil conditions in a particular habitat and region, thus playing meaningful roles in keeping specific ecosystems stable.

Our table emphasized the importance of planting native plants to ensure that local pollinators can maintain proper nutrition to not only survive but thrive where they are accustomed. Non-native plants tend to be more like "junk food" for pollinators due to how insects have co-evolved to receive nutrition from native plants. Over time, insects have become more specialized in feeding on native plants, changing their mouthparts, digestion, and dependence on the plant as a host for larvae. Native plants are vital for maintaining native pollinator populations.

Visitors asked us questions and shared stories about their gardens and how they could improve them to increase the amount of native wildlife around their homes. We were able to provide them with resources for the installation of natives in their gardens, we handed out two of MCSWCD's booklets: *Native Plantings for Beneficial Insects and Pollinators* and *Rain Gardens for Homeowners*. These user-friendly booklets feature great photos of example gardens, diagrams about the benefits of natives, and charts detailing the growth patterns of some native plants to help find specific plants for the space available. In addition to the booklets, we also handed out packets of native seeds, which contained Purple Coneflower, Yellow Coneflower, Hairy Penstemon, and New England Aster—all species that not only feed insects but also attract hummingbirds.



The next Bug Fest will be on August 24, 2025, at Southeastway. Make sure to mark your calendars and come receive an Honorary Degree of Bugology! Booklets can be found here:

Native Plantings for Beneficial Insects and Pollinators

Rain Gardens for Homeowners

Save the Dates! Workshops and Training are Coming Soon

Stream Steward Workshops—Nov 2nd & 9th

Back by popular demand and funded by Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, in partnership with Friends of White River, two Stream Steward workshops are planned for Saturday November 2nd at Millersville along Fall Creek and Saturday November 9th at Oliver's Woods along White River. Both events will be held from 9:30-12:30. Save the date on your calendar and register here:

REGISTER HERE

Wild Ones Greater Indianapolis Chapter

If you attended the Indiana State Fair in August and visited the Pathway to Water Quality exhibit you might have picked up a free native seed packet provided by Wild Ones Greater Indianapolis , a new local Wild Ones chapter promoting native plant communities across Indianapolis and surrounding areas. Over 3,000 native seed packets were assembled for distribution at PWQ! Wild Ones is growing and welcomes new members now through this local invite link:

New Member Invitation

2025 Indiana Watershed Leadership Academy Registration Now Open

The Indiana Watershed Leadership Academy is a well established, informative program full of everything you need to know about working to improve our watersheds in Indiana while networking with similar minded folks, including SWCD employees. Registration is now open for the academy that runs January-May 2025 but don't wait too long-it closes November 4th, 2024. Register at the link below:

REGISTER HERE

Ban Callery Pear Petition

Callery Pear continues to wreak havoc on our local landscapes not only in Marion County but throughout the state and unfortunately continues to be sold in commercial nurseries. Help stop the sale of callery pear and other commonly sold invasive plants by signing this petition today!

Natural Lawn Care 101: *Fall Fertilization*

University research has shown that a late summer/fall (September) and late fall (November) fertilization schedule is best for home lawns. This is when turfgrass plants are enlarging their root systems. Good root growth in the fall will result in better top growth in the spring. Fall fertilization also contributes to better color late in the fall, earlier spring green-up, and fewer disease problems.

The first step for natural lawn care is to have your soil tested to see your lawn's actual needs. Fertilizer bags will label how much of the major nutrients - nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) are available in their fertilizer. It is best for the environment to use low or no-phosphorus fertilizers (0 will be the middle number) as phosphorus is a major pollutant of our waterways. Phosphorus is usually available in the soil anyway but extra may be needed if you are reseeding your lawn.

Choose natural organic fertilizers that release nutrients more slowly than synthetic ones, making them available steadily over a longer period. Natural organic fertilizers preserve the biotic quality of the soil, encouraging earthworm populations and normal microbial activity. They often contain organic matter, derived from animal manures and previously living plant and animal sources. Some fertilizers sold as "organic" or "natural" may be enhanced with synthetic chemical fertilizers so always read the label.

To determine how much fertilizer to apply you must know: 1) the analysis of the fertilizer, 2) the amount of actual N needed per 1,000 square feet of lawn as determined by your soil test, and 3) the square footage of lawn to be fertilized. A general rule of thumb is to apply 1 pound of actual N per 1,000 square feet. Divide actual N needed by the percentage of nitrogen contained in the fertilizer, expressed as a decimal, to determine how much fertilizer to apply. For example, if using cottonseed meal with an analysis of 3-1-1: 1.0 ÷ .03 = 33 pounds. Thirty-three pounds of cottonseed meal per application are needed to supply 1 pound actual N per 1,000 square feet.

Information on how to take a soil sample and a listing of soil testing labs is available at

Soil Testing Labs

More lawn care tips can be found on our website:

https://marionswcd.org/lawn-and-garden/

Invasive Highlight: Common Reed

Common Reed is a non-native alien and highly invasive plant that had its origin in Asia and Europe. It is generally found in very wet areas such as drainage ditches, roadside channels, wetlands, pond and lake edges. It spreads by seed and once started spreads rapidly by underground rhizomes. The rhizomes can grown 10 or more feet in a single growing season. Once established it can dominate the wet area reducing the capacity of drainage channels to carry flood water. It can quickly destroy the normal biological functions of a wetland. Glyphosate based herbicides seem to be the best bet for control and should be applied in the early fall after the plants bloom. It can be applied as a foliar spray or on the stems after they have been cut by mowing or other methods. It will likely take several applications over a period of years to completely eliminate the plants due to the extensive underground rhizome system. More Info HERE

Indiana Nutrient Management Tool

More News from our Urban Soil Health Specialist Kevin Allison!

The Indiana Nutrient Management Tool, developed by the Marion County SWCD in collaboration with the USDA-NRCS, is a spreadsheet that assists with soil and crop fertility recommendations for commonly grown vegetables. The tool can help gardeners create a plan for amounts of soil amendments or fertilizers needed to meet a crop's nutrient needs. An enhanced Google Sheets version will be released on Halloween, paired with a virtual training that you are encouraged to attend! Growers, stay tuned for in-person meetings this winter.

When: October 31 at 12 PM to 1 PM Eastern **Register HERE**

This work is supported by the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service. The USDA-NRCS and its partners are equal opportunity provider, employer, and lenders. The training is also supported by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture through the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program, under project number ENC24-233.

Check out our Blog Posts!

We have monthly posts on all kinds of themes related to natural resources.

Check out this month's timely topic—

Maximizing Soil Cover in the Garden

BLOG POST

Webinar Recordings

We recently held webinars on spreadsheet tools to help with cover crops and mulching. You can find the tools and links to the recordings at:

https://marionswcd.org/soilhealth/

Quick Links

Indiana Mulching Tool Training Video
https://youtu.be/HMRkuJx6PAQ
Indiana Cover Crop Tool Training Part 1
https://youtu.be/sHFbDSbwVQ0
Indiana Cover Crop Tool Training Part 2
https://youtu.be/Bumyjsga7AM

Indiana Prairie Farmer

Thanks to Purdue University Agricultural Communication Student and Indiana Prairie Farmer writer Hannah Kerkhof for this cool article! Check out the picture of hairy vetch cover crop mulch at Damar Services garden. Props to Kathy Tierney, their consultant dietician and awesome gardener, who has been on this learning journey with me for almost a decade!

Read More HERE

MARION COUNTY
SOIL AND WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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The Mission of the Marion County Soil & Water Conservation District is to assist Marion County land users in conserving soil, water, and related natural resources by providing technical, financial and educational services.

** PLEASE NOTE**

SWCD staff work in the office, remotely, and in the field. To reach us, email marioncountyswcd@iaswcd.org, utilize our website's 'Contact' tab, or call 317-786-1776 to leave a message when staff members are not in the office.

SWCD Board Supervisors

Heather Buck, Secretary **Owen Dwyer, Treasurer** **Maggie Goeglein, Vice Chair**
Tyler Gough, Member **Brian Neilson, Chair**

Black Gold for Gardeners

Composting lawn waste yields big benefits

Fall begins the season for yard & garden clean up. Instead of bagging up those leaves and yard clippings consider starting a compost pile. Compost is extremely beneficial for flower beds and vegetable gardens as it supplies nutrients and greatly improves soil structure which is often poor in urban soils.

Finished compost provides valuable nutrients for your yard & gardens

What do you need to get a compost pile started? Fresh green material (such as grass clippings), dry brown material (such as fallen leaves), some starter microbes (soil or starter compost), moisture, air and possibly some livestock manure or fertilizer to help heat it up if you have more brown material than green. You can also add kitchen scraps such as fruit & vegetable peelings, coffee grounds or egg shells, but not meat or oil. Ashes from your fireplace can also be added. Try to use an equal amount of browns to greens, turn or aerate the pile often to help it heat up, and add moisture if it starts to dry out before completely composted.

For more information see the link below:

COMPOSTING

Remember that landowners are responsible for keeping leaves off of and out of storm drains, culverts & ditches on their property so Compost It!

Follow us on Facebook!

SWCD Staff

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Julie Farr, Resource Conservationist, PT

Susannah Hinds, Acting NRCS District Conservationist

STOP That Dirt! Erosion Watch Campaign