



photo by DR. TODD CRAIL

A ROUNDABOUT RESTORATION

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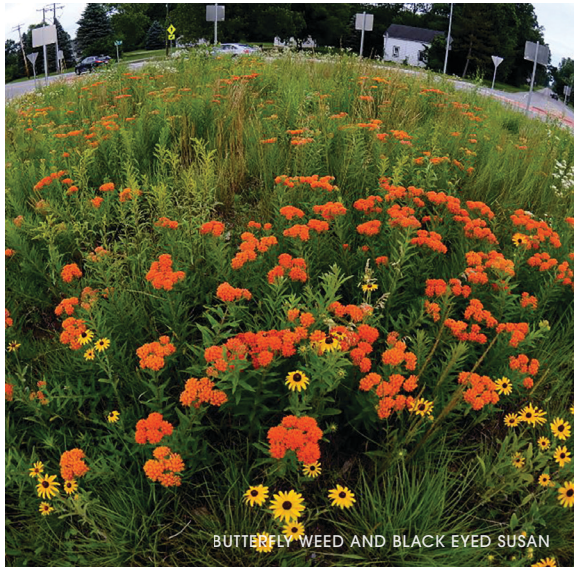
Environmental studies students at the University of Toledo recently completed a habitat restoration project, turning a drab suburban roundabout into a natural sanctuary bursting with native wildflowers. This small-scale restoration of a 100 square foot plot of land may seem insignificant, but patches like these can act as refueling stations for migrating birds and insects, safe havens for threatened and endangered plants, and stepping stones for animals traveling between habitats. The native cover plants also serve as an attractive sight for commuters, take some of the strain off our pocketbooks, and even help keep us safe on the road.

The roundabout project began when Lucas County engineers approached environmental scientist and UT Professor, Dr. Todd Crail. Dr. Crail saw a chance to teach his students about the importance of habitat restoration in their own community. This roundabout, and much of the city of Toledo, is located within a unique region known as Oak Openings. The key feature of the Oak Openings region is the sandy soil left over from an ancient lake. This means the dense forests typical of Ohio are unable to take root here. Instead, Oak Openings is home to a diversity of rare and imperiled habitats like oak savannah and tall and short grass prairies. For the students' capstone project, they determined what species would go in the roundabout and volunteered their own time to help plant the seeds.

The low nutrient content of sand is terrible for growing typical cover plants, like turf grass, but essential for planting the native low-nutrient loving species found in the Oak Openings region. Many of these species are adapted to the sand and can live nowhere else. Dr. Crail and his students planted over 40 species of native plants including little blue-stem, butterfly weed, showy goldenrod, and dotted horse mint, of which the latter two are endangered in Ohio. Pollinators like butterflies quickly appeared, birds soon followed, and even toads took up residence in the roundabout. It's like "a restaurant on a lonely highway," said Dr. Crail.

This roundabout isn't just a boon to the local ecology, taxpayers stand to benefit from native plantings as well. Unlike a typical roundabout which requires constant mowing, spraying, and weed control, the native planting roundabout needs just two person hours of work per year. With local university students as eager volunteers, the labor cost is virtually zero. The sandy soil, and low-maintenance plant species also save the city \$1,500 a year in mulch that would otherwise be required.

The tallest plants can grow to two and a half feet in height and serve a functional purpose—they help make the roundabout safer by blocking the view of cars entering on the far side. Drivers, that are distracted by other cars contribute to more roundabout accidents. Tall plants help drivers focus on the vehicle to their immediate left and allow them to enter the circle distraction free.



BUTTERFLY WEED AND BLACK EYED SUSAN



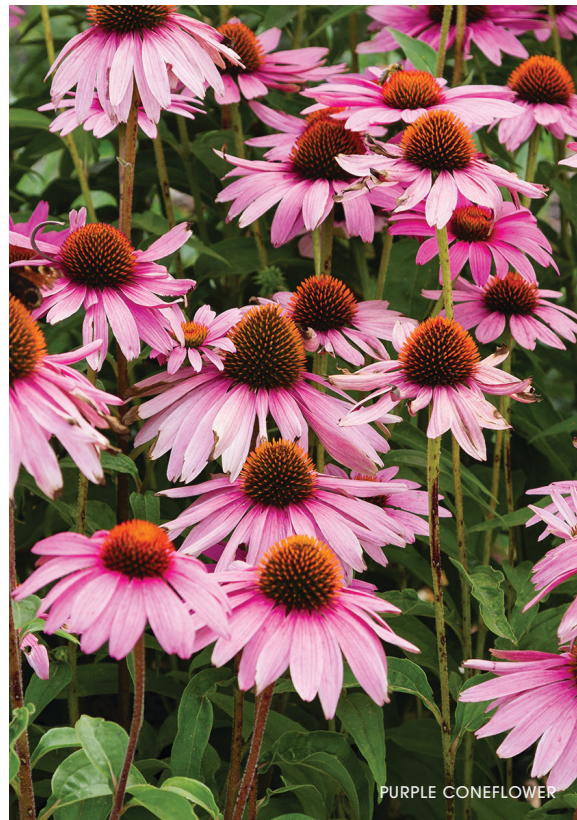
CANADA BLUEJOINT

According to Dr. Crail, “you can create little nature preserves all over the landscape that build the habitat connectivity that many species need.” With the success of the native roundabout, Dr. Crail and his students are shifting focus to the University of Toledo’s campus. They have planted nine native gardens and even converted a turf field into a prairie.

Wherever you live, be it city, suburb, or countryside, you too can contribute to habitat restoration by planting native species. Consider attractive species like common milkweed, the host plant for the monarch caterpillar, or purple cone flower which provides food for both pollinators and birds. Find more information in the BACKYARDS FOR BUTTERFLIES booklet at wildohio.gov.



MONARCH ON RATTLESNAKE MASTER



PURPLE CONEFLOWER

photos by DR. TODD CRAIL