

## **Royal Oak Nature Society Arboretum and Native Wildflower Garden**

Worden Park East is located at the southeast corner of Lexington Blvd and Marais. The park surrounds The Royal Oak Senior Center on three sides. The park is 4.25 acres in size, which includes playgrounds, tended gardens, grassy areas, open areas with mature over-story trees and ornamental trees and shrubs and a two acre wooded area. It is believed to have been part of the Goodwin Farm.

A topographical survey from 1969 shows it as a young woodlot. The dominant species were mostly maple and ash, with some cherry, elm, oak, hickory, poplar and hawthorn present as well. Some native understory plants still grow in non-invaded areas such as: Swamp Avens, Tovar, Bishop's Cap, and Heath Aster. Ornamental trees have been added since Worden Park's inception such as: willow, sweetgum, dogwood, apple, and vernal witch hazel.

When the Nature Society first toured the woodlot in 2001, it was already being taken over by invasive species, primarily common buckthorn, Asian bush honeysuckle, Garlic mustard and English ivy. After 2001, the problem continued to worsen. The majority of the flora until recent eradication work was invasive exotics.

### **Arboretum Startup**

Around 2006, a long range plan for an arboretum was made to create a collection of native plants that are not found in our nature parks (Cunnington and Tenhave Woods), and group them by community type. The arboretum will eventually add to our ability to teach about our area's ecosystems, and encourage residents to use native plants, which are beneficial to the environment, in their home landscapes.

In 2007, The Royal Oak Nature Society began restoring the native plant community in what is now known as its' Worden Park East Arboretum & Native Wildflower Gardens.

The Nature Society's first efforts in our arboretum have focused on identifying and preserving the good things (surveying and documenting native trees and shrubs) and removing the bad things (buckthorn cuts & other invasive species removals). This "removing the bad things" has continued with various "pulls" & "cuts" coordinated by Nature Society board members through volunteers from various conservation and community groups, Eagle Scouts, and city staff. The "removal" area up to now has been the space west of the new sidewalk that was built in 2006 behind the Senior/Community Center. Continuous cutting of buckthorn and honeysuckle shrubs and pulling of garlic mustard has been necessary for several years. The infestations of these noxious weeds were dense, and they formed impenetrable barriers for citizens, wildlife, and the native understory/meadow plants that currently thrive in Tenhave Woods and that thrived throughout the Royal Oak area before settlement. These species in particular were brought here as pioneers thought they would help stabilize soil and make nice hedges...Unfortunately they were wrong – buckthorn, honeysuckle, and garlic mustard all disrupt Midwest glacial soil types and organisms therein.

### **Arboretum Accomplishments/Projects to Date**

- Fall 2006: The City installed a 5-foot wide concrete path through the woods with funding from a Community Development Block Grant.
- Spring 2007: Dena Serrato and volunteers moved wildflowers in the middle of Tenhave paths to cement walkway edge of Arboretum
- May 2008: the Nature Society planted native Michigan wildflowers and woody plants along the path with a \$300 grant from the Wildflower Association of Michigan.

- Buckthorn removal in April 2008 (Eagle Scout Project)
- Buckthorn removal in September 2008: Arboretum Service Project with some members of Troop 1627
- August 2009: Community Workday
- November, 2009: Buckthorn cut on 11/11 included John & Theresa DeLisle with Richard Stoll. 2 weeks later, a workday was held. Dena Serrato, the DeLisles and 10 people from SOCWA Ecological Gardeners & Detroit Metro WildOnes. 7 species of native savanna plants were seeded in 3 openings, and buckthorn was cut.
- Bob Muller planted several native trees and John DeLisle sowed Native wet-mesic savanna seeds of Aster, Helen's flower, Swamp Butterflyweed, Mountain Mint & Switchgrass in 2009.

### **What would make our Arboretum Special?**

This will be a manageable and UNIQUE, local arboretum - the 4+ acre size, great volunteer community and native species focus which makes it easier to maintain a collection of all the deciduous trees native to Michigan. Using "Michigan Trees" as a guide, there are 69 natives. Our surveys show 46 species of native trees exist in either the Arboretum or Tenhave Woods and 3 are at present in our nursery waiting to be moved to the arboretum. That leaves 20 trees to be acquired, so sourcing is reasonable.

### **Creating & Maintaining the Arboretum**

We are now reaching the point ecologically in 2010, where we can start collecting the native trees, shrubs, wildflowers, native grasses, and sedges that will fit into a unique local native plant arboretum – one based on the deciduous forest and savanna/meadow communities of southeast Michigan – and to care for these native plant communities.

That ecological gardening step requires, in addition to the current work being done by our native landscape design team and the ongoing stewardship by our **Natural Resource** team, to create, recruit, and foster the growth of **Ecoscapers**.

The **Natural Resource Group** assists in

- surveying important native species, invasive species,
- habitat assessment,
- hydrology,
- looking for any threats or species additions that should be monitored or considered by the Nature Society in order to sustain and improve species diversity and community function.

The **Natural Resource Group** consists of Bob Muller, Don Drife & Dena Serrato.

An **Ecoscaper** is a gardener who landscapes with regard for nature's local suite of organisms, their environment, and maintains and balances the local ecology and interactions amongst those organisms. This is the definition put forth by the Wild Ones.

In order to maintain a native garden or restore an ecosystem, the Ecoscaper manages by:

- learning to identify the natives & exotic species
- remove/cut weeds (or invasive plants and other exotic species),
- planting natives,
- moving plants

- replanting or seeding disturbed/weeded areas,
- monitoring/treating phragmites and other specifically identified target weeds
- mulching
- watering certain plants
- helping to plan weekly arboretum plant community and garden maintenance.

### **Help us grow, please**

We need to get an **Esocaper** crew that will help us from the ground up, as this is the year we will be planting and seeding entire “plant community gardens”.

Basically, in our Royal Oak Nature Society Arboretum, we are actively seeking gardeners like you who know how to dig, weed, and plant, but who also appreciate and want to maintain nature’s garden!

Would you like to be the one who puts in the first Bloodroot to the Beech-Maple Forest Garden or the first Bee Balm to the Wet-Meadow garden? For more information on becoming an Escoper, you mail email John DeLisle at [johndgoesyard247@wowway.com](mailto:johndgoesyard247@wowway.com), or Dena Serrato at: [oldtoolgirl@yahoo.com](mailto:oldtoolgirl@yahoo.com)

The Royal Oak Nature Society is currently in the design phase of the Arboretum section of its Master Plan, stewardship events and plans for the Escoper and Resource groups are being developed. Check our website: <http://www.ci.royal-oak.mi.us/portal/community-links/nature-society> or email John or Dena for the latest info. We welcome comments and suggestions, and thank you from the Royal Oak Nature Society!

### **Our Main Goal**

Our goal is to have more species of southeast Michigan native plants than any other garden, and we will be completing our collection of Michigan deciduous trees in 2010. We wish to offer our visitors a window to the many varieties of native species to enjoy throughout the year. We hope you enjoy your walk through our Arboretum and hopefully learn or see something interesting each plant community in it! We desire that you incorporate some of these trees, shrubs, and wildflowers into your home garden. Please come back often to enjoy the many plants and environments throughout the year.