

# Getting Started with Native Plants



Brockville Library Drop-in series

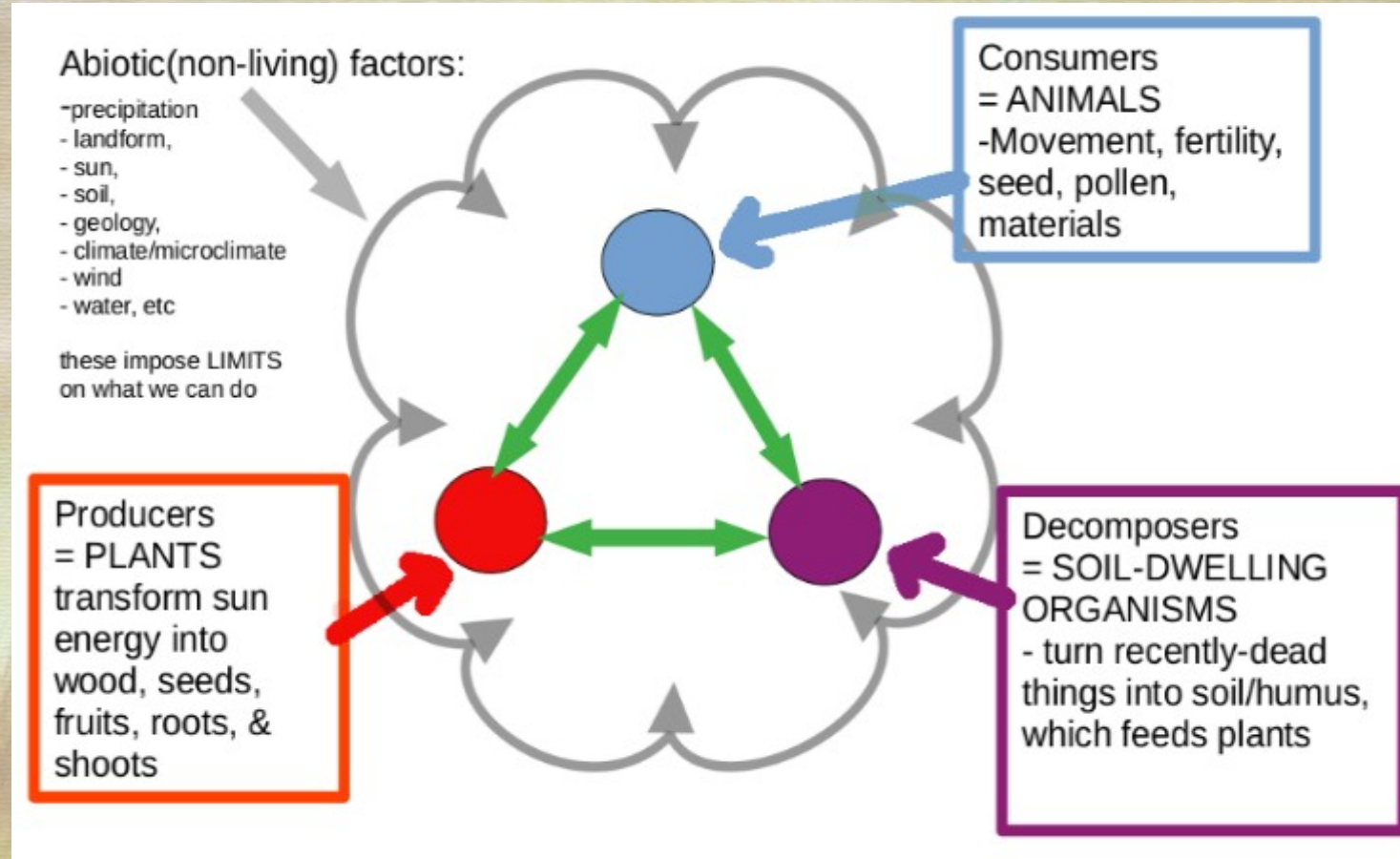
Brockville Library Drop-in series  
on Ecological Gardening  
Feb. 10, 2026  
Bev Wagar

# ...a web of connections

Ecology is the branch of biology that deals with the relations of organisms to one another and to their physical environment

Changes ripple through the system, affecting the food chain/web up and down

Pesticides remove bird food; herbicides remove insect food



# What is a native plant?

- present in the region before colonization
- “**evolved** in association with all the features of a place and developed specific and important **functional relationships** and interactions that contribute to the specificity and identity of that place” - *Lorraine Johnson*
- Evolutionary time = vast scale, often millions of years
- Native plants are recognized as food by the animals that evolved alongside them

# Examples of functional relationships

- milkweeds & monarch butterflies
- Milkweeds & milkweed tussock moths

Middle Instar Milkweed Tussock Moth Caterpillars



Joe Boggs, OSU Extension

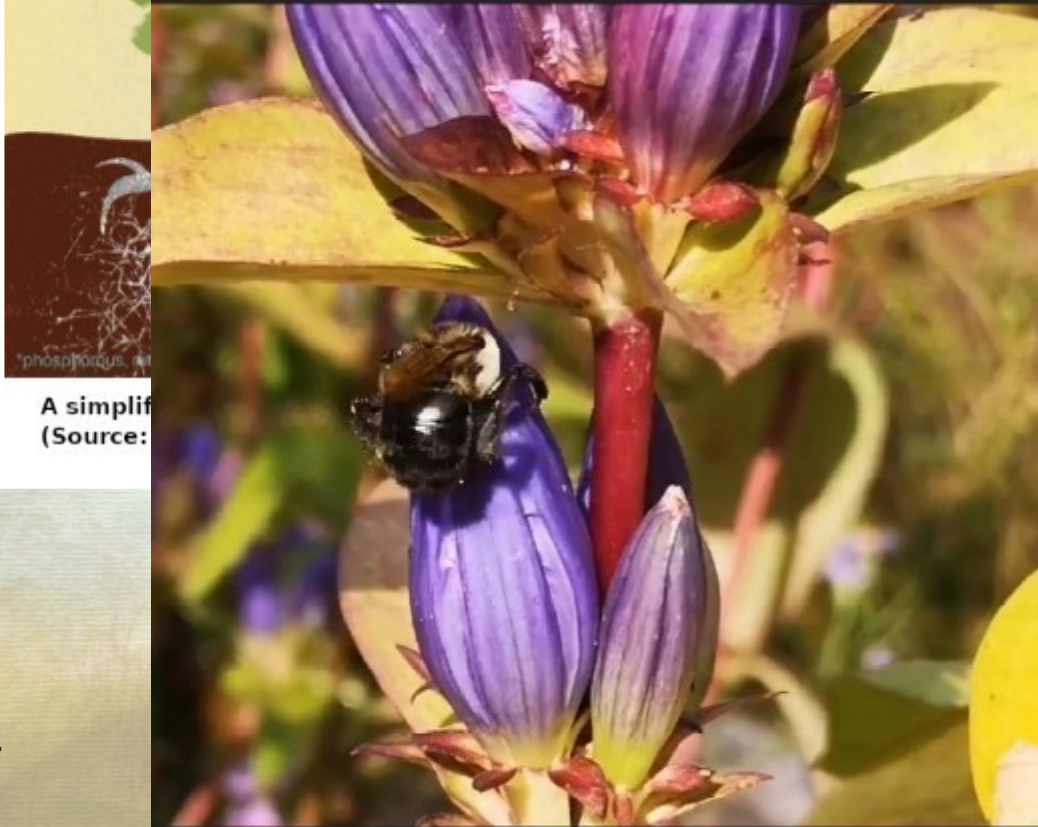
## More Examples of functional relationships

- Ladybird beetle larvae & aphids
- Birds & tree fruit
- Bird nestlings and soft-bodied insects \*
- Tomato hornworm & braconid wasps \*
- Fungi (soil fauna) and trees
- Bees and flowering plants
- Tree roots & mycorrhizal fungi (“forest’s natural communication & logistics system”) \*

'The social network' of trees and fungi



bee\_in\_bottle\_gentian.mp4




A simplif  
(Source:

# INSECTS NEED NATIVE PLANTS



## BIRDS NEED INSECTS



SERENDIPITY FB GROUP  
GROW NATIVE  GROW BIODIVERSITY

### DID YOU KNOW?

- "When native plants disappear, the insects disappear, impoverishing the food source for birds and other animals" (Tallamy's Hub)
- 96% of North America's landbirds need insects to feed their young
- "Native plants produce four times as much insect biomass compared to non-native plants" (Audubon)

- The ecological function of a plant is to be EATEN
- But plants have defenses
  - odour
  - colour
  - toxins



# Native Plants Matter!

“Ninety percent of the insects that eat plants can develop and reproduce only on the plants with which they share an **evolutionary history**,”

- Doug Tallamy (The Smithsonian, April 2020)



Within the same genus, introduced species provide 68 % less food for insects than native plants



Leafcutter bees make room dividers



The ecological function of a plant is to be eaten!

- **Native** plants are recognized as **food** by the native fauna in an ecosystem: leaves/pollen/nectar
- Non-native flowers are often **junk food**



Dandelion pollen = inferior protein

# The 'ten step' rule for a beautiful garden



Rick Gray's garden in Ridgetown ON

# Choose plants / make plan

- First choose woodies (shrubs/trees)
- Then 'pretties' min. 8 species
- Diverse: heights/habits; flower colour/form/; season of bloom
- "straight" native species (avoid cultivars)
- create tiers / layers
- Plan for access



BEES

BUTTERFLIES

MOTHS

## POLLINATORS OF NATIVE PLANTS

Attract, Observe and Identify  
Pollinators and Beneficial Insects  
with Native Plants



WASPS

FLIES

BETLES

Heather Holm

# Where to get them

[Biosphere Native Plants](#) (Westport)

[Dropseed Native Plant Nursery](#) (Picton)

[Echo Native Plants](#) (Almonte)

[Ferguson Tree Nursery](#) (Kemptville)

[Fletcher Wildlife Garden](#) (annual spring plant sale, Ottawa)

[Friends of Lemoine Point](#) (Kingston)

[Friends of Mac Johnson](#) (Brockville)

[Natureaide](#) (Winchester)

[Native Plants in Claremont](#) (Claremont)

[Natural Themes](#) (Frankford)

[Ontario Native Plants](#) (mail order)

[Ottawa Wildflower Seed Library](#) (giveaways)

[Rideau Roots](#) (Portland)

[WWF](#) (available at Loblaws garden centres)



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