

Building Resilient Landscapes – Right Plant, Right Place for Right Now
With Tom Christopher – September 28, 2025
Summary and Links



Tom Christopher is host of the podcast Growing Greener, as well as an author/collaborator for several books and columns about improving the environment with native plant restoration.
<https://www.thomaschristophergardens.com/>

Resiliency-What is it? The capacity to withstand and recover from difficulties. Toughness.

Challenges in the current environment:

1. Climate change - extreme weather
2. Declining insect and pollinator population from lack of native vegetation as food source and use of pesticides.
3. Loss of biodiversity
4. Relationship between human population and nature. Cultural appreciation of how nature serves and supports human population and vice versa.

Based upon his experience and those he's met on his podcasts, Tom proposed several alternatives to current practices of human interaction with nature. To heal the earth, practice ecological restoration. He had several suggestions of methods to create habitat by transforming lawns and other spaces.

Strengthen Spiritual Connection to Nature- Cultural norms need to change concerning human/nature relationship, to replace human feelings of separateness, exploitation, and domination in landscape.



Inspiration from St. Francis of Assisi's poem, "Canticle of the Creatures" or Canticle to Brother Sun. He stressed a spiritual connection between all creatures.

Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical Laudato Si' (Praise be to You) was inspired by his poem.

Rethink your lawn. Reserve less area for a maintained non-native turf lawn, which provides no ecological value. Plant native plants.

Plant mini-meadows of native plants in your lawn. Turf grass has very shallow root systems and requires constant maintenance. Prairie native perennials have deep roots which prevent erosion and are drought resistant, don't need fertilizer. They also form channels in the soil as the roots die, which act like a sponge to soak up stormwater and prevent flooding.

Native Gardens are beautiful and can fit into a formal garden design. Larry Weaner and Sarah Weaner Cooper - garden designers. (Tom co-authored book with him)
Ecological Landscape Symposium at Conn. College. <https://www.conncoll.edu/landscapesymposium/>

Change the soil: To transform your lawn into a meadow, mow lawn very short a couple of times, add powdered sulphur to lower the pH of the soil which makes the soil less fertile. Native Plants thrive in less fertile soil while turf grass does not. (Lime does the opposite. Don't use that) Over-seed with native meadow plants mix. You can also kill turf grass with 10% acetic acid solution.



No Mow Lawn: Fine fescue- only needs mowing about twice a year.
Hard fescue (*Festuca longifolia*), creeping red fescue, Chewings fescue (*Festuca rubra* subsp. *commutata*)
Not native plants but require less maintenance than turf grass, and will play nicely with native meadow plants. Not good for hot sun areas.
[https://www.csu.org/hubfs/39606065/Document Library/FineFescues.pdf?hsLang=en#:~:text=Looking for a shade-tolerant,grass mixes of several species.](https://www.csu.org/hubfs/39606065/Document%20Library/FineFescues.pdf?hsLang=en#:~:text=Looking%20for%20a%20shade-tolerant,grass%20mixes%20of%20several%20species.)

Endophytic fungi are beneficial to these plants. You can buy inoculate at Chas Hart Seed Co.

Bee lawn: Fine Fescue, white clover, and (native plant) self heal (*prunella vulgaris*)

Wild Strawberry (*Frageria virginiana*) **lawn:** Plant native strawberry plants instead of turf grass. Box turtles love it.

Dan Jaffee Wilder has some great lawn alternative suggestions.
<https://youtu.be/AIEaELPg9jo?si=ymD1NWboGHGX8qrI>

Exemplary and beautiful native plant gardens and resources:

BPlants – <https://bplant.org/about.php> - native plant ID and info website

Wave Hill Public Garden & Cultural Center, Bronx, NY
<http://www.wavehill.org/>

Tom Wessel-teaches importance of ecologically high performance systems. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcLQz-oR6sw>

Brooklyn Bridge Park, designed by Rebecca McMackin - she gave Tom hope.
<https://www.rebeccamcmackin.com/>

Doug Tallamy - entomologist and activist for native plants and pollinators
<https://homegrownnationalpark.org/doug-tallamy/>

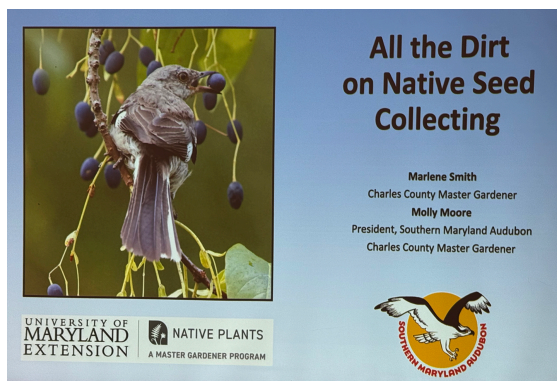
Plant native annuals for longer blooms: Tall bellflower, fleabane, etc.

Plant for the future:

Plant and preserve local genotype plants

All the Dirt on Native Seed Collecting

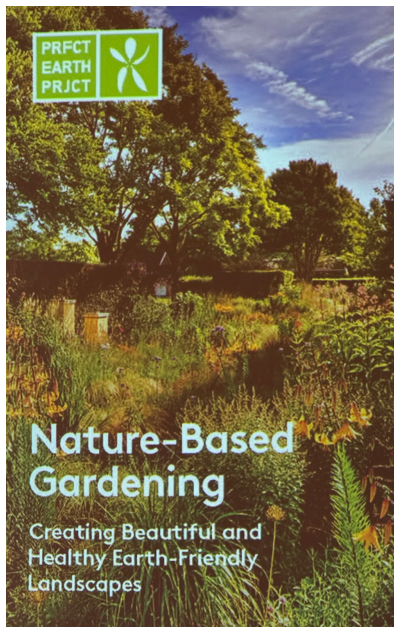
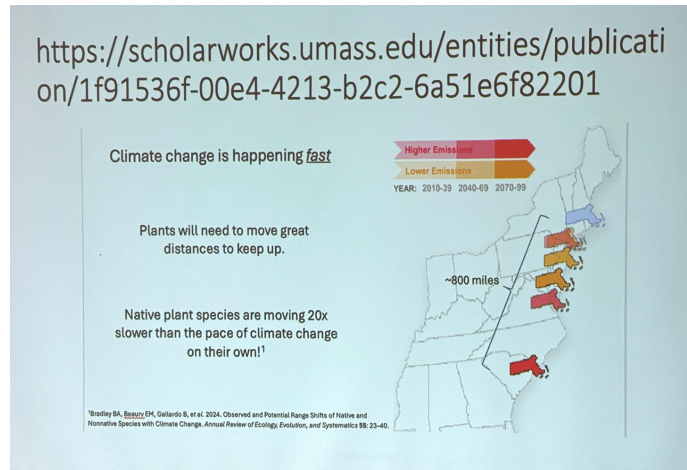
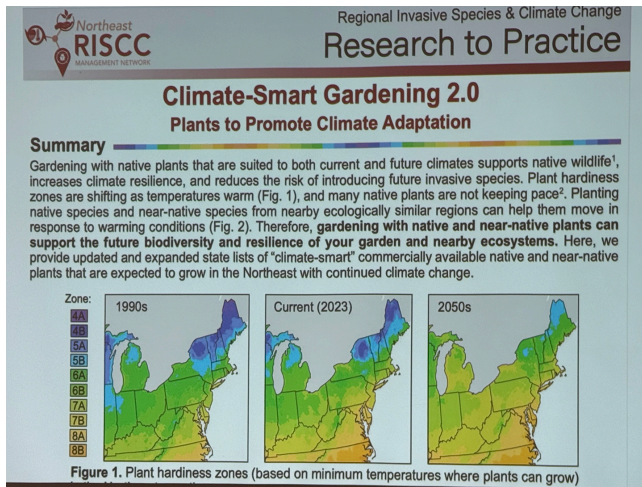
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bc8hsjZHz9s>



but in the future native genotypes may change. Native plants such as sugar maples are suffering because of climate change. Plants are migrating northward but not keeping pace with climate change.

Climate Smart Gardening 2.0 - free publication.

<https://scholarworks.umass.edu/entities/publication/1f91536f-00e4-4213-b2c2-6a51e6f82201>



<https://perfectearthproject.org/nature-based-gardening-booklet/>

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