

Gardening for Life

Excerpts from an article by Douglas Tallamy, author of *Bringing Nature Home*. The entire article is available at hgcn.org/factsheets (or ask me for a copy).

Chances are, you have never thought of your garden – indeed, of all of the space on your land – as a wildlife preserve that represents the last chance we have for sustaining plants and animals that were once common throughout the United States.

That is exactly the role our suburban landscapes are now playing, and will play even more critically in the near future. ...

Are there consequences to turning so much land into the park-like settings humans enjoy?

Absolutely. Both for biodiversity and for us.

Our fellow creatures need food and shelter to survive and reproduce, and in too many places we have eliminated both. ...

The song birds that brighten spring mornings have been in decline since the nineteen sixties, having lost forty percent of their numbers. ...

For most of us, hearing such numbers triggers a passing sadness, but few people feel personally threatened by the loss of biodiversity.

Why We Need Biodiversity

Here is why every one of us should feel threatened. Here is why it matters. Losses to biodiversity are a clear sign that our own life-support systems are failing.

The ecosystems that support us – that determine the carrying capacity of our Earth and our local spaces – are run by biodiversity.

It is biodiversity that generates oxygen and clean water, creates topsoil out of rock, buffers extreme weather events like droughts and floods, pollinates our crops, and recycles the mountains of garbage we create every day.

It is plants that turn sunlight into all of the food that supports life on Earth, yet we continue to reduce complex forests into lawns the world over.

Humans cannot live as the only species on this planet because it is other species that create the ecosystem services essential to our survival. Every time we force a species to extinction we promote our own demise.

Biodiversity is not optional.

Start Locally: Redesigning Suburbia

... The group of animals most responsible for passing energy from plants to the animals that don't eat plants directly, is insects. ...

So many animals depend on insects for food (e.g., spiders, reptiles, amphibians, rodents, bats, and ninety-six percent of all terrestrial birds), that removing insects from an ecosystem spells its doom.

If you think back on our suburban landscaping history, getting rid of insects is exactly what we have tried to do. For over a century we have favored ornamental landscape plants from China and Europe over those that evolved right here. ...

Your Garden Has a Function

In the past we have not designed gardens that play a critical ecological role in the landscape, but we must do so in the future.

The importance of our doing this cannot be overstated.

We need to quickly replace unnecessary lawn with densely planted woodlots in the East and West, and natural prairies in the Midwest; whatever can serve as habitat for our local biodiversity. ...

As gardeners and stewards of our land, we have never been so empowered to help save biodiversity from extinction, and the need to do so has never been so great.

All we need to do is plant native plants.



Books by Doug Tallamy

Highly recommended! Available at the library