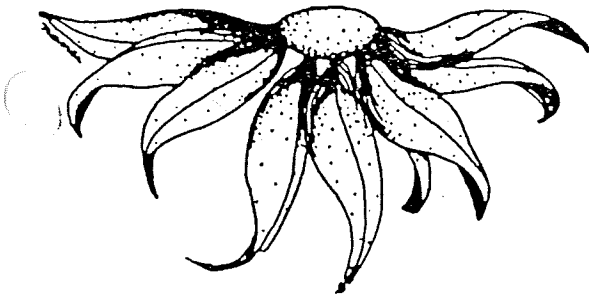


the wild ones



The Outside Story

newsletter for natural landscapers

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Bayside, Wisconsin

Must suburbia shatter another frail ecosystem?

BEACHWOOD FARMS. What a name! In naming suburbs, developers tend to recall ghosts of what used to be. In this new Mequon subdivision, the streets might be identified as Chorus Frog Ct., Catbird Circle, Treefrog Ave. and Pewee Pl. Next year, teenagers may meet at the corner of Salamander Slope and Lamprolittis Ln.

Today, however, there is a sign across the street from the isolated woods along N. Lake Shore Dr. It reads, "Magnificent Tudor: four baths, three fireplaces." Another monster house for another 1990s family.

Water may be a problem in the future but for now there is plenty of firewood in sight. The 26-acre island has red oak, white oak, hickory, basswood, sugar maple, red maple and American beech trees. The shaded vernal ponds harbor an innocent biota of life from blue iris to breeding treefrogs. The threatened section is in the midst of freshly sanitized suburbia with alien spruces and pines positioned like



LORRIE OTTO
IN MY OPINION

plastic sculptures on sodded lawns. Birds must quiver in horror as they look down on the shrinking acreage of their ancestral habitat!

The Exxon oil spill was an accident. If these woods are destroyed, it will be no accident. One wonders why we are allowing this to happen. Perhaps we have not thought about it or carefully observed that area.

Migrating birds, having escaped the burnings in their winter territories, fly north through toxic fumes, risk drinking in polluted waters, and flutter to the shores of Lake Michigan and over to the Reads' ponded woods. There, they rest and eat the wild berries and seeds, scratch in

the decaying leaves looking for decomposer insects and probe in the mud with their bills searching for worms.

Warblers feast in the treetops on other types of insects while woodpeckers drill into and under the bark of dead branches. They will also join the Jays to get acorns from mature oaks. Red-breasted Grosbeaks flock to the seeds of beech, basswood, ironwood and musclewood trees. Honeybees gather pollen from the black willows growing in the vernal ponds. Others sip the fresh sap around the buds of maples.

The area provides a critical breeding site for frogs, salamanders and toads. None of these species is endangered in the state but all are on death row here if their spring ponds and buffer woodlands are scraped away and replaced by storm sewer ponds and landscaping. The diverse, self-sustaining ecosystem will be lost and replaced by a toxic environment.

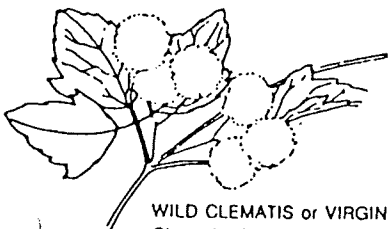
In the next decade all of us everywhere will notice a decline in

bird sightings. First, they will be without a place to rest and feed, then, they will be without a safe nesting habitat full of insects to feed their nestlings. Next, they will lose their mates and sister species. Lastly, there will be silence and emptiness with only my generation left to mourn for what we once knew. It was my generation which made the rules that officials so carefully follow to protect private property.

NO ONE takes into account that birds and butterflies belong to all of society and that we are the stewards of the fragile skin of life on our lonely planet.

Lorrie Otto is a teacher-naturalist living in Bayside

Reprinted from the Milwaukee Journal, May 13, 1990



WILD CLEMATIS or VIRGIN'S BOWER

Clematis virginiana WOODS/THICKETS/BANKS

A lovely vine of woodland edges and sunny banks. Can be easily trained on fences or trellises. The white flowers are followed by large, showy clusters of fuzzy white seed heads. Perennial.

Lorrie Otto

Letting the lawn run wild

Tall grasses and wildflowers make creature-friendly yards

The coming of the fall season has Jeff Johnson of Matteson, Ill., going wild. In the corners of his small suburban yard, he attracts insects, field mice and shrews with piles of discarded leaves and branches. He keeps the native grasses, next to a pond, unmowed to lure muskrats and waterfowl.

His reward: A dazzling array of birds and butterflies plus occasional raccoons and skunks—even beavers and Canada geese. Johnson's neighbors don't mind; many, he says, don't know what he's doing. "They just say, 'Oh, what pretty wildflowers you have.'"

But Johnson's idea is catching on. More than 9,000 Americans are now part of the National Wildlife Federation's Backyard Wildlife Habitat (BWH) program (call 800-432-6564). Most join, says the program director, Craig Tufts, out of concern for small animals that have been displaced by development. Some are also swayed by movement "priestess" Lorrie Otto, who teaches natural landscaping in Milwaukee and speaks of mowing as "immoral." BWH members' backyard habitats range from 5 acres of Arizona desert visited by road runners and coyotes to the balcony of a fourth-floor apartment in East Boston frequented by birds and butterflies.

Attracting a wide variety of wildlife, says Tufts, takes more than hanging out a bird feeder, although that's a good start. You may need to replace favorite plants that offer shade and color with varieties that give animals better food and cover. Roger Eddy of Greendale, Wis., created a constant food supply in his quarter-acre yard with a mix of trees—sugar maples, crab apples, dogwoods and junipers—that bear fruit and seeds at different times of the year, attracting finches, cardinals, rabbits and sometimes raccoons. Your state's fish and game department can tell you the best trees and shrubs for wildlife in your area.

Equally valuable is a dependable source of water. A dripping hose or a fiberglass pond of water, fitted into the ground and kept ice-free, if necessary, with a garden heater, will sustain birds and animals throughout the winter, and might even contain tadpoles next spring.

Creating a habitat is not synonymous with creating neglect. Some ecological habitats are, in fact, the aesthetic match



No lawn lover. Natural-landscape advocate Lorrie Otto in her Milwaukee back yard

of any manicured lawn. But Florida landscaper Jody Walthall advises homeowners to check city or neighborhood ordinances before they start planting.

Concerns about attracting pests and snakes are overblown, says Walthall. Garbage, not plants and berries, attracts rats. Wire fences can protect vegetable gardens from rabbits. The larger bird population should keep insects in check. Most garden-variety snakes such as king

and garter snakes are harmless and sometimes eat real pests. In the South and the West there is a greater chance of encountering poisonous snakes, which may have to be exterminated.

For fussy gardeners, going wild takes some adjustment. "It's like having a child in the house," says Jeff Johnson. "You learn to live with a little disorder." ■

by Kukula Glastris in Chicago



ADVICE AND DISSENT

They're contentious and contagious. They're the McLaughlin Group. (clockwise from left) Jack Germond, Eleanor Clift, John McLaughlin, Fred Barnes, Morton Kondracke, and Pat Buchanan.

Made possible by a grant from GE.



THE MCLAUGHLIN GROUP
Check your local listing for station and time.

We bring good things to life.



Godmother of Natural Landscaping

HERE'S A QUIZ: What four-letter noun is a "sheared, poisoned, monotonous, sterile landscape," created by human acts that are "immoral," "evil" and "flagrantly wasteful of drinking water and our non-renewable resources?" Hint: You won't find that definition in the dictionary. Those are descriptions offered over the years by naturalist Lorrie Otto, godmother of the movement known as natural landscaping. And the answer lies in that patch of green that Americans spend more than \$25 billion a year to create and maintain: the lawn.

For more than four decades, Otto has waged a campaign to conserve natural habitat and its wildlife—starting with her own yard in Bayside, Wisconsin, and ranging as far afield as the national debate in the 1960s over banning the pesticide DDT. "More than anyone else, Lorrie Otto brought the whole idea of natural landscaping to the public's view," says naturalist Craig Tufts, manager of NWF's Backyard Wildlife Habitat Program.

As one might imagine after reading her incendiary words, Otto's goal has never been to make herself popular—but she has perfected an art of diplomacy with which she always seems to make her point in the long run. She started her habitat advocacy in the 1950s by encouraging native plants to grow in her front yard. Her aim then was simply to give her two children an interesting place to play and learn. Soon, the profusion of goldenrods, asters, blackcap raspberries and other plants not normally seen in Bayside yards brought objections.

Then, one day while Otto was home folding laundry in the basement, village workers showed up and mowed down the little bit of wilderness, without notice and without permission. That's when Otto the diplomat emerged. She persuaded village officials to accompany her on a tour of her yard, during which she de-

scribed the wonders of everything that had been chopped. The authorities then paid her a settlement.

Otto's next big test took her out of the garden. She learned in the late 1950s of plans to develop a nearby 20-acre woodland known as Fairy Chasm. Otto worked for a decade to



LORRIE OTTO shows off a compass plant, one of the hundreds of wildflower and grass species she grows in her yard.

conserve this native wildlife habitat and its wildflowers, alerting and educating botanists, reporters and neighbors. She finally triumphed in 1969, when the Nature Conservancy purchased Fairy Chasm.

During her fight to save that woodland, Otto began noticing a terrible phenomenon: dead birds. The culprit was DDT, which communities across the country sprayed to control mosquitoes and the beetle that causes Dutch Elm disease. Otto worked hard to raise awareness of DDT's effects, and was even known to carry dead birds to pull out when she wanted to make the point that the pesticide was killing wildlife. In the late 1960s, she

was a prime mover behind state hearings that led to the banning of DDT in Wisconsin, and her work helped bring about the national ban in 1972.

Next, Otto turned her attention to natural landscapers who ran afoul of local weed and lawn-height ordinances, assembling a team of experts to help defend the gardeners in court. In a landmark case in 1976, the team successfully helped defend U.S. Forest Service biologist Donald Hagar, who was charged with violating the weed ordinance in New Berlin, Wisconsin. By the time the trial was over, the defense had shown that Hagar's wild yard did not create a fire hazard, was not a health menace and did not depreciate local property values. The case helped set a precedent for similar cases around the country, with Otto often helping the defense.

But most of all, Otto's influence has altered the way legions of Americans see their yards. First, she makes people see carpets of grass as unnatural, sterile places that require several types of killing—of weeds, insects, fungus and competing plants—usually with poisons. And she points out that lawns consume both the oil that fuels mowers and far more water than would local native plants. Most of all, Otto helps people appreciate the alternative to lawns—beautiful natural environments that provide habitat for all manner of wildlife. "People should be forced to have natural plants, not grass," she has said.

Today, Otto, at 77, seems untiring. Her yard is a nationally recognized showpiece, with hundreds of wildflower and grass species, in bloom from early spring to late fall. She is active in the Wild Ones, a national group of natural landscapers, hosts cable television shows and lectures around the country. And if you're lucky enough to get a tour of her yard, she's apt to dig up a plant for your own garden.—*Bret Rappaport*

ZANE WILLIAMS



IN THE VILLAGE of Bayside, Wisconsin, residents trim their hedges squarely, plant their perennials in rows, and mow their lawns into tidy tiles of green. But not **Lorrie Otto**. Her yard sways with big bluestem grass, tall stands of purple asters, coneflowers, goldenrod, sunflowers, and many other kinds of prairie grasses and wildflowers. It's a place that looks suspiciously countrylike. But this is not the country. It's a wealthy suburb just north of Milwaukee. And it's where, 30 years ago, Otto defied the status quo and transformed her one-acre yard into a native prairie.

Since then she has worked closely with her chapter, the **Milwaukee Audubon Society**, to enlighten the public about natural landscaping. She has taught classes at local nature centers, established natural areas on school grounds, testified in court about the benefits of prairie restoration, and been featured in countless books and magazine articles about environmental gardening. For her efforts, the 79-year-old Otto has received many honors, including a special-achievement award from the National Wildlife Federation and induction into the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame. "When people talk about natural landscaping, they use the name Lorrie Otto," says Mark Feider, director of the Milwaukee Audubon Society.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Patron of the Plants

But they didn't always. Nearly 50 years ago, Otto managed her yard the way many Americans did: She mowed the lawn and watered the flowers. But after a nearby marsh was cleared for development in the 1950s, Otto decided to let one corner of her yard grow naturally. She stopped mowing and planted wildflowers. Soon the plants took hold, and her children were romping in a natural playground. But the weed commissioner of Bayside saw the overgrown patch as an annoyance and cut it down.

Otto requested an immediate visit from Bayside's village manager, lawyer, and weed commissioner. Armed with the town's list of unacceptable weeds, including ragweed and even snapdragons, Otto described each of her destroyed plants and showed that none of them fit the definition of a weed. The officials conceded and paid for a restoration.

Otto would win other battles. In the late 1960s she saw that the pesticide DDT was causing convulsions and death among the birds that populated her natural nook. She implored the town to stop spraying, but officials didn't listen. Otto needed better artillery, so she began talking to scientists from around the country who were studying the effects of DDT. In 1968 she invited them to her home.

"The pieces of the puzzle came together in this living room," she says. The scientists at the meeting built a strong case against the use of DDT. Along with a few legal experts, they testified before the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. In 1970 the state became one of the first in the country to ban DDT. The rest of the nation followed in 1972.

It was a tremendous victory for the woman who had served as its catalyst. "I impressed myself as having so much influence," she says. "But what could I do next?" After completing an environmental-education course at a local nature center, Otto looked around her neatly trimmed neighborhood. She knew just

the topic to teach: natural landscaping. She began holding classes at the **Schlitz Audubon Center**, in Milwaukee. "You have to get plants that don't need to be watered or sprayed," says Otto. "Then you don't need to be using drinking water, polluting the air with noise and pollutants, or destroying another place to make your place work."

People began to take notice, including the local cable company. In 1983 Otto began producing a 28-show series about natural landscaping called *Earthcare*. Milwaukee Audubon member Margot Fuchs was the cameraperson. "Through her, I grew to love the prairie," says Fuchs.

Inspired by Otto's enthusiasm, Fuchs and several other chapter members started The Wild Ones, an organization devoted to growing native plants. The group now boasts more than 2,200 members nationwide.

Otto's knowledge and inspiration also drive the Milwaukee Audubon Society's annual Natural Landscaping Conference. She is an expert at finding and inviting the perfect speakers, says Feider. The conference, which began with 50 people 18 years ago, now attracts nearly 800 people.

Otto's view is simple: People who don't have an interesting landscape around them "don't have an interesting landscape in their heads."
—Tracy Staedter

were not present in the bodies of our great-grandparents who lived at the turn of the century.

TOP: COURTESY DANIEL P. BEARD, THOMAS D. MANGELSEN, PETER ARNOLD, INC.; COURTESY FRANK L. RUAM, JR.
MICHAEL KIENITZ FOR AUDUBON

PRAIRIES RECLAIMED

Our concern for the grasses and flowering forbs of the Midwest has lagged far behind our passion for other wildflowers, but now enthusiasts are rallying

BY CAROLYN ULRICH

Americans have never quite known what to make of their land. Was it, as the Puritans believed, a force of darkness, something to be kept at bay and under control? Or was it a source of universal good, abounding in moral lessons à la Rousseau and the Romantics? Out in the Midwest, yet another viewpoint took hold: The land was good, all right—but for money-making agriculture.

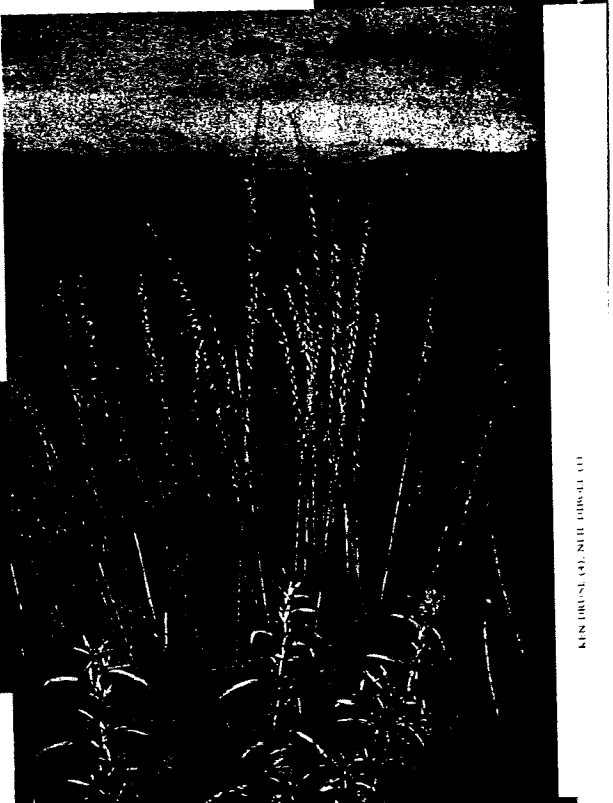
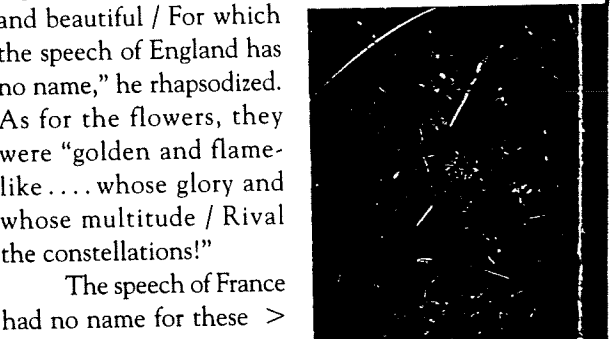
It's hardly surprising that the vast midcontinental region of our country—stretching from Manitoba to Texas, Ohio to Colorado—became the world's breadbasket. Ten thousand years of evolution following the last glacial ice melt had created a land of exceptional fertility. Carpeted by hundreds of species of grasses and flowering forbs (nongrass prairie plants) whose roots burrowed ten, fifteen, twenty feet into the ground, the prairie grew rich from the underground decomposition of this plant material—just the opposite of a rain forest, where the fertility is purely a surface wonder.

Early midwestern settlers, whose forebears had hacked their way through the eastern forests, must have been flabbergasted at their newfound landscape. Who had ever seen such grasses, so tall you could lose your children and cows in them if

you weren't careful? Or such flowers, sparkling with brilliant jewel tones of ruby, sapphire, and topaz? Then there was the bur oak, a tree with bark rugged enough to laugh its way through prairie fires. Small wonder that when the Bostonian poet William Cullen Bryant ventured forth to visit his brothers in Illinois, he couldn't help but follow up the 1832 trip with a paean: "The unshorn fields, boundless and beautiful / For which the speech of England has no name," he rhapsodized. As for the flowers, they were "golden and flame-like . . . whose glory and whose multitude / Rival the constellations!"

The speech of France had no name for these >

Prairies bloom, clockwise from top: Coneflower (Ratibida pinnata) at a restored prairie in the Owen Conservation Park in Madison, Wisconsin. Blue-eyed grass, a member of the iris family. Side-oats grama grass at the Freda Haffner Kettlehole Prairie near Milford, Iowa. Joe-Pye weed, popular for perennial borders and home gardens. Purple coneflower, one of the first prairie flowers to be used as an ornamental.



"How gorgeous we could make the world if we took out lawns and grew the native plants that bring back birds and butterflies," says Lorrie Otto

grasslands either, but 17th-century French explorers settled on their word for meadow—prairie. It was, however, hardly adequate for a unique ecosystem where so many colorfully blooming species flourish so closely and cooperatively together. Here, low-growing plants bloom in spring before taller ones have even sprouted. And underground, the fibrous root systems of some species twine around the tap roots of others, enabling two plants to occupy virtually the same space. The extreme depth of these roots is a major reason that prairie plants are impervious to drought. Another is that many grasses have developed an alternative form of photosynthesis, C4 (or carbon dioxide capture pathway), which keeps them from going dormant in the high heat of summer and allows them to survive with minimal water.

Five years after Bryant raved about the beauty of the prairie, the instrument of its destruction was invented. In 1837 John Deere produced the steel plow, which would enable farmers to turn grasslands into fields for corn, soy beans, and wheat. Towns, factories, and roads followed and today in Illinois, the so-called Prairie State, less than one-hundredth of one percent of original tallgrass prairie remains.

Midwestern grasses and forbs were virtually ignored until recently, although Americans have periodically been mad about other groups of wildflowers. (In the 1880s the Rio Grande and Western Railroad ran "wildflower specials" up the Colorado mountains, and Mrs. William Starr Dana's 19th-century books on eastern woodland plants became bestsellers.) Now, however, increasing numbers of midwesterners are mobilizing to save prairie remnants, to reconstruct new prairies, and even to put in prairie gardens around their houses.

As early as the 1930s the University of Wisconsin decided to include a reconstructed prairie at its new arboretum, but this was a tentative effort, and the prairie movement did not really take off until the 1960s. In 1962 the director of Chicago's Morton Arboretum authorized the institution to begin planting a prairie and put Ray Shulenberg in charge. The now-retired Shulenberg describes his masterpiece today as "a joy to go back and see." The 1960s also saw the emergence of Doug and Dorothy Wade as movement leaders. Students at the University of Wisconsin in the 1930s, just when its reconstructed prairie was going in, they had developed a lifelong interest in native midwestern plants, and Doug later became a professor of natural history at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb. True visionaries, the Wades started one of the country's first prairie plant nurseries—Windrift Prairie Shop in Oregon, Illinois—and they also organized the first North American Prairie Conference in 1968. Lorrie Otto attended the second.

Otto's role in mobilizing home gardeners to the cause cannot be overstated. She had emerged as a community leader in the late sixties after becoming concerned about her Mil-

waukee suburb's weekly DDT spraying for mosquitoes. Her work helped lead to hearings that banned the pesticide in Wisconsin. (So conclusive were the hearings that in 1972 the EPA banned DDT in the entire U.S.). But in 1970, with the hearings successfully over, the fifty-year-old Otto looked around at the world and asked herself, "Well, what can I do next?" The answer came at Doug and Dorothy Wade's conference, where she heard for the first time about the disappearing prairie and realized she could "save some prairie plants." She responded by chopping down the 64 Norway spruce trees that had shaded her one-acre lot and replacing them with an array of native plants. Although many other Milwaukee homeowners have since followed suit, large-scale conversion to the cause took time. Once when Otto's garden was young, the town actually mowed it down because a new neighbor, thinking she was looking at a vacant lot, reported it to authorities. Otto swiftly set the officials straight and was eventually reimbursed for her loss.

Passionately concerned about pesticides, pollution, and water use as well as the insidious way that landscaping with lawn increases them all, Otto continues to evangelize, winning converts with her dynamic lectures and sheer force of personality. "How gorgeous we could make the world if we took out lawns and grew the native plants that bring back birds and butterflies," she implores. "And it's so much fun once you find out you can do this." Eager to share the fun, Otto organizes a tour each year that includes her own garden and those of her followers who have dug up lawns to go native. "Their lives change," observes Otto of the tour-goers, who see the beauty of the native wildflowers and the diversity of the wildlife. "And," she adds, "knowing there are no pesticides gives you such comfort, such a safe feeling."

Meanwhile, down on the academic farm, Darrel Morrison was preaching the word about native plants to his classes at the University of Wisconsin and, for the first time, attracting the interest of the corporate world. In 1972 he designed a two-acre prairie-style landscape surrounding a lawn for the CUNA Mutual Insurance Company in Madison. Two years later he designed an eighty-acre prairie for the GE Medical Systems Division, west of Milwaukee. In both cases, officials in the corporations had read about Morrison's naturalistic plantings and wanted something similar. Although the CUNA garden has been lost to building expansion, the GE prairie is intact, and Morrison, based today in Georgia, continues to design native plant gardens around the country. He recently served as environmental design consultant on the new native plant botanical garden at the National Wildflower Research Center in Austin, Texas.

Morrison sees environmental concerns as prime factors motivating the interest in native grasses and forbs, but he also stresses "the aesthetic of prairie landscaping—its pleasing contrast to predictable lawn and shrubs, and the fitness of >

5. The project will create a small patch of habitat where there is almost none. It will hopefully serve as a first link/example in a network of urban neighborhood garden spaces.

The area has been described by neighborhood elders as one that had “fields” near the edge of a “swamp” (pre-1920s). In the 1910s and 1920s a few residences were built, and the area was used in small-scale cultivation. In the 1920s, the area quickly became a densely populated neighborhood of closely spaced one- and two-family houses, schools, churches, bakeries, and grocery stores. (This particular project site once held a combination residence and corner grocery store. Later this became a party store when the grocery store owner joined the many in flight from the city.) From the late 1960s onward, a race riot, fires, and general disinvestment have challenged the community and left many open land spaces. The neighborhood still nurtures many, many children and a new, rich ethnic diversity.

This project will not attempt to recreate the “swamp,” but to bring back some of the “field.” The land has only recently been purchased (22 October 1998 at a Michigan Department of Natural Resources auction of state-owned land). From 1990 until its recent purchase, it truly was abandoned. The owner of the fire-destroyed party store lost ownership through absence and failure to pay taxes. Since its purchase in October, seeds have been collected from remnant prairie plants on nearby roadsides and railroad-sides. These and other sun-tolerant native plants will be used on the site. Some native tree and shrub species (less likely to be dismissed as weeds and easily recognized by the city-dweller) will be used in the “back” of the site.

6. The area will be maintained by student and community stewards. The coordinators of this project take responsibility for training those stewards and maintaining a continuity of stewardship. Some funding will be required—especially at these very early stages. Grants (such as this one) and donations will be sought to provide the necessary funds. ☺

—Andrea Urbiel

Wild Ones is very grateful to the following “SFE Partners” for their sponsorship in the form of seeds, plants or discounts: Enders Greenhouse of Illinois and, from Wisconsin, Kettle Moraine Natural Landscaping, Little Valley Farm, Prairie Future Seed Company, Prairie Nursery, and Prairie Ridge Nursery. SFE has a panel of judges who volunteer their time and to whom we are deeply grateful: Neil Diboll, Molly Fifield-Murray, Babette Kis, G. Andrew Larsen, Ken Leinbach, Mariette Nowak, Bret Rappaport, Craig Tufts, and Donald Vorpahl. Thank you, all!

OUR QUEEN-OF-THE-PRAIRIE NOW A HALL-OF-FAMER

Voices
from the
Past



Admirer and longtime collaborator David Kopitzke (Wisconsin Bureau of Endangered Resources) greets Lorrie Otto at the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony at the Sentry World Headquarters Theatre in Stevens Point, held April 17. Lorrie’s story and an engraved plaque now permanently reside in the UW-Stevens Point Schmeekle Reserve Nature Center as the 36th inductee since the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame Foundation was established in 1985.

Lorrie is hence regarded as a conservation luminary along with the likes of Aldo Leopold, John Muir, Gaylord Nelson, and Owen Gromme. Testimonials were given by David Kopitzke and Wild Ones President Bret Rappaport, assisted by his son Connor. Lorrie most graciously and vivaciously addressed the audience, reliving in great detail one of her first activist missions.

Turning 80 this September, Lorrie shows no sign of slowing down in her quest for a healed and respected natural environment. All who attended were indeed inspired. As an added honor, the College of Natural Resources, along with dozens of graduating students, presented Lorrie with their Environmental Leader Award. She was also attended by longtime friend and fellow naturalist Richard Barloga, her sister Betty, cousin Kay Ruff, Kay’s daughters Karen Bate and Connie Darling, and your’s truly, Chris Reichert. ☺

PHOTO BY CHRIS REICHERT



1997 National Conservation Achievement Awards

Lorrie Otto - Special Achievement



Lorrie Otto has been an effective advocate for naturalistic landscaping for more than four decades. It seems fitting, then, that her life began on a dairy farm in Dan County, Wisconsin where her earliest memories include working her fingers into the newly turned earth, sensing how life seeds, roots and swells in response to the sun and rain.

As a young wife and mother, Lorrie Otto nurtured native plants around her home to provide an interesting space for her children to play and learn, and educated neighbors and town officials about their value when they scorned her "messy" yard. Her influence and emphasis on providing habitat for wildlife has changed the way many Americans view their yards, and spurred the growth and success of NWF's Backyard Wildlife Habitat™ certification program.

Some 30 years ago, Otto lobbied successfully to save Fairy Chasm, a 20-acre woodland near her home. During those efforts she became aware of the use of the pesticide DDT and its disastrous effects on wildlife and the environment. She later became a prime force during the Wisconsin state hearings which resulted in a ban of DDT in that state. Her continued lobbying efforts helped bring about the national ban in 1972, leading to the recovery of the endangered American bald eagle.

Otto has also been an activist for schoolyard habitats, and her neighborhood now boasts more than six schools with naturalistic landscaping and related curriculum. She is currently the program chair and a national director of the "Wild Ones," which promotes the use of native plants in urban and suburban landscapes and has established a "Seeds for Education Program" in Lorrie's name. Her work has even attracted overseas attention--she will soon be featured in a BBC program on American gardening.

Lorrie Otto's lifetime of work as a naturalist and environmentalist has significantly influenced the way people landscape for wildlife habitat across the country. Craig Tufts, NWF's Chief Naturalist, says: "More than anyone else, Lorrie Otto brought the whole idea of natural landscaping into the public's view."

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Throw away the lawn mowers

Throw away the lawn mower and let the grass grow, Milwaukee area naturalist Lorrie Otto told participants at Continuing Education Day for Women Saturday at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

Neatly trimmed lawns and shrubs are by-products of "smaltzy suburbia," she said, and force nature to act in a way it wasn't intended.

The grass imported for domestic yards is meant to be green in spring and fall, and brown during its summer dormant period.

"But we say, oh no, you can't do that. So we bring up water from the well or turn on the faucet" to force it to be green, Ms. Otto said.

And since the grass has "stubby little roots" because people keep mowing the top off, gardeners bring in nitrogen fertilizer to force it green, she said, and douse it with herbicides to kill weeds and pesticides to kill bugs.

The only grass that is meant to turn green in mid-summer is prairie grass, which loves the sun and drought, she said. And prairie flowers will bloom from spring to fall, she said. Between the two they won't give weeds a chance.

People are afraid if they let their lawns go, they'll be invaded by weeds, but weeds won't take hold where something else is growing, she said, and it's not true that the yard will become a haven for allergy-giving plants.

Birches, oaks, elms, ashes and Kentucky blue grass lead

the list of allergy giving vegetations, Ms. Otto said.

"No one ever got hayfever from prairie grasses."

She suggested people plant shrubs along their street or road to act as a buffer from car exhaust fumes and pollution.

Strawberries, which are almost evergreens, she said, can be mixed with violets and creeping charlie for a beautiful, low ground cover.

A prairie yard can be beautiful when the wild flowers are mixed in with the grasses, she said.

"Some people are turned off because they've been taught by Scott's Weed and Feed," she said.

And don't believe people who'd say that the grass will "grow to your chin" if it isn't mowed, she said.

Ms. Otto, who is a volunteer at River Edge Nature Center in Newburg, showed slides of yards which have undergone the transition from cut and trimmed to unmowed and natural. They included homes along Milwaukee's Lake Shore Drive, in suburbs and in the country.

For people beginning landscaping projects, she advises they introduce a variety of shrubs and trees.

"Whatever the village is using (for trees), that's what you don't use," she said. "The greater the diversity, the less apt you are to have bugs."

Each species has an insect which favors it, she said. If that insect isn't provided with a smorgasbord of his favorite meal, he won't be apt to move in with all of his friends, she said.

But she also advises homeowners not to bring in trees and shrubs that aren't native to the soil and their part of the state. A Norway spruce doesn't belong in the wooded countryside. Instead, she tells people to look at the woodlots in their area and plant those trees. "People want to build a house in the woods and then the first thing they do is destroy the woods," she said.

Instead of digging up the ground cover and planting grass, leave it alone, she said. Prairie grasses won't grow in shaded areas, but the ground cover already present in the woods is ideal for holding the nutrients in the ground. Flowers can be purchased and planted that are native to that environment, she said.

If there are low, wet areas on the land or areas prone to runoff, she suggests planting marsh flowers that will use up the excess water. It's standing water that invites mosquitos to breed, she noted, not unmowed lawns.

"Don't let water stand in eave troughs or culverts," she said.

For families with children who might trample the prairie grasses and flowers, Ms. Otto suggests they "just let the grass grow" that is currently planted and let the children have fun pitching tents and playing in the

yard.

Gradually, prairie plants can be introduced in a corner of the yard, she said.

If the soil is sandy and rocky, Ms. Otto said, let it be.

"There are wonderful things that grow in sandy soil and rocks," she said. "Don't bring in top soil."

But even if a homeowner doesn't want to undertake a large planting project, he can help nature by leaving alone what is currently growing on the land.

Ms. Otto said she despises men who hunt the best and biggest of a breed of animal so they can mount his head on the den wal, "But I will take any kind of hunter in comparison to a man with a lawn mower," she said. "He destroys an entire habitat."

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