

2025 Conference Keynote Speakers

Neil Diboll, Keynote Speaker

Neil Diboll is a consulting ecologist and President of Prairie Nursery and has over 40 years of experience in prairie establishment and restoration. He designs natural landscapes for golf courses, corporate campuses, public parks, and residential settings. Neil will share his expertise in creating prairie meadows and gardens to help you establish native wildflowers and grasses on your property. His step by step approach will provide you with “tried and true” methods to convert a small area to a prairie garden or a large acreage to a beautiful prairie meadow.



Neil Diboll received his degree from the University of Wisconsin in 1978. He has since worked for the U.S. Park Service in Virginia, the U.S. Forest Service in Colorado, and the University of Wisconsin. In 1982, Neil began his involvement with Prairie Nursery, producing native plants and seeds and designing native landscapes. He has since devoted his efforts to championing the use of prairie plants, as well as native trees, shrubs and wetland plants, in contemporary American landscapes.

PRAIRIE GARDEN DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The interest in using native wildflowers, grasses and low-growing shrubs of the North American Prairie in gardens has been building for the past fifty years. What were once considered to be “weeds” are now recognized as essential members of a healthy landscape that requires little or no pesticides, fertilizers, irrigation, and when done correctly, reduced weeding. Of equal or greater benefit is the sustenance these adaptable plants provide to pollinators, birds, and a host of other wildlife and garden visitors that can delight us as much as the plants themselves.

Neil explains the ecological principles of prairie garden design, including the importance of understanding each plant’s root system, foliage structure, bloom time, and interactions with neighboring plants to create sustainable, long-lived, low maintenance, ecologically sound prairie gardens. The best flowers and grasses for urban and suburban gardens are presented for a variety of different soil conditions. Dig deep into the fascinating world of prairie plants and how they can add beauty and value to your gardens!

Heather Holm, Keynote Speaker

Heather Holm is a pollinator conservationist and award-winning author of four books: *Pollinators of Native Plants* (2014), *Bees* (2017), *Wasps* (2021), and *Common Native Bees of the Eastern United States* (2022). Both *Bees* and *Wasps* have won multiple book awards including the American Horticultural Society Book Award (2018 and 2022 respectively). Heather’s expertise includes the interactions between native pollinators and native plants, and the natural history and biology of native bees and predatory wasps. Her work has been featured in the *New York Times*, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, and many local publications. Heather is also an accomplished photographer and her pollinator photos are frequently featured in print and electronic publications.



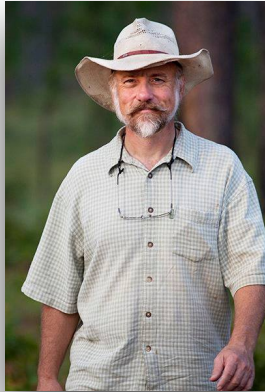
Heather serves on the boards of the following non-profits: [Friends of Cullen Nature Preserve and Bird Sanctuary](#), [Friends of Minnetonka Parks](#), and the new Minnesota Oak Savanna Chapter of [The Prairie Enthusiasts](#). In her spare time, she is an active community supporter, writing grants, and coordinating and participating in volunteer ecological landscape restoration projects. The latest project is a [13-acre oak savanna restoration](#) that will provide thriving habitat for pollinators, birds, mammals, and passive, nature-based opportunities for people.

NATIVE PREDATORY WASPS: THEIR ROLE AS POLLINATORS AND BENEFICIAL INSECTS

Native bees and predatory wasps share the same lineage and also share many behaviors and habitat requirements. Predatory wasps feed their offspring insects and spiders, and bees diverged from this carnivorous diet to feed their offspring plant-based food (pollen and nectar). Flower-rich landscapes provide critical habitat for both adult bees and wasps because they each consume flower nectar; in addition, wasps need diverse, flower-rich landscapes to hunt for their prey. Heather will highlight many amazing natural history and biology facts about native wasps illustrating their nesting habitat, prey specificity, and the ecosystems services they provide—pest insect population control and pollination.

Bill Finch, Keynote Speaker

Bill Finch is founding director of the Paint Rock Forest Research Center, which partners with The Nature Conservancy to develop cutting edge forest research on a 4000-acre Nature Conservancy preserve in northeast Alabama.



Finch is the former director of the Mobile Botanical Gardens and was the Conservation Director for the Alabama Chapter of The Nature Conservancy. He is also a founding partner of the Alabama River Diversity Network, a partnership devoted to restoring human and biological diversity along the Alabama River. He is also an award-winning writer and journalist. His book, *Longleaf Far As the Eye Can See* – developed with his partner, Beth Finch – is in its fourth printing with University of North Carolina Press. As environmental editor with the *Mobile Register*, Finch won numerous national and regional awards for series on Alabama forests, on mercury contamination in seafood, and on Alabama's many ecosystems. His weekly column on nature and gardening was awarded best specialty column nationally by the Headliners Club. His weekly radio show,

focusing on natural history, the environment and gardening in Alabama and along the Gulf Coast, broadcasts every Sunday morning.

WHY THE SOUTH IS THE FUTURE OF MIDWESTERN FORESTS, GRASSLANDS AND GARDENS

It's a scary thought: your future depends on Southern states like Alabama. For millions of years, Ohio, the Midwest and the northern tier of states have depended on the storehouse of species and genes in the Deep South. Southern forests, grasslands and streams have repeatedly repopulated Ohio, the Midwest and New England after glacial obliteration. Now that climate is warming again—as dramatically as at any time in the past—Midwestern ecosystems are going to depend on heat-tolerant (and more diverse) Southern genes for their survival, and Midwestern gardeners and conservationists are going to have to understand the experience of gardeners and conservationists in places that have long dealt with higher temperatures.

Saturday Afternoon Featured Speakers

Bill Finch - Talk #2

SEEING THE LIGHT: A NEW WAY OF UNDERSTANDING ECOSYSTEMS, INDOOR

We forget that light is the keystone of ecosystems. And we often fail to understand that not just any light will do. Ecosystems are tailored to their own precise lighting systems, and some effectively modify sunlight to take advantage of the most useful rays. Learning more about the precise ways ecosystems use light will be critical to saving the diversity of our forests, grasslands, streams (and even caves!)—and may even help you become a better gardener and farmer.

Dr. Kellen Calinger

Kellen Calinger earned her BS in Biology from West Virginia University and her PhD in Evolution, Ecology, and Organismal Biology at The Ohio State University. She has spent the past 9 years teaching majors and non-majors introductory Biology students at Ohio State in both lecture and lab while working to develop novel undergraduate research laboratory experiences. Her current research spans both biology and pedagogy. In biology, she investigates how flowering responses to warming

vary across vast geographic ranges. Her pedagogical research focuses on how diversity aligned curriculum improves students' understanding of bias and fosters feelings of belonging among marginalized groups.

THE FLOWERING TIMES, THEY ARE A'CHANGING, INDOOR

This talk will provide foundational knowledge about global warming and its effects on flowering plants in Ohio.

Jim McCormac

Jim McCormac worked for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources for 31 years as a botanist, and later specializing in wildlife diversity projects, especially involving birds. He has authored or coauthored six books, including *Birds of Ohio* (Lone Pine 2004); and *Wild Ohio: The Best of Our Natural Heritage* (Kent State University Press 2009). The latter won the 2010 Ohioana Book award. He is a coauthor of the *Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas II* book. His latest book, coauthored with Chelsea Gottfried, is *Gardening for Moths* (Ohio University Press 2023). Jim writes a column, "Nature", for the *Columbus Dispatch*, and regularly publishes a natural history blog. He has written numerous articles in a variety of publications and has delivered hundreds of presentations throughout the eastern United States. He was named 2015 Conservation Communicator of the Year by the Ohio League of Sportsmen. Jim is an avid photographer, shooting a range of natural history subjects. He has had hundreds of photos published in various forums. His photography can be sampled at <https://www.jimmccormac.com/>

AUTUMN GOLD: THE GOLDENRODS, INDOOR

Come fall, fields are painted gold with goldenrods. In spite of their beauty, goldenrods all too often get a bad rap as weedy— certainly not desirable garden plants! But there is great diversity among goldenrods, with over 70 species in the eastern U.S. and over 25 species in Ohio. Many are stunningly beautiful, and it is possible to select species that will bloom from early July through the first frosts. Goldenrods are also critical nectar sources for a staggering array of insects, and serve a vital role in ecological webs. Many interesting insects specialize on goldenrods, and the nutrient-rich seeds provide ample fodder for seed-eating birds. This program will explore many of our gorgeous goldenrods, the animals that use them, and how they fit into nature's bigger picture.

Friday Afternoon Breakout Sessions

Gale E. Martin

Gale Martin, proprietor of Natives in Harmony Nursery, holds the preservation of local genotypes in high regard and aims to convert others to native species by offering top-quality, genetically suitable native forbs and grasses, along with the necessary expertise for their use and care. Education is a key element of Gale's mission; she diligently educates and assists her customers and the broader public with their land-use choices. Her passion lies in making Ohio genotypes accessible to those interested in cultivating native plants to foster habitats for native pollinators, birds, and other wildlife.

Gale has contributed to the boards of various conservation and education nonprofits, including the Ohio Prairie Association, Appalachia Ohio Alliance, Headwaters Outdoor Education Center, and Olentangy Watershed Alliance. In 2017, she retired as the Executive Director of the Marion County Historical Society, a role she fulfilled for 13 years. Prior to her tenure at MCHS, Gale served as the education specialist for the Morrow County Soil and Water Conservation District and worked as a naturalist at Mount Gilead State Park.

Seed Collection and Propagation of Native Plants, indoor

In nature, most plants engage in sexual reproduction, meaning they propagate through seeds. This process leads to genetic diversity among plants, allowing each one to adapt uniquely to environmental stresses like heat, drought, and flooding. Genetic diversity is crucial for a species' adaptation to changing environmental conditions, and propagating seeds preserves this diversity in wild native plants.

Native plant seeds require different germination conditions compared to common garden and vegetable species. The good news is that the methods are straightforward, and there's no need for complex facilities since these seeds are well-suited for outdoor germination in beds or containers. Moreover, seed propagation is a cost-effective method to produce numerous plants. Propagating native plants is rewarding because it doesn't require costly or advanced equipment. This presentation aims to provide beginners with the fundamental techniques and also delve into more complex knowledge for cultivating challenging species.

Rebecca Wood

Rebecca Wood, MEd, is a Certified Natural Health Professional, E-RYT 500 Yoga Instructor, Herbalist/Ethnobotanist and Advanced MRF & Reiki practitioner. She is a retired Professor from the School of Natural Resource Management at Hocking College where she taught for 22 years. You can find Rebecca at the outdoor booth Companion Plants.

Rebecca's services are twofold: first, Natural Healthcare Practitioner. Second, Rebecca extends her Natural Resource and field experience to you and your land, offering integrated Land-use consultant services. Rebecca speaks at conferences and workshops and is available to design classes specific to your interests.

Tree Treasures; The Folklore, Myths, Magic and Wonder of Trees, indoor

This will be a power point presentation accompanied by many examples of tree medicines, products, books, native tree samples and handouts with Fun and Historical Facts About Trees.

Saturday Repeating Breakout Sessions

Sarah Meadows

Sarah Meadows, Public Involvement Coordinator, was born and raised in Hamilton County, Ohio. With two parents who worked in the local park system, her passion for nature and conservation were fostered from a young age. She has a B.S. in biology from Northern Kentucky University, and has been working in the environmental conservation field for 12 years in a variety of roles including environmental education, restoration, and leading volunteers. Her roles have most often tied back to protecting our local water resources, including using native plants to restore and protect waterways.

RAIN GARDEN RUN-DOWN, INDOOR

A rain garden is a shallow depression that is designed to capture and filter rainwater runoff. They are planted with tough plants that thrive during brief periods of inundation as well as drought, providing attractive habitat for pollinators and other wildlife. Installing a rain garden can be a proactive way to improve local water quality or solve water issues in your yard, and might seem intimidating at first. Learn the basics of rain gardens and how installing a rain garden can be accessible to anyone who enjoys gardening!

Bill Whorrall

Bill is an artist who uses nature in his drawings and paintings and photography. He has three art degrees from Indiana University.

DESIGNS IN NATURE AND NATURE JOURNALING TBD

Students will learn about many design systems in the natural world and how to draw natural objects with those systems in mind. All art materials will be provided. This program will be held in the Hoelle Room.

Mark Wessel

Mark Wessel was raised on a small farm in SW Ohio on the edge of a 500 acre wooded valley. This valley provided his entertainment in nature for most of his first 20 years. After a long career of private estate gardening in the Cincinnati area, he changed careers and started working as the Director of

Horticulture Research for the Gardens Alive Company and its many horticultural focused brands. Leisure activities include birding, gardening, hiking, botanizing, foraging and many more activities in nature with his wife Meg.

COMMON ASTERS ENCOUNTERED IN OHIO, INDOOR

Mark's talk will cover key identification characteristics of the more common asters of Ohio. It will also include habitat where they may be encountered and the insect life that depends on them for nourishment.

Brooke Medlin

Landscape designer and consultant Brooke Medlin has been working in the nursery and landscape industry for over a dozen years, but her love of nature goes back to her childhood, most of which was spent happily outdoors. She has held many roles in the industry, and recently combined them all to start a native plant consulting and landscaping business with her sister. Meadowsweet Ecological Landscapes is lucky to operate in beautiful southwestern Ohio (and beyond) offering consultation, design, installation, plant sales, and education.

DESIGNING INTENTIONAL WILD SPACES, INDOOR

This program is an introduction to creating a native plant landscape design for your residential property. Included in the presentation are measuring and design layout instruction, design tips and best practices, as well as numerous sample designs for different conditions. Examples of local HOA and zoning regulations will be reviewed, and attendees will leave with a list of "neighbor friendly" plants. Because we will be covering a lot of ground in a short amount of time, Brooke will also be making herself available at her vendor booth (Midwest Ecological Landscapes) for questions.

Tom Borgman, Sessions I & II

BASIC INVASIVE PLANT IDENTIFICATION & CONTROL, SESSION I, OUTDOOR

This program will give a basic introduction to invasive plants species that we will most likely encounter in our own landscapes. Plant identification and how to control them will be a part of this basic session that will apply to the homeowner and to landscape restoration projects.

ADVANCED INVASIVE PLANT CONTROL, SESSION II, OUTDOOR

This program will build on basic invasive plant control that was learned in Session I or learned on your own. This program will discuss planning and ongoing restoration techniques, especially for large scale projects.

Michael Keeler

Michael Keeler is the founder and principal of Ohio Native Concepts, a landscape design and consulting firm located in Columbus that specializes in native plant landscaping. With a background in natural resources management and a deep passion for nature and community, Michael aims to redefine the concept of a garden and steer the landscape industry towards a future where design harmoniously blends with nature and society. His design philosophy emphasizes the creation of resilient native plant landscapes that embrace nature rather than resist it, fostering a healthier environment for both current and future generations.

MATRIX DESIGN FOR BIODIVERSE GARDENS LISTED ON AGENDA AS MATRIX DESIGN WITH GRASSES & SEDGES, OUTDOOR

We will discuss how we can replicate native plant communities to maximize biodiversity in our own gardens. We will cover the subject of matrix design, from concept to implementation through a presentation and demonstration using live native plants. Participants will see firsthand how plant species are selected, spaced, and arranged using the matrix design technique.

Michele Banker

Michele serves as the Land Resource Coordinator for the Marianist Environmental Education Center. As steward of the 100 acres of natural areas at Mount Saint John, she has led the establishment and management of tall grass prairie, non-native invasive plant monitoring and management and

installation of a bioretention pond for storm water runoff control. During the past 17 years she has led service learning, educational programs, ecological research, and land restoration projects. Michele also gives presentations and provides land consultations for homeowners.

DIY GROWING NATIVE PLANTS AND MEEC NURSERY TOUR, OUTDOOR

A walking tour with a behind-the-scenes look at the Marianist Environmental Education Center (MEEC) native plant nursery. The outdoor workshop will introduce the steps taken in native seed propagation including basic tools needed, proper seed collection and handling, various cleaning techniques, soil mixes, protection from animals, and the challenges of weather conditions. While it is an investment in time and patience; you too can propagate, perpetuate, and promote native plants throughout our home landscape

Judy Semroc.

Judy has spent more than 30 years chasing, observing, and marveling at the amazing natural history found in Ohio & other states. She is the founder of “Chrysalis in Time,” the first Ohio chapter of the North American Butterfly Association (NABA). Judy also serves on the board of the Ohio Bluebird Society, the Ohio Ornithological Society (Conservation Committee) & the Ohio Biological Survey. She has co-authored two natural history guides, *Dragonflies & Damselflies of Northeast Ohio* and *Goldenrods of Northeast Ohio: A Field Guide to Identification & Natural History*. As a former Petroleum Geologist and science teacher, Judy loves to learn about and share her passion for the natural world through hikes, interpretive programs and photography. Learn more about Judy’s latest adventures at Nature Spark! www.naturesparkohio.com.

BIRDS, BUGS & BOTANY: TAKE A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE, OUTDOOR

This outdoor nature foray will focus on the birds, bugs and botany we encounter during a leisurely stroll through the wonderful habitats in and around the campus. We will seek out and observe as much nature as we can find during our time outdoors. Consider bringing binoculars, camera, and your keen eyesight to fully enjoy our nature trek!