

Brush Piles



NBPP's Refrigerator Door Companion

Fall 1992

FIFTEEN YEARS OF GROWING: 1977-1992

By Joanne Softcheck

A smorgasbord of special programs throughout the month of September will commemorate the 15th Anniversary of the North Branch Prairie Project. For a complete description listing names, dates, times, locations, and fees, see the insert in this issue of *Brushpiles*—but read on for some tempting appetizers.

The celebration will kick-off on Friday, September 11, at the Chicago Academy of Sciences, with a slide show and talk on the “**History of the North Branch Prairie Project.**” Steve Packard, Director of Science and Stewardship for the Illinois Chapter of The Nature Conservancy and a founding member of the project, will be the presenter. A convivial reception with wine and potluck hors d'oeuvres (see below) follows.

Eminent prairie and savanna experts Gerry Wilhelm, Field Taxonomist at the Morton Arboretum, and Ray Schulenberg, retired Curator of Woody Plant Collections at Morton Arboretum, are also featured speakers. On September 17, Gerry will explore the “**Ecology of Prairies and Savannas**” at the Chicago Botanic Garden. Ray will speak on “**Native Peoples and Our Local Vegetation**” at Northeastern Illinois University on September 24. There is a \$5.00 admission fee, payable at the door, for each of the three lecture programs.

At a “**Wild Gardens Project**” workshop at the Chicago Botanic Garden on September 12, coordinator Lindsay McGee will explain how home gardeners can aid restoration by growing seeds of rare grasses and wildflowers.

Lee Hansen, with help from Karen Laner and Joanne Softcheck, arranged a **family-oriented “Prairie Docks” program** to be held at Emily Oaks Nature Center on September 19. Kids can do the beautiful “What Belongs in a Prairie Puzzle” designed by Corasue Nicholas and take-home coloring sheets.

The September 13th workday at Somme will be followed by an afternoon “**Tallgrass Trail Tales Tour**” introduced by steward Steve Packard and led by experienced North Branch volunteers. Steward Robert Lonsdorf will introduce volunteer-guided “**Ice and Fire: Glaciers and the Red Buffalo**” tours on the afternoon of the September 20 Miami-Indigo workday.

Cruise the North Branch on a **six-mile canoe trip** from Willow Road to Dempster Street on Sunday, September 27 (advance

registration required). Nonpaddlers are needed at Somme that morning to **collect the seeds** of fall-blooming forbs and grasses.

See images of the river from the 1940s at a slide show and talk focusing on the North Branch of “**The Chicago River—Then and Now**” by ardent canoeist and Cook County Clean Streams Committee activist Ralph Frese of Chicagoland Canoe Base September 21 at the Edgebrook Clubhouse.

As is always true of organized events like these, plenty of planning and preparation are still to be done. **Help is needed** in several areas. To lend a hand in any of the following ways, please call Joanne at 312-878-3877.

CHEFS AND SHOPPERS—Bring a plate of delicious hors d'oeuvres (that do not need heating or refrigeration) to the September 11 reception. We are hoping for an excellent response on this one—it does not have to be fancy or homemade, just tasty! (In order to get a general estimate on quantity, please call.)

CREW LEADERS—Be a crew leader/assistant at the REI Service Project at Harms Woods on September 26 (it runs from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and help is welcome for all or part of the day)—or help lead crews at the September 13, 20, or 27 workdays.

TICKET TAKERS—Collect admissions at the September 11, 17, or 24 talks.

HOSPITALITY HOSTS—Greet newcomers, distribute literature, answer questions, sell 15th Anniversary T-Shirts, keep the refreshments flowing for September 11, 17, 24, or 26 events.

THANKS—AND SEE YOU THERE!



NORTH BRANCH PRAIRIE PROJECT

FALL WORKDAYS AND ACTIVITIES SCHEDULE 1992

The NORTH BRANCH PRAIRIE PROJECT is working to restore and manage the few remaining prairie remnants along the North Branch of the Chicago River in the Cook County Forest Preserves. These areas, once part of a vast grassland ecosystem, are under tremendous pressure from urban development and non-native species. We are working to restore conditions that will allow these natural wild communities to flourish as a permanent part of the metropolitan area.

In the fall we collect seeds, pull weeds, and cut brush. Always dress for the weather and bring some water. Insect repellent and sun protection are important. Bring some food if you can stay for lunch. The workday hotline is 312-878-3877.

Fall 1992

September 3	Thursday	6:00 p.m.	Somme Sedge Meadow
September 6	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	SEED COLLECTING—Somme
September 6	Sunday	1:30 p.m.	SEED COLLECTING—Somme
September 13	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Somme—15TH YEAR ANNIVERSARY WORKDAY & PICNIC
September 13	Sunday	1:30 p.m.	Tallgrass Trail Tour of Somme
September 19	Saturday	10:00 a.m.	PLANT ID CLASS AT SOMME (Advance Registration Required)
September 20	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Miami-Indigo—15TH YEAR ANNIVERSARY WORKDAY & PICNIC
September 20	Sunday	1:30 p.m.	Ice and Fire: Glaciers and the Red Buffalo Tour of Miami-Indigo
September 20	Sunday	1:30 p.m.	SEED COLLECTING—Miami-Indigo
September 27	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	SEED COLLECTING—Somme
September 27	Sunday	1:30 p.m.	SEED COLLECTING—Somme
October 4	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	SEED COLLECTING—Somme
October 4	Sunday	1:30 p.m.	SEED COLLECTING—Somme
October 10	Saturday	9:00 a.m.	STATE-WIDE SEED COLLECTING DAY— Meet at Somme Prairie Grove or Miami-Indigo
October 11	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Somme Sedge Meadow
October 18	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Sauganash
October 18	Sunday	1:30 p.m.	SEED COLLECTING—Sauganash
October 24	Saturday	9:00 a.m.	SEED COLLECTING—Miami-Indigo
October 25	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Wayside-RR Prairie
October 25	Sunday	1:30 p.m.	SEED COLLECTING—Wayside
November 1	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	SEED COLLECTING—Somme
November 1	Sunday	1:30 p.m.	SEED COLLECTING—Harms Woods
November 8	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Buffalo Grove Prairie
November 8	Sunday	1:30 p.m.	SEED COLLECTING—Bunker Hill
November 14	Saturday	9:00 a.m.	Bunker (Oxbow Prairie)
November 15	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Bunker Hill
November 21	Saturday	9:00 a.m.	SEED MIXING DAY—Emily Oaks
November 22	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Somme PG/Woods

NORTH BRANCH WORKGROUPS

The North Branch workgroups listed below need volunteers. Contact the chairperson for more information or attend a workgroup meeting. *The next Coordinating Committee meeting will be on Wednesday, October 28 at 7:30 p.m. at the home of Sharon Gryska, 2711 N. Mildred, Chicago.*

Ecological Management:

Jane and John Balaban, 708-679-4289
Next meeting: Thursday, October 1

Education/Volunteer Development

Joanne Softcheck, 312-878-3877

Publications:

Karen Holland, 312-929-7658

Publicity:

Gail Schmoller, 312-935-0654

Science:

Susanne Masi, 312-973-2608

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Wetlands in Peril/Lake Calumet and Beyond

A Workshop sponsored by the Chicago Audubon Society and the Great Lakes Regional Office of the National Audubon Society. **Saturday, October 3.** Time and location to be determined.

The Lake Calumet Airport site contains irreplaceable

Directions

BUFFALO GROVE PRAIRIE (Buffalo Grove)—Turn north on Johnson Drive, which is the first light west of Milwaukee on Lake-Cook Rd. Meet in the Cryovac lot, the first driveway on the west side of Johnson Dr. The prairie is under the Com Ed power lines.

BUNKER HILL (Chicago)—Meet at the Bunker Hill Forest Preserve parking lot on the west side of Caldwell Ave. about 1/4 mile north of Devon Ave.

EMILY OAKS NATURE CENTER (SKOKIE)—From intersection of Skokie Blvd. and Howard St., go east on Howard to first residential street, Knox. Go north on Knox to Brummel. Turn left on Brummel and go one block to Nature Center parking lot.

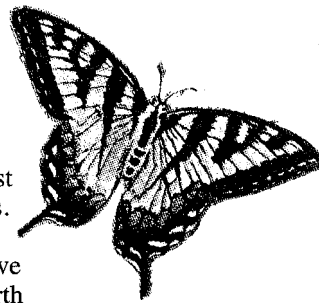
HARMS WOODS (Glenview)—Meet at Forest Preserve Grove parking lot on the west side of Harms Rd., just south of Glenview Rd.

MIAMI-INDIGO (Morton Grove-Niles)—Meet at Miami Woods Prairie Forest Preserve parking lot on the east side of Caldwell Ave., two blocks north of Oakton Ave.

SAUGANASH PRAIRIE (Chicago)—Meet at the edge of the Forest Preserve along the south side of Bryn Mawr Ave. at Kilbourn Ave. (south of Peterson Ave. and east of Cicero Ave.)

SOMME PRAIRIE GROVE, WOODS, AND SEDGE MEADOW (Northbrook)—Take Dundee Rd. two miles west from the Edens Expwy. to Waukegan Rd. Go north a few hundred feet on Waukegan and meet at the unpaved parking area on the west side of the road.

WAYSIDE-RR PRAIRIE (Morton Grove)—Meet at Wayside Woods Prairie Forest Preserve parking lot on Lehigh Ave. (a few blocks east of Waukegan Rd. and just north of Dempster Ave.)



Metilotus alba

By Jim Cutler

It's also known as white sweet clover;
It tries to take the prairie over.

We work to cast it out,
And feel without a doubt
With help our prairies will recover.

Brush Pile Crew

Editing: Barbara Rose

Layout: Kathy and Chuck Lapinsky

marshland and ecological communities. Three state endangered species nest there: the black-crowned night heron, yellow headed blackbird and common moorhen. The site also is the home for 40,000 people in three neighborhoods. Join in discussions of strategies for protection of habitat. **Call 312-539-6793 for information.**

Global Connections: Ecological Communities, People to the Land

State of the Prairie Lecture Series

January 19, 26, February 2, 9, 16, 1993 7 p.m.

At the Chicago Academy of Sciences

Admission: \$5.00

Sponsored by the Chicago Academy of Sciences, The Nature Conservancy, Open Lands Project, North Branch Prairie Project

Oak Savannah Conference

February 20, 1993

At Northeastern Illinois University

Sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, The Nature Conservancy, Northeastern Illinois University, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

Call Karen Holland at 312-886-0238 for details.

Prairie University

The Nature Conservancy has put together a catalogue of Chicago area courses on the environment offered by volunteer groups, not-for-profit organizations, universities, museums, nature centers and governmental agencies. **Call Laurel Ross at 312-346-8166 for more information.**

PHOTOS NEEDED TO CAPTURE THE ELUSIVE SEEDS

Seed collectors are sometimes puzzled about when the seeds of the plants they search out are ready to collect. What does a plant in seed look like after it has lost its flowers, and often many of its leaves? Is the seed too green, already gone, or ripe for the picking. Botanist Dr. Margaret Murley, who also supports the NBPP Herbarium, has funded a two-year project to produce a collection of slides and photos that will help collectors identify seed-ready plants in the field. The money is part of a gift donated to the Fort Dearborn Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society in Dr. Murley's name.

Susanne Masi coordinates this project and invites interested photographers to contribute slides to the collection. Contact Susanne about details before you shoot! Call her at 312-743-3124.



NORTH BRANCH PRAIRIE PROJECT
15th ANNIVERSARY
CALENDAR OF EVENTS



Friday, September 11, 7pm - 10pm

“History of the North Branch Prairie Project,” a slide show and talk by Steve Packard, Director of Science and Stewardship for The Illinois Nature Conservancy and a founding member of the project. A reception follows the talk. At the Chicago Academy of Sciences, 2001 N. Clark Street, Chicago. Admission is \$5.00 at the door. Cosponsored with the Chicago Academy of Sciences.

Saturday, September 12, 9am - 12 noon

“Wild Garden Project” Workshop and tour by coordinator Lindsay McGee demonstrates how home gardeners can help raise native plants for seed to be used in restoring natural areas. Held at the Chicago Botanic Garden (on Lake Cook Road in Glencoe) which has been assisting in the project. Free. **ADVANCE REGISTRATION REQUIRED** (maximum 20). To register call Lindsay at 312-346-8166.

Sunday, September 13

9am - 12 noon

Restoration Workday at Somme Prairie Grove in Northbrook - stay for lunch! Meet at unpaved parking area on the west side of Waukegan Road a few hundred feet north of Dundee Road.

12 noon to 1:15pm

Bring-Your-Own Picnic Lunch at Somme Woods picnic shelter (enter from Dundee Road just east of Waukegan Road). Entertainment provided.

1:30pm - 3:30pm

“Tallgrass Trail Tales” - ecology tours of Somme Prairie Grove introduced by Steward Steve Packard and led by experienced North Branch volunteers.

Thursday, September 17, 7pm - 9pm

“The Ecology of Prairies and Savannas,” a talk by Dr. Gerould Wilhelm, Field Taxonomist at the Morton Arboretum. Held at the Chicago Botanic Garden on Lake Cook Road in Glencoe, Alsdorf Auditorium, Education Building. Admission is \$5.00. Cosponsored with Chicago Botanic Garden.

Saturday, September 19, 11am - 4pm

“Prairie Docks,” a fun program for families at Emily Oaks nature Center in Skokie will feature discovery walks with the “Prairie Doc,” prairie puzzles, and prairie coloring sheets. Stop in anytime between 11 and 4. Free admission. From the intersection of Skokie Boulevard and Howard Street, go east on Howard to the first residential street, Knox. Go north on Knox to Brummel. Turn left on Bummel and go one block to the nature center parking lot.

Sunday, September 20

9am - 12 noon

Restoration Workday at Miami Woods/Indigo Prairie in Morton Grove - stay for lunch!
Meet at Miami Woods Prairie Forest Preserve parking lot on the east side of Caldwell Avenue, two blocks north of Oakton Avenue.

12 noon - 1:15pm

Bring-Your-Own Picnic Lunch at Miami Woods Forest Preserve picnic shelter.
Entertainment provided.

1:30pm - 3:30pm

"Ice and Fire: Glaciers and the Red Buffalo" - ecology tours of Miami Woods Prairie introduced by Steward Robert Lonsdorf and led by experienced North Branch volunteers.

Monday, September 21, 7pm - 9:30pm

"The Chicago River, Then and Now," a slide show and talk focusing on the North Branch of the Chicago River by Ralph Frese from Chicagoland Canoe Base, and ardent canoeist who has campaigned for the preservation of Illinois rivers and is active in the work of the Cook County Clean Streams Committee. At Edgebrook Community Center, on the grounds of Edgebrook Golf Course, 6100 N. Central Ave. Free. ADVANCE REGISTRATION REQUIRED. Call 312-878-3877 to register.

Thursday, September 24, 7pm - 9 pm

"Native Peoples and Our Local Vegetation," a talk by Ray Schulenberg, Morton Arboretum's Curator of Woody Plant Collections, Retired, at Northeastern Illinois University, 5500 N. St. Louis Avenue, Chicago. Admission is \$5.00 at the door. Cosponsored with Northeastern Illinois University.

Saturday, September 26, 9am - 4pm

REI 1992 Service Project with NBPP at Harms Woods in Glenview - our goal is to remove a ton of invasive buckthorn brush. Lend a hand anytime between 9 and 4. Meet in the forest preserve parking lot off Harms Road just south of Glenview Road. Additional parking in forest preserve groves a short distance south of the meeting place. For more information, call REI at 708-470-9090.

Sunday, September 27

9am - 12 noon

Seed Collecting at Somme Prairie Grove in Northbrook. Help gather seed of rare grasses and wildflowers to be used in prairie and savanna restorations. Meet at unpaved parking area on the west side of Waukegan Road a few hundred feet north of Dundee Road.

9:30am - 3:00pm or so

Canoe Trip on the North Branch of the Chicago River, from Willow Road to Dempster Street (6 miles). \$15.00 per person, based on two people to a canoe. Return time will vary depending on you paddling speed. ADVANCE REGISTRATION REQUIRED. Call 312-878-3877 for information.

12 noon - 1:15pm

Bring-Your-Own Picnic Lunch at Somme Woods picnic shelter (enter from Dundee Road just east of Waukegan Road).

[Handwritten signatures and scribbles at the bottom of the page]

FALL CLASSES

Sponsored by the Forest Preserve District of Cook County and The Nature Conservancy

Saturday, August 29; 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.;

Herbicide Workshop

INSTRUCTOR: Ed Collins, McHenry County Conservation District

LOCATION: The Grove Interpretive Center

Topics covered in this practical workshop include: considerations in making the decision about the use of herbicides; choosing the right chemical and equipment; safety measures; effective application methods and timing; possible alternatives to herbicides in controlling brush and exotics; prescriptions for specific problem weeds; storage; and sources for materials. Bring questions.

Note: This is *not* a herbicide licensing class. See below.

DIRECTIONS: The Grove is located at 1421 Milwaukee Avenue in Glenview, just south of Lake Avenue on the East side of the street. Exit I-94 west at Lake Avenue. Drive 6 miles west to Milwaukee Avenue. OR I-294 to Willow Road. Exit west to Saunders. Left to Milwaukee.

Saturday, September 12; 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Herbicide Workshop

INSTRUCTOR: Ed Collins, McHenry County Conservation District

LOCATION: Camp Sagawau

DIRECTIONS: Camp Sagawau is located at Route 2 and Highway 83 in Lemont, Ill. Take I-55 to Route 83. Cross river and canals and continue south 1/4 mile to first stoplight. Turn left (east) on 83. Entrance to Camp Sagawau is immediately on the left.

Saturday, October 31; 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.;

Herbicide Workshop

INSTRUCTOR: Ed Collins, McHenry County Conservation District

LOCATION: Evanston Environmental Association

DIRECTIONS: Evanston Environmental Association is located at 2024 McCormick in Evanston. This is north of Golf at Bridge Street in the Ladd Arboretum.

Saturday, November 14; 1 to 4 p.m.;

Burn Workshop

INSTRUCTOR: Ed Collins

LOCATION: Crabtree Nature Center

This workshop is for everyone who plans to participate in a controlled burn in Cook County Forest Preserves. The format is lecture/discussion with audience participation encouraged. Topics include: fire ecology; the importance of fire in management; making a good burn plan; safety considerations; and burn equipment.

DIRECTIONS: To get to Crabtree Nature Center, exit I-90 at Barrington Road, go north to Palatine Road and left (west) to the Crabtree Nature Center sign.

Sunday, November 15; 1 to 4 p.m.

Burn Workshop

INSTRUCTOR: Ed Collins

LOCATION: Camp Sagawau

Saturday, December 5; 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.;

Burn Workshop

INSTRUCTOR: Ed Collins

LOCATION: Evanston Environmental Association

Saturday, December 12; 9 to about 11:30 a.m.;
plus lunch & exam;

Herbicide examination

An opportunity for VSN volunteers to obtain a license to use herbicides. An instructor from the University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service will provide general standards training prior to the test. Participants should read the General Standards Manual (\$2.50) and the General Standards Workbook (\$1.00) before the workshop. To order, send a check, payable to the University of Illinois, for \$3.50 to the Office of Agricultural Entomology, 172 Natural Resources Building, 607 East Peabody Drive, Champaign, Illinois 61820.

Bring a bag lunch. The hour-long test will be administered by the Illinois Department of Agriculture after lunch.

REGISTRATION: Required. (Call Sandi at 312/346-8166.)

LOCATION: Administration Building at North Park Village Nature Center, 5801 N. Pulaski Road (between Bryn Mawr and Peterson), Chicago

DIRECTIONS: From I-94, exit onto Peterson. Drive east to Pulaski and then south to 5801. OR from I-90, Austin exit onto Foster and drive east to Pulaski, then north to 5801.



FIELD PLANT IDENTIFICATION CLASS

at Somme Prairie Grove, Saturday, September 19, 1992,
10am-12pm. Instructor: Laurel Ross

Designed for the serious plant identification student with some previous experience. Bring a favorite field guide, Swink & Wilhelm (if you have it), a pencil, notebook, and hand lens.

The class will include:

- Identification of flowers and grasses in the field;
- Learning to identify plants by flowers as well as other distinguishing characteristics;
- Emphasis will be on the fall flora;
- Participants will key out at least one plant;
- Worksheets and other appropriate materials will be provided.

Class size: Limit 15 Fee: \$2 per person
See directions under the Fall Workday Schedule

REGISTRATION

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Day phone: _____ Night phone: _____

Mail this completed form & your NBPP check to:

Joanne Softcheck, 4537 N. Hamilton, Chicago, IL 60625

NORTH BRANCH CANOE TRIP

Sunday, September 27 9:30 a.m. to 3:00 (or so)
Fee: \$15.00 per person based on two people to a canoe.
Ralph Frese of Chicagoland Canoe Base will lead us on a six-mile stretch of the North Branch of the Chicago River, from Willow Road to Dempster Street. Directions will be sent with confirmation notice. Return time will vary depending on your paddling speed. **Maximum of 30 canoes.**

REGISTRATION (Deadline is Sept. 18)

- Canoe Trip, September 27
- I also plan to attend the September 21 slide show at Edgebrook Clubhouse. 7:30-9:30 p.m.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Day phone: _____ Night phone: _____

Make your check payable to North Branch Prairie Project and send it to:

Brian Seinfeld, 8230 Harding Ave., Skokie, IL 60076-2711

BUCKTHORN BLUES

By Brian Seinfeld

It was a dark and stormy night. The apprentice steward of Harms Woods awoke sweaty and gasping for breath. The reality of the arduous task of clearing copious amounts of dreaded buckthorn weighed heavily upon his young shoulders. In those early morning hours, worries about what to do occupied his mind.

Calling upon the omnipotent and omniscient Balabans, full-stewards of the buckthorn-laden Harms Woods, the apprentice was told of REI's (Recreational Equipment, Inc.) need for a service project. Something clicked. Out of the combined mind power of the stewards, a proposal of poetic proportions was drafted. The plan incorporated NBPP know-how and REI volunteer muscle to eradicate the buckthorn and save the native ecosystem.

The proposal was submitted and the waiting began. One day passed . . . and then another. Volunteer Development Coordinator, Joanne Softcheck, contacted Julie Carmazzi at REI to check on the proposal's progress. Joanne was able to answer a few questions on specific details, and we waited optimistically. After weeks of nail biting, our proposal was accepted as the **1992 Niles REI Store Service Project.**

The young apprentice steward now calls upon all NBPP volunteers to help harness this incredible work force of up to 150 REI people. All those able to lead work crews or willing to herbicide, clear your calendars for Saturday, September 26 from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Please R.S.V.P. with the Balabans (708-679-4289). REI will be providing drinks and snacks for all.

With your help, the young steward's nights will be filled with something other than dreams of the "buckthorn blues."

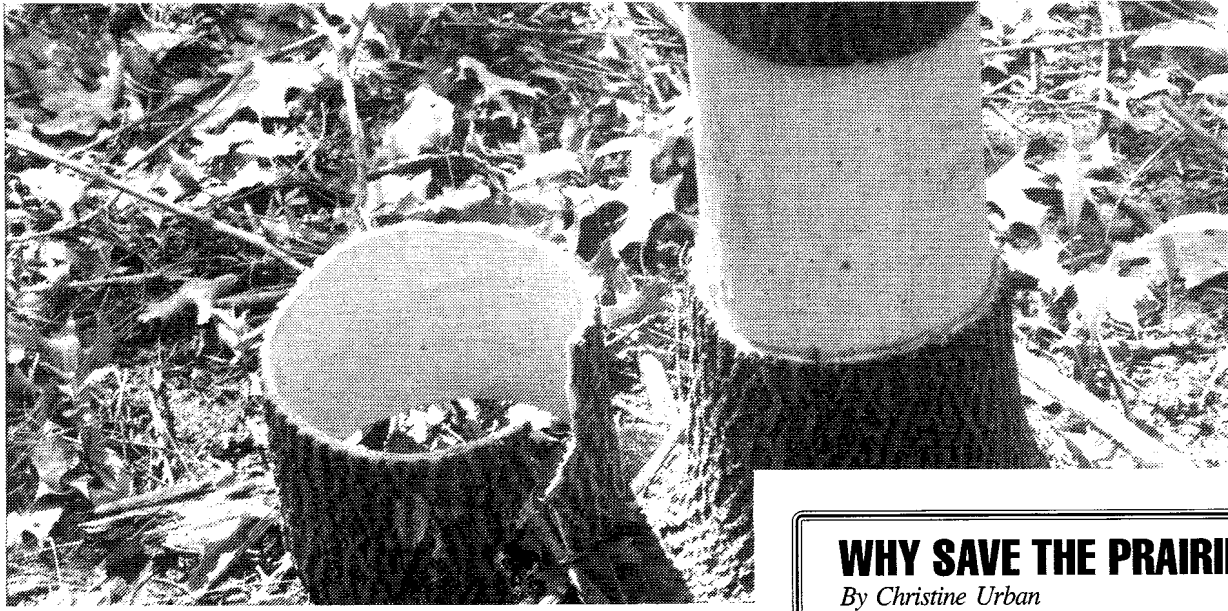


SEED COLLECTING

Through the fall, seed collection is still going on every Wednesday morning at 9 a.m. Call the NBPP information number 312-878-3877 to find out *whether* there is a collecting day scheduled and *where* to meet.

GIRDLES: WHAT THE WELL-DRESSED TREE IS WEARING THIS SEASON

By Rick Gabriel



We girdle invasive species of trees so that native prairie and savanna plants have a chance to grow.

The trees throughout the North Branch Prairie Project's sites wear girdles of diverse shapes and sizes. While some are neat and inconspicuous, others are a bit shabby. To present a good public image our girdled trees should "dress for success."

The best way to make a girdle is to saw two rings around the trunk, and then use the back of a hatchet to knock off the bark. Just chopping the bark off with a hatchet would leave a girdle mark that is not as neat.

When the tree is close to a trail or in another conspicuous place, the girdle should be as close to the ground as possible. The girdle will be less flagrant when the tree wears it around its bottom rather than at shoulder height. Also, adjacent brush and grass will mask a low girdle.

Another method for hiding the girdle mark is to apply some of Mother Nature's own make-up, mud, to the exposed sapwood. Just a light application will dull the shine and allow the girdle to blend into the surrounding bark. Dry dirt works, too. When rubbed in, it mixes with the sap and forms mud.

Trees have been sighted wearing only half a girdle. If the bark, including the phloem layer, is not completely removed from all around the trunk, the tree will continue to grow.

When a tree has twin trunks, be generous and give them both a girdle. If only one trunk is girdled the other will continue to send energy from its leaves to its roots, which will then send the energy to both trunks through the uncut sapwood in the middle.

This may all seem a bit fussy for a simple tree girdle but remember—a good prairie never goes out of style.

WHY SAVE THE PRAIRIE?

By Christine Urban

A group of North Branchers, in a quest for relief from arduous urban living, journeyed to Dinosaur National Monument in Utah. On a path we encountered a sign: "Why Protect the Desert?" We took to heart the sign's invocation; explain to those who don't understand why we should preserve natural areas. Why restore what has already been destroyed?

As technology encroaches on our everyday lives, we are slowly divorced from the consequences of our actions and our connection with the planet on which we live. Our lives lack perspective in our narrowly defined reality. Prairie work restores our connection with the earth, and with ourselves. On the North Branch, academic ideas plucked from dusty books are given life: we plant seeds and they come up! Cause and effect. Time expands when measured by the passing of seasons, the growth of trees, and restoration of a system that has developed over millennia. The Sunday driver who made us 2 minutes and 47 seconds late for the workday is soon forgotten.

When North Branchers step onto the prairie, layers of career stress, city soot and materialistic definition fall away. In our muddied boots and worn work clothes, stripped of these trappings, we talk and enjoy each other at face value. It is a two class society of mentors and students. Perhaps the only thing we have in common is that we find ourselves drawn to others in an effort that is timeless and larger than ourselves.*

Our culture places a premium on competitiveness. Our belief in survival of the fittest seems to justify the replacement of fragile ecosystems with "superior" man-made monocultures. Using technology we "cheat" in the game of survival. Will we be able to survive in the stressed ecosystem which we have created for ourselves? Perhaps working as a team to restore a small piece of the world will serve as a model for us to mend an ailing planet.

Why restore the prairie? Because the prairie restores, and may eventually save us.

*Inspired by Thoreau

