

WILTON WALKS AND TALKS

Since last autumn, the Town of Wilton Conservation Commission, in concert with the Wilton Garden Club and the Norwalk River Watershed Association, has been providing opportunities for the public to enjoy guided walks in some of the numerous spaces throughout our community where residents can hike or take leisurely walks. Beginning in March, we are also offering a series of lectures in the Brubeck Room of the Library on topics of interest and importance concerning the environment and what landowners can do to steward it; two will be this Spring and two in Fall.

Walks are typically on Sunday afternoons, and last for about an hour. Families and other residents in Wilton are encouraged to join the walks as often as possible to learn more about the natural beauty in our environment and concerns for its well-being. Dogs on leash are also welcome.

The walks and talks are free, but pre-registration is advised. To register, please phone 203.210.5240 and leave a message with the date of the event, your name and the number of persons who will join the walk. Please also include a phone number to reach you, should the weather be inclement. For more details on the Walks and Talks, check the upcoming Wilton Bulletin and/or visit the Conservation Commission’s website: <http://www.wiltonct.org/conservation>

Date	Time	Location	Leader/-Speaker	Other Info
19 April	1 PM	Merwin Meadows	Dean Keister	Focus on trout fishing opportunities, rain gardens
17 May	12 PM	Bradley Park	Susan DiLoreto	Easy 1 hour hike
19 May	7 PM	Brubeck Room, Library	Dr. Michael Dietz	UConn Prof. will discuss Low Impact Development (LID) –impact of development on water

- Jackie Algon



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Wilton Conservation Commission Newsletter



TREEKEEPERS

A few years ago I was graciously invited to represent the Wilton Conservation Commission at the Wilton League of Women Voters annual “Ask Your Town Official” event. On a winter Saturday morning at Trackside, I sat aside selectman and superintendent, finance chief and fire chief. Each official responded with expertise to an audience of caring Wiltonians. I listened until curious eyes turned to me, the Conservation Commissioner, and asked, “Now tell me, what do you do?”

In this article, I would like to write about the importance of the trees in your backyard. But first, I’d like to tell you ‘What We Do.’ In a few words, the Conservation Commission is charged with protecting Wilton’s natural resources. We strive to inspire the change necessary to care for our planet. Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson, in The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth (2006) states,

“Earth provides a self-regulating bubble that sustains us. This protective shield is the biosphere, the totality of all life, creator of all air, cleanser of all water, manager of all soil, but itself a fragile membrane that barely clings to the face of the planet.”

It follows that we are best served by protecting that biosphere. Through the care of life forms, such as the trees that surround our homes and share our land, we can make a difference.

It’s a safe bet that if you look outside your window you’ll see a tree. Often it sits on land you own, and often you judge it, pro or con, based on its physical appearance. But that tree serves you, without discrimination, by taking the energy that flows from the sun and putting it to work. Here are a few examples how:

- The oak in your backyard can sequester one ton of CO2 by the time it reaches 40 years old, absorbed during photosynthesis and stored in the wood until it dies--or until you cut it down. This reduces the CO2 in our atmosphere which scientists tell us is at its highest level in 10 million years.

- A maple, left standing near an asphalt driveway will spread its limbs and directly reverse the “heat islands” created by the sunlight magnified and reflected by that driveways’ surface.

- In one day, a large tree can lift 100 gallons of water and discharge it into the air. Locally, this counteracts runoff, erosion, and flooding. Globally, the vapor clouds produced by trees provide the rainfall that sustains our reservoirs and irrigates our crops.

- Trees store chemical energy in the form of sugars. This kicks off a chain of events begun when your tree’s leaves are eaten by something, which is eaten by something, and so on. This intricate process, called the food web, ultimately provides the food we eat.

- A large beech tree in your yard provides the daily oxygen needs of 10 people.

- Trees impact the incidence of asthma, skin cancer and stress-related illness by filtering polluted air, shading out solar radiation, and reducing smog formation.

- Trees shading your house can reduce air conditioning needs by as much as 30 percent. In general, the net cooling effect of a young, healthy tree is equivalent to 10 room-size air conditioners operating 20 hours a day.

Now, with a look at the services provided by the trees in your backyard, I’d like to revisit the question posed by you, the citizens of Wilton, about the role of a conservationist in our community. What do I do? I know my responsibility to the earth that sustains me. What do we do? We advocate for change. So, now, what do you do?

Of most beneficial impact is not the tree, but the forest; not the individual, but the community. I invite you to join with us, the Wilton Conservation Commission, in caring for your trees. Let’s be Treekeepers together.

- Donna Merrill

Beneficial Insects in the Garden

Prevention and a balanced ecosystem are the first lines of defense against plant diseases and insect pests. As we all know, there is nothing more frustrating than working in the garden for weeks and then finding your garden crops being devoured by insect pests. Here are a few ideas to consider for your garden before you plant:

1. Add compost to your bed. Feed your soil, not your plants. Healthy soil makes healthy plants. Strong plants are less susceptible to pest and disease attacks. Compost adds nutrients and improves the structure of your soil allowing it to hold moisture and feed roots. Add compost again mid-season.
2. Check your soil pH. Typically lime is needed to raise the pH of New England acidic soils. Plants absorb nutrients best at specific pH levels. Most vegetables grow best at a pH between 6 and 7.
3. Look for disease resistant varieties of vegetables and try to avoid planting all the same type in one bed.
4. Space your plants properly. Plants need air circulation.
5. Plan to attract beneficial insects to the garden. When nature is in balance, you will find a mix of good and bad insects in the garden. The good or beneficial insects include pollinators, predators and parasitoids.

Pollinators like honeybees, fertilize flowers, which increases the productivity of our crops.

Predators, such as ladybugs, lacewings, hoverflies and minute pirate bugs, consume pest insects. It is the larval form of most predators that are the voracious eaters.

Parasitoids are small wasps that use pests as nurseries for their young. They do not sting. Their stingers are adapted to allow the females to lay their eggs in the bodies of insect pests. The eggs hatch and the young feed on the pests killing them.

On any given day, all three beneficial insects are feeding in a diversified garden. Learning to recognize these bugs and their life cycles makes it easier to appreciate their work and understand why it is best not to use broad-spectrum herbicides that kill the good insects with the bad.

So how do you attract these beneficials? By providing food and shelter for the beneficial insects, you can create a resident population in your garden.

Plant nectar-bearing flowers among your vegetables. All beneficials need a steady supply of nectar to feed on throughout the growing season.



- Plant a mix of annuals, perennials and herbs. Choose different flower shapes and bloom times to attract a range of beneficial insects. Greek oregano and scarlet sage attract pollinators, alyssum, parsley, and dill attract the mini-wasps or parasitoids, cosmos, yarrow and fennel attract lacewings and butterfly weed, tansy and marigold ‘Lemon gem’ attract ladybugs.

- Garden beds should be heavily mulched. In addition to conserving moisture and preventing weeds, mulching also provides shelter from the hot sun to nocturnal predator insects like ground beetles. Chopped hay works well for this. Alternatively, consider planting a green mulch under your tomatoes such as alfalfa. Beneficials like the nectar its flowers produce and the alfalfa provides a cool, moist shelter for ground beetles while crowding out weeds. An added bonus for the garden is the nitrogen that alfalfa fixes in the soil.

- Provide a water source or bird bath for birds and insects.

- Create a place for beneficials to overwinter. Consider planting a mix of early blooming native shrubs near your garden, then after the garden is put to bed, beneficials have a place to overwinter.

A garden is a complex living organism. It can take several years to build productive soil and a resident population of beneficial insects. Be patient, observe and experiment. When you work with nature, your garden will benefit.

To read more about identifying beneficials and creating the habitats to sustain them:

<http://insects.about.com/od/insectpests/p/attbeneficials.htm>

<http://www.finegardening.com/attracting-beneficial-insects>

http://www.farmerfred.com/plants_that_attract_benefi.html

- Susan DiLoreto

Try Fishing the Norwalk River

If you are looking for a new outdoor activity for your family this year you might want to try fishing. You probably already know that the Norwalk River runs through the center of our town, but did you know that it provides critical habitat for trout? The river is home to a thriving population of wild spawning brown trout thanks to its cold, clean water and the significant open spaces and green corridors along the river that help keep it that way. In addition, the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection stocks it annually with over 5,000 brown, rainbow and brook trout. Spring is a fantastic time to try your hand at catching some of these amazing fish – and fishing season opens April 11!

The website www.takemefishing.org offers tips for taking kids fishing for the first time. The site recommends buying inexpensive light-weight fishing rod and reel combinations with 6-pound test line. They also explain that small hooks and small bait are the key to catching more fish. A net will also be handy for landing fish and catching small critters in the water. People over the age of 16 must obtain a fishing license before heading out. They can be purchased at the Wilton Town Clerk’s office at the Town Hall or online at www.ct.gov/deep/fishing.

For those who would like to learn the basics of fishing from seasoned professionals, the Mianus Chapter of Trout Unlimited is holding a Youth and Family Fly Fishing Clinic on May 9, 2015. The free event will be held at Merwin Meadows Park from 10am to 2pm. Kids can help stock trout in the Norwalk River in the morning and then learn the basics of casting in the park pond. There are also learning stations on tying knots, stream ecology and the insects that live in the Norwalk River and make up the vast majority of a local trout’s diet. After a free

barbecue lunch provided by Trout Unlimited, everyone is invited to head to the river to try to catch some of the recently stocked fish! Last year over 150 people attended the event and most of them caught at least one trout. Trout Unlimited generously provides all the equipment and instructors to give participants the best chances at making what may be their first catch ever.

A fishing trip to a local spot may only be 5 or 10 minutes away from home but can easily turn into an adventure especially for kids. You might end up spotting a hawk, catching a frog or salamander or seeing a snake sunning itself on the river bank. The Mianus Chapter of Trout Unlimited has an interactive map of fishing spots along the Norwalk River and other area rivers on its website www.mianustu.org.

- Mike Conklin, *Environmental Analyst*
& Jeff Yates, *Trout Unlimited*



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