ATHENS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

OVER THE GARDEN FENCE

September 2023

Events

- **September 25—Master Gardener monthly meeting**
- **Spring—Lunch & Learn Series https://mastergardener.osu.edu/HHHLNL22-23 All programs and links are on our County Calendar**

Caring for Trees –

Ed Brown

There are a few things that you can do to improve the long-term health of your trees

- Select the right tree for the right location
- Plant trees at the correct depth with the root flair at or slightly above ground level.
- Prune trees during the dormant season and use the correct pruning technique
- Do not pile soil or mulch next to the trunk
- Be careful when running equipment next to trees in order to prevent damage to thebark or compacting the soil

Digging Deeper with Invasive Plants –

Molly Gassaway

At last month's Master Gardner Meeting, we had the pleasure of seeing and hearing a presentation by Gary Conley, Vice President of the Ohio Invasive Plants Council (OIPC). The OIPC is a coalition of agencies, organizations, and individuals throughout Ohio concerned about the introduction, spread, and control of invasive, non-native plants in Ohio's natural habitats. OIPC promotes public awareness of invasive species issues and encourages land management and research to detect invasive species and prevent new invasions into natural ecosystems.

Approximately 50,000 non-native plant and animal species have been introduced to the United States. At least half that number are plants, which can cause more than $34 billion a year in damage to the environment, forestry, agriculture, industry, recreation, and human health.

Rapid growth, high reproductive rates, lack of natural controls, and an ability to tolerate a wide range of environmental conditions have helped some non-natives outcompete and displace native species. Invasive species reduce biological diversity, change food webs, and displace wildlife. At least 42% of the federally endangered and threatened species in the United States are at risk because of invasive species.

The introduction of many non-native plant species was well-intentioned. Some had medicinal qualities, others were valued in horticulture, for forage, and for erosion control. Other species arrived by accident - stowaways in cargo and ballast. (Gary used the example of Kentucky Bluegrass, which was

Plant

Before Sept. 10

- Broccoli (T)
- Brussel Sprouts (T)
- Cabbage
- Chinese Cabbage
- Leaf Lettuce
- Bib Lettuce

Before Sept. 20

- Cauliflower (T)
- Collards
- Mustard
- Rutabaga
- Turnips

September

CFAES

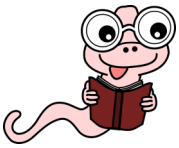
Digging Deeper – *continued*

brought into the US from Asia as it was being used as packing material for China way back when!) Potential for invasiveness was neither known nor considered. Human population growth, environmental alteration, and the vast increase in worldwide trade have created more opportunities for the introduction and spread of invasive species.

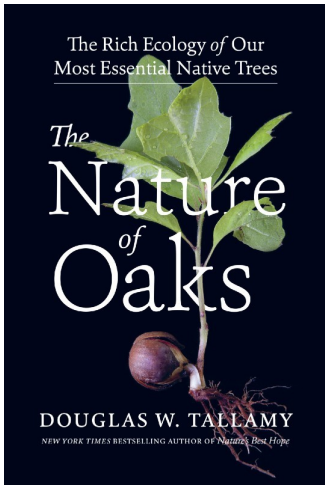
Of the approximately 3,000 plant species known to occur in the wild in Ohio, about 75% are native (present before the time of substantial European settlement - around 1750). Of the remaining 25% (more than 700 non-native plants), fewer than 100 are known to be problems in natural areas. The most invasive of these degrade Ohio's woodlands, wetlands, and prairies. On the OIPC website, www.oipc.info, you can find a frequently updated list of Ohio's invasive species and can click on a "fact sheet" for each one that goes over the description of the plant, habitat, invasive characteristics, and recommended methods of control.

Source: www.opic.info

Book Worms — *Char Rae*



The Nature of Oaks: The Rich Ecology of Our Most Essential Native Trees by Douglas W. Tallamy, author of *Bringing Nature Home* and *Nature's Best Hope*. (2021). Timber Press: Portland, OR.



Those of you familiar with Tallamy's writing will know that this book, like his others, will be an invitation to readers not only to learn more about the intricacies of Nature but also to do something positive toward protecting and preserving it. In the introduction to *The Nature of Oaks,* Tallamy explains he felt compelled to write it because "Oaks support more forms of life and more fascinating interactions than any other tree genus in North America," and because too few of the genus *Homo sapiens* understand the importance of genus *Quercus*.

One of the mysteries of oaks (as well as a few other trees, including beeches) is "marcescence," the habit of retaining their leaves, particularly on the lower branches, throughout the winter. Possible explanations range from an increased potential for maintaining moisture when the leaves fall to the ground in the spring, thus providing a mulch at the base of the tree, to protection for developing leaf buds from leaf eating predators who might be discouraged by the taste and poor nutritional value of dead leaves. Tallamy posits that these and other explanations might all be valid.

If you offer seed to help sustain the birds through the winter, you might be surprised to learn that a number of bird species that spend their winters in the Midwest also eat insects through the winter, specifically caterpillars that overwinter in the bark and on the branches of trees, many of which are oaks. The oaks in Tallamy's county in Pennsylvania support 511 species of moths and butterflies, which, in addition to their importance as pollinators, support insect-eating birds and other wildlife. Additionally, of course, vast numbers of insects, birds, and mammals are dependent upon acorns for sustenance. While other native trees and plants do provide food and shelter for wildlife, Tallamy emphasizes, "A yard without oaks is a yard meeting only a fraction of its life-support potential."

While an oak tree typically won't begin producing acorns until it has reached maturity (15 to 30 years, depending on the tree and conditions), your oak trees will be providing food for birds and other wildlife long before it matures. *The Nature of Oaks* provides a detailed introduction to some of the guests likely to visit your oak trees throughout the year, including caterpillars, which make up the bulk of the oaks' banquet for wildlife. Tallamy's long-time friend, naturalist and columnist, Jim McCormac, refers to these caterpillars as "tube steaks." Tallamy also provides a list of the best oaks for each region in the U.S., including ten for Ohio. Among the more familiar northern white oak (Quercus alba) and northern red oak (Q. rubra) on the Ohio list, are the chestnut oak (Q. montana) and post oak (Q. stellata).

Tallamy concludes, "...there is no trick to restoring oak populations, and no shortage of places in which to restore them. … We humans live our lives out in a brief instant of ecological time. We cannot return ancient oaks to our landscapes during that instant, but we can – indeed, we must – start the process."

(Next time: *Gardening for Moths: The Darker Side of Butterflies*, by Jim McCormac and Chelsea Gotfried).