

ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION GROUP: 20TH ANNIVERSARY, ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION AWARDS

BY KRISTINE FALLON, ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION GROUP

The Beverly Shores Environmental Restoration Group (ERG) celebrated their 20th anniversary at the Annual Meeting at Goblin & The Grocer on September 11 and recognized Arlene Beglin, a founding member. Initially galvanized into action by the extreme deer overpopulation in the early 2000s, the group also works to re-establish environmental balance through the removal of invasive plant species.

A major success story is ERG's effort to eradicate Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*). When ERG began the Tree of Heaven eradication program in 2013, they identified 250 infested sites within Beverly Shores. Since then, thanks to member dues and donations, the group has devoted over \$32,000 to removal. Now only 7 known sites remain. Tree of Heaven is particularly pernicious because it reproduces very quickly, crowds out native species, and secretes a chemical into the soil that is toxic to surrounding plants.

Environmental Restoration Awards

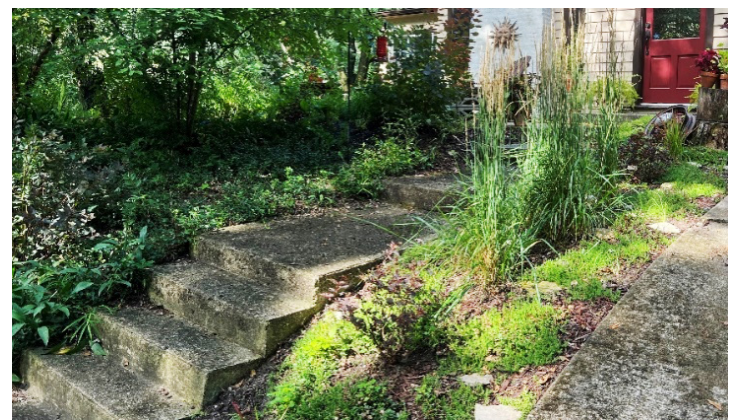
ERG recognizes individual property owners' efforts to eradicate invasives and re-introduce native plants through their Environmental Restoration Awards. For 2022, the award committee selected two winners: Bill Gilmer and John Blackburn; and Diana Stezalski and Eric Simpson. This article discusses Diana Stezalski and Eric Simpson's restoration efforts. There will be a November article on Bill Gilmer and John Blackburn.

Diana and Eric chose Beverly Shores as their full-time home in 2020. They felt privileged to live in such a beautiful natural environment and wanted to give back. Neighbors introduced them to environmental restoration. Diana attended ERG hands-on "Digging in the Dunes" training at a Town Green Space property to learn to recognize and remove invasives. She also took on-line classes to learn about native and invasive plants and techniques for environmental stewardship. Neighbors who had recently worked to remove a dense thicket of Burning Bush (*Euonymus alatus*) from their own property recommended that Diana and Eric tackle the Burning Bush that covered theirs. Burning Bush was once considered a desirable landscape plant because of its brilliant fall color, but it is now considered invasive in most of the eastern and midwestern US, including Indiana. The problem with Burning Bush is that it prodigiously reproduces by seed, which are dispersed by birds to woodlands and open areas. Once established, it forms a dense thicket that outcompetes almost any native plant. ERG is working with the Town this fall on Burning Bush removal from town right of ways.



Eric Simpson and Diana Stezalski

Diana tackled Burning Bush energetically, finding the hard work therapeutic during trying times. According to the award nomination, "Diana has done a LOT of hard work removing Burning Bush and other invasives from her property. She has been working on it tirelessly for two years, has made tremendous progress and the yard looks great."



Before (left) and After (right): Dense Burning Bush was replaced by a mix of native and non-invasive, non-native grasses, flowers, and shrubs

Diana comments on their efforts to date, “The decision to begin the process of removing invasives on our property — a process far from finished — was simply a means to respect, in what small way we could, the natural habitat that we have the honor of living in. After learning how invasives can be a detriment to the native wildlife and plant growth, it simply seemed like the right thing to do. The process is not easy, especially when doing it yourselves, but SO worth it when witnessing the regrowth of gorgeous native plants, trees and vines, which were being completely swallowed up and suffocated. In redeveloping our landscape, we cannot claim to be native purists, but we are trying our best to plant and seed as many native flowers as possible. As a cost saving measure, we have been seeding outside, as well as, starting seeds inside during the winter. Undoubtedly the hardest lesson to learn is patience (so hard!). Seeds planted directly outside may take a few years to come to fruition. Starting seeds indoors is also quite a task, especially when it comes time to harden them off, but the process may offer quicker results. Key advice we have often received: don’t expect all planting to survive — no matter how hard you try. Regardless of the challenges, it is rewarding to see the flowers started from seed in the cold of January now in full bloom. As the saying goes: 'Never underestimate the power of a planted seed.'”

Diana also offers some sound advice for other impatient native gardeners: “I do recommend marking where you seed so, if you are impatient like me, this will remind you not to plant in that area—those seeds need time.” Her native plant list includes: Cardinal Flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), Coreopsis, a number of Rudbeckia cultivars, Milkweed (*Asclepias*), Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), Big Bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), and a variety of Ninebark cultivars (*Physocarpus opulifolius*).