

ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION AWARDS

BY KRISTINE FALLON, ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION GROUP

The ERG recognizes the efforts of individual property owners to eradicate invasive species and re-introduce native plants through its Environmental Restoration Awards. For 2022, the award committee selected two winners: Bill Gilmer and John Blackburn, and Diana Stezalski and Eric Simpson. Last month we featured Diana Stezalski and Eric Simpson. This month highlights Bill Gilmer and John Blackburn's restoration efforts.

Bill describes their growing awareness and commitment to environmental restoration, "Our first experience removing invasives occurred after we first moved to Beverly Shores and learned about garlic mustard. The property around our home on Idler was covered with garlic mustard. Though we never totally conquered it, we discovered after just a couple years that other plants, including magnificent ferns, started to appear in areas where previously there was only garlic mustard. Then, through later education efforts by ERG, we learned to identify tree of heaven, and removed it from our property.

"That was pretty much the extent of our awareness until we moved to our new home and property on West Ripplewater, which was dense with all sorts of tall weeds, bushes and bramble, in some areas so dense, one could barely walk through. To make matters worse, our first attempt at landscaping involved transplanting a burning bush from our old property. Only after our very thoughtful neighbor, Terry Bonace, gently informed us that we had a burning bush growing along our walkway, did we decide we should learn more about what else might be lurking in the yard — and what not to plant!

"After that, we attended a couple ERG-sponsored walking sessions, and most importantly, attended the very practical and hands-on invasive identification and removal training session co-sponsored by ERG and the Green Space Committee last August, 2021. We also became re-acquainted with ERG's *Beginners Guide to the Plants of the Indiana Dunes* from that session. After that, there was no stopping us — particularly when we discovered the extent to which our property was overrun by burning bush, privet, oriental bittersweet, Japanese barberry, multiflora rose, buckthorn and invasive honeysuckle. It remains a constant battle — but we've enjoyed learning more about native alternatives — and are grateful for the generous guidance offered by neighbors and friends here in Beverly Shores who have shepherded us through this process."



Before: Dense weeds, brush and brambles (above), including many invasive species, such as Dame's Rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*) (below).

Like all who attempt this, Bill and John encountered a number of stumbling blocks, not least of which was our noxious, native poison ivy, (*Toxicodendron radicans*). A major frustration was that, when invasive plants were removed, new invasive species filled the area before new plants filled in. Another challenge, faced by many, was understanding the light and moisture conditions in different areas of their property. This led to mistakes in selection of some species.



After: As the nomination form commented, “[Bill and John] . . . have done a great job at removing invasives and replanting with native plants and have made a lovely garden with winding paths.”