

The Acadiana Native Plant Project

Achievements

The Acadiana Native Plant Project (ANPP) is a nonprofit conservation organization based in Southwest Louisiana. Its mission is to *promote the use of native plants within our landscape*. Launched in 2016, ANPP has grown to over 200 current members and become the leading organization in the region encouraging the use of native plants on private and public properties. ANPP accomplishes its mission through propagation, education, demonstration, and collaboration. In 2022 ANPP made significant advances in all these areas. Visit greauxnative.org and Facebook for a comprehensive introduction to ANPP's work.

Propagation: A major part of our mission is to make native plants and seeds available to the public. ANPP grows over 100 species of native plants at the June Walker Memorial Greenhouse in Arnaudville, LA, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette Ecology Center, and at satellite sites. Most are hard if not impossible to find in commercial nurseries in Louisiana. Plant sales support ANPP's mission.¹ Since propagation began in 2017, ANPP has sold or donated approximately 10,000 native plants to homeowners, large property managers, landscape professionals, schools, nonprofits and municipal organizations. Over 200 public and private gardens have been planted with ANPP's plants. Approximately 20 volunteers contributed over 2000 hours in 2022.

Education and Outreach: ANPP offers formal talks and workshops as well as informal outreach activities such as tables. ANPP offered three native gardening workshops in 2022: Yard-to-Habitat, Cajun Prairie, and Native Landscaping for Professionals, all of which sold out quickly.

- The Yard-to-Habitat workshop, now in its 4th year, helps homeowners transform their property into resilient habitat for wildlife by incorporating native plants in attractive plantings. Participants learn the whys and hows of native garden design, plant selection, installation and maintenance.
- The Cajun Prairie workshop introduces the history, current status, and how to restore this endangered habitat of any size. Participants planted a pocket prairie garden and 1/3 acre prairie at Saint Luc French Immersion campus in Arnaudville. The Cajun Prairie workshop was filmed as part of a grant-funded documentary film with the Cajun Prairie Habitat Preservation Society and Louisiana Native Plant Society.
- ANPP's Native Landscaping for Professionals workshop held at the LSU Hilltop Arboretum showed landscape professionals how to introduce native plants to their clients, including ecological benefits of native plants and designing and maintaining habitat gardens. Participants included landscape architects (earning CEU credit), contractors, maintenance companies, and growers.

ANPP also hosted outreach tables at approximately 15 events in 2022, including the Lafayette Farmers Market, UL Lafayette's Fête de la Terre, Atelier de la Nature, Master

Gardener Plant Fest and others. ANPP leaders spoke to about 15 civic groups, garden clubs, university and other school groups, and nature clubs and completed an invasive plant survey in Moncus Park that is informing eradication efforts. ANPP volunteers led 6 nature walks at Moncus Park and other nature-oriented events. The Education and Outreach team also administers the Louisiana Native Plant Society's Louisiana Certified Habitat Program. Since the program began in 2020, over 80 properties in Southwest Louisiana and over 230 in Louisiana have been certified to have at least 25 native species.² In May 2022, 14 certified properties in Acadiana and Lake Charles were on the first Native Garden Tour, attended by over 100 visitors.

ANPP's website is a comprehensive introduction to the hows and whys of habitat gardening. Free, downloadable designs by Lawrence Rozas and Dona Weifenbach are provided for a typical flower bed, wetland edge, woodland edge, and pocket prairie.

Approximately 8 ANPP volunteers contributed 600 hours in Education and Outreach. ANPP's President, Dr. Phyllis Griffard, was recognized by the Bayou Vermilion Preservation Association as their Visionary Educator for 2023. Past President Dona Weifenbach's native garden design was selected to represent Lafayette by Wild Ones, a national organization with chapters in 32 states (photos below).

Demonstration: Three demonstration gardens are maintained by 3-6 ANPP volunteers in the Acadiana area: June Walker Education Center in Arnaudville, Vermilionville rain garden, and LARC's Acadian Village. Via access and labels, the public is introduced to how native species look and perform in real gardens. The site in Arnaudville is the most diverse, having a prairie bed, a wetland bed, and several woodland shade beds. Originally designed by Dona Weifenbach, it serves as a showcase for the plants we grow and sell, as well as a local source for seed and propagation material. Our Vermilionville site is a pond-side wetland, managed in conjunction with the Operations office of the Bayou Vermilion District. A boardwalk makes the site accessible to all. Our Acadian Village site contains both prairie and woodland species. The site is a collection of historic houses, and is most often visited for events such as weddings and a large Christmas lights display. Approximately 1000 volunteer hours went into maintenance of these gardens in 2022.

Collaboration: ANPP collaborates with nonprofit organizations including the Bayou Vermilion Preservation Association, TreesAcadiana, Audubon Delta, TECHE Project, Acadiana Master Naturalists, Cajun Prairie Habitat Preservation Society, Louisiana Native Plant Society and Moncus Park. We also administer an Assistance Program to support projects aligned with our mission. In 2022, ANPP responded to two requests for assistance under this program. For example, ANPP provided plants valued at over \$500 to install a pollinator garden behind the Wilson Laboratories at LSU. Several volunteers have contributed 100 hours of their time on collaborative activities.

Importance of ANPP Accomplishments

The accomplishments of ANPP in 2022 are significant and will continue to fulfill a critical role in advocacy for conservation of Louisiana's flora and fauna by ordinary citizens. Populations of native plant species are disappearing, especially in Acadiana, where prairies, forests, and coastal marshes have been lost to agriculture, conversion to residential areas, industrial development, and coastal land loss. ANPP aims to connect residents with their own land and convince them that *What you do on your property matters*.

Many of the natural areas of Louisiana are infested with invasive species such as Chinese Tallow, Chinese Privet, and Coral berry, which are mostly native to Asia, but also Europe and Africa. Chinese Tallow also threatens pasture lands in Southwest Louisiana. Not all non-native species are invasive, and many of these ornamental plants are favorites of Louisiana gardeners. About 15% of all introduced non-native species have become invasive and damaging to the environment. It is surprising that many Tier 1 invasive species (e.g. Yellow Flag Iris, Bermuda grass, Air Yam), defined by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries as "currently having severe or widespread negative impacts on wildlife or natural communities", continue to be sold legally in Louisiana nurseries.

Substantial portions of Louisiana's urban and industrial areas are covered by impermeable surfaces. Open spaces consist mostly of lawns, which are biological dead zones. Any trees and shrubs are mostly non-native species that contribute little ecological function. ANPP encourages property owners and managers to adopt responsible landscape practices that can mitigate flooding, reduce sediment loss and protect soil health, all of which are needed to protect habitat.

Not surprisingly, wildlife populations have declined precipitously in response to habitat loss. Recent studies show a steep decline in insect populations worldwide and are most significant for butterflies and moths, bees, beetles, damselflies, and dragonflies. Consequently, North American bird populations have dropped by 30% (a loss of 3 billion birds) since 1970³, a devastating trend attributed to habitat loss because of the tight trophic relationships among native plants, insects, and nesting birds. The leaves of native plants are used as food for caterpillars, and most caterpillars will only eat and live on very specific plant species. Native oaks serve as hosts to more than 530 species of butterflies and moths; the next most important native plant hosts are cherries and plums, which host about 455 species. In comparison, Crape Myrtle, which is native to India, hosts about 2 species. Caterpillars in turn are a key component in the diets for nestlings of most bird species. A single nest of baby birds requires over 6000 caterpillars during the few weeks between hatching and leaving the nest.

ANPP and its Louisiana-based partners are determined and are doing the work necessary to turn this around. Residential properties offer the greatest potential⁴ for expanding native landscapes in Louisiana and throughout the U.S., where lawns encompass an area approximately the size of Texas. If landowners in Louisiana can be

convinced to avoid non-native invasive species and convert ever-larger parts of their lawns to landscapes with native plants (e.g. pollinator gardens, groves of native trees and shrubs), that would go a long way toward restoring habitat that can support native wildlife. ANPP is making more progress every year toward *Connecting Habitats, One Garden at a Time*.

Documentation of media, awards and recognition

<https://www.katc.com/news/acadiana-native-plant-project-holds-seasonal-native-plant-sale>

https://www.theadvocate.com/acadiana/entertainment_life/plants-that-give-back-native-garden-at-freetown-cottage-recognized-for-contributing-to-habitat/article_e018827e-d386-11eb-b786-fb881dad8df8.html)

<https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home/bring-birds-back/>

Tallamy, D. W. (2019). *Nature's best hope: a new approach to conservation that starts in your yard*. Portland, Oregon, Timber Press.

NATIVE GARDEN DESIGNS VIDEO SERIES:
LAFAYETTE DISCUSSION WITH DESIGNER DONA WEIFENBACH



The poster features the 'Wild Ones' logo at the top left, with the tagline 'NATIVE PLANTS, NATURAL LANDSCAPES'. Below the logo is a landscape design plan for Lafayette, Louisiana, showing a garden layout with various plantings and a yellow arrow pointing to the location. To the right is a circular portrait of Dona Weifenbach, a woman with glasses and a blue shirt, set against a background of green foliage. A red YouTube play button icon is positioned below the portrait. The text 'Native Garden Design' is prominently displayed in white, followed by 'Designer & Speaker: Dona Weifenbach' and 'Host: Susie Van de Riet' in smaller white text. At the bottom, it says 'Fall of 2022'.

