Natural Connections Program

Native Plants From Seed

Tim Horton's Onondaga Farms Tallgrass Prairie Project

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Brant Resource Stewardship Network

5 Main St. N.
P.O. Box 960
St. George, ON
N0E 1N0
Phone: 519-448-1714
Fax: 519-448-3105
Email:rob.wallis@mnr.gov.on.ca
www.ontariostewardship.org/brant

Healthy plant and wildlife populations require healthy habitats. The Natural Connections Program is helping private landowners and agencies create tallgrass prairie and oak habitats throughout Brant County.

Brant's sand plain and gravel moraines are special habitats which support unique species and varieties of plants. These native plant species have evolved over millennia to be specially adapted to local climate and sites - a process of Natural Selection. This means that seed source matters to the success of any planting project. A priority of the native plants from seed program is promote the use of local and native plants and seeds in gardens and habitat creation projects.

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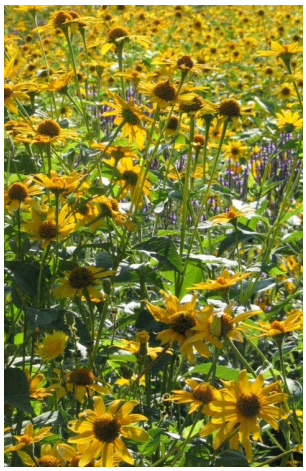
Demonstration sites are important for educating people about natural habitats, especially as our society becomes an urban population with less opportunity to interact with nature. The Natural Connections Program is working with the staff of the Tim Horton Onondaga Farms to create a demonstration tallgrass prairie. The tallgrass prairie creates a large living classroom to teach some of the 20,000 people that go through the camp every year. Because tallgrass prairie is one of the rarest habitats in Canada this will probably be their first introduction to tallgrass ecosystems. The site will also include opportunities for seed collection and further native plant propagation in the Camp greenhouse.

The prairie covers 2 hectares and features local native tallgrass prairie plants from North and South Dumfries Townships. When it matures the tallgrass prairie will be composed of grasses - big bluestem, Indian grass and Canada wild rye (pictured left) and wildflowers such as New England aster, hoary vervain and false sunflower (pictured below left to right). Many of the plants in the prairie are rare because of habitat loss to agriculture and development.



The tallgrass prairie will also provide an important insect educational opportunity - specifically for butterflies and other pollinators. Some of the plants are the food plants for caterpillars while others provide nectar for the butterflies, bees and wasps. The area will provide an opportunity to teach about the butterflies of the area. Native bees and wasps are often small and not aggressive (example pictured left). They are also important pollinators of our food crops and wild plants. They need wildflower plantings and protected habitats free of insecticides to thrive.