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Native Plants To Go

06.03.2008 | Campus and Community, Science, Energy and Environment, Faculty Want to give bees a boost?

A mysterious disease is threatening the survival of bees across the U.S., but environmentalists at the Marianist Environmental Education Center (MEEC) say that area gardeners can use plants native to Southwestern Ohio to help the tiny creatures.

The environmental center will offer more than 70 species at its annual Native Plant Sale 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., Saturday, June 28, at 4435 E. Patterson Road. Because availability of some species is limited, early orders are encouraged. A workshop on "Gardening with Native Plants" will be held from 9 a.m. to noon, Saturday, June 21.

"Native plants attract native bees along with the European honeybees that help with so much agricultural pollination," said Tara Poling, MEEC program coordinator. "Scientists are still diagnosing this latest threat, but using native plants is something the average person can do to help build up the populations of our native bees as well as support honeybees."

At the same time, gardeners may see more visits from butterflies and birds and discover plants that because they are from this region, are often easy to grow and quick to flourish.

"Natives do very well and are well adapted to this region," Poling said. "They tend to be very carefree, because they don't require soil improvement and tend to be very drought tolerant."

Now in its fourth year, interest in the sale has accelerated dramatically, according to MEEC Director Sister Leanne Jablonski, FMI, who also teaches at the University of Dayton.

Jablonski, who holds a doctorate in plant physiological ecology and global climate change and who specializes in how climate change is affecting life in Southwestern Ohio, said there are good ethical and ecological reasons for gardeners to use native plants.

Jablonski said all the wildflowers and shrubs are nursery grown on-site from seed legally collected from the wild; the MEEC sale is especially focused on prairie and wetland plants.

"It helps maintain genetic diversity in our area," she said. "Some of the plants are very rare, so growing them helps preserve and sustain them in the environment."

While there are good environmental reasons for using native plants, Poling said area gardeners have been excited about how they look and the ease of care.

"A lot of these plants will tolerate quite a bit of range of moisture and sun. People tell us they have planted one or two, discovered they come back beautifully every year and thrive in our Southwestern Ohio climate," she said.

"Some plants work as specimens in a more formal garden, or they can be used to naturalize an area that doesn't have to be mowed. They work in any size yard and can bring a little bit of nature even to the smallest yard," she said. "People don't expect native plants to be as showy as they are."

The sale this year offers 12 new species for the first time, including the American plum shrub; the eastern wahoo, which is a non-invasive, native burning bush; and the blackhaw

viburnum, which boasts beautiful fall foliage.

More information on the workshop and sale, including the catalog and order form can be found at <http://meec.udayton.edu> or by calling the center at 937-429-3582.

Leanne Jablonski or Tara Poling at 937-429-3582

