



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection

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Published in *The Delaware Gazette*: October 2020

FARM CAMPERS VISIT STRATFORD ECOLOGICAL CENTER

The general public visited Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road on October 3, for the first time since the covid-19 restrictions began in mid-March. There was a good turnout to buy Stratford maple syrup, honey, meat, eggs, squash, vegetables and garlic. The safety procedures worked well, and the product was welcomed, but the best part for parents of veteran farm camp kids was the opportunity for their enthusiastic children to lead them on a tour of the property. Restrictions are still in place, but the good news is that there will be another sale before year-end, with details posted on social media and our website.

After the pond restoration last fall the banks were sown with grass seed. Stratford's Development Director David Hoy realized there was space to create colorful oblong beds for native plants and grasses shorter than those in the adjacent prairie.

David recently read "Nature's Best Hope" by Douglas W. Tallamy, which reinforced his awareness of how crucial it is to have contiguous plantings of natives to replace those lost to development, and to keep the web of life intact. Tallamy's book took the bold approach that if lawns were planted with natives, instead of imported plants which are not a food source, it would make a huge difference to the survival of many species. Lawns were dug up for Victory Gardens this year, so why not a native plant garden next year?

Gale Martin of Natives in Harmony in Marengo generously provided David with all the plants free of charge. She has an awesome collection which can be viewed on her website. Many of them are species of familiar plants, and this helps make natives less intimidating. With help from the women gardeners seven beds were planted with Hyssop, Asters, Boneset, Lobelia, Sundrops, Everlastings, Mountain Mint, Golden Rod, Gentians and Sweet Flag. A mixture of Side Oats Grama and Little Bluestem were broadcast to provide support for the natives.

Farmhand Tom began primary cultivation of field 1 on September 24 to prepare for planting spelt after October 1. Farmer Jeff harrowed a couple times over the following days. Unfortunately, it then rained twice, and the weeds responded causing him to re-harrow before planting last weekend, along with the north end of field 2 and field 9.

Groundhog radishes are growing incredibly thick in the back yard behind the barn. The green leaves are about five inches tall and their thick roots will eventually grow down eight inches. They are great as a winter cover crop because not only do the roots open up the ground, but they bring nitrogen to the soil surface where it remains after winter kill to nourish the following spring planting. Farmer Jeff intends to allow our seven hogs to graze the radishes at the end of October, and then plant Triticale to provide grazing for the livestock in the spring.

The chickens were moved out of the Paw Paw coop into the Orchard in order to replace a few of the dead Paw Paw trees and plant the sparsely covered ground with Triticale. This awesome seed mix has worked wonders to cover the muddy spot inside the Orchard gate.

Two hens are continuously flying the coop. One, a Speckled Sussex, has laid fifteen eggs in a nest situated on the straw bales in the equipment shed. She makes no attempt to sit on them and allow the chicks to hatch. She is guilty of entering the big greenhouse and indulging her liking of tomatoes, young collards and kohlrabi, enough that the latter have been covered with white floating row covers and firmly pegged down. She has finally been caught, and her wings clipped to ensure she remains in the orchard. The other hen is a Buff Orpington cross, and she hatched three chicks, two of which have survived predators and the family remain at large.

We hope the weather will co-operate and allow the corn to be timely harvested. The farm hands still need to finish their work clearing the tractor route on the north property line, and the numerous woodland trails. The area on the far side of the sugar shack is looking exceptionally smart with the scattered heaps of wood now cut, stacked in piles, and covered with a tarp ready for maple sugaring in February. We trust you have enough opportunities to enjoy preparing your own property, before the time comes to rest and snuggle down with a good book.

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