



Medina County Park District Leads the Way: Enhancing Water Quality and Education Through Native Landscaping

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Coordinator**

Parks are places we can go to stretch our legs and recharge our spirits — but they're also living, outdoor classrooms where we can see and learn new things. An important aspect of Medina County Park District's mission is to model nature-friendly landscaping ideas almost any property owner can put into practice.

In 2014, the park district was awarded a \$2,500 grant from the Ohio Environmental

Education Fund to install a small native planting and a series of educational panels at Carolyn Ludwig Mugrage Park. This park is ideally situated on the continental divide that separates the watersheds of the Lake Erie Basin and the Ohio River Basin. After ten growing seasons, the flowers and shrubs produced their best and most colorful display yet, putting a spotlight on the benefits of native vegetated buffer strips for wildlife habitat, ecosystem health, and water quality.

At Medina County Park District, we recognize our role and our residents' roles in clean water for Ohio and all who share the Great Lakes. Medina County has the potential to have great impacts on improving water quality because it is located within two watersheds. All water flows downstream. A watershed is the area of surface water features (runoff, rivers, and streams) that all drain to a larger body of water. In the northern and western parts of the county, water flows downstream to Lake Erie (and ultimately to the Atlantic Ocean), and in the southeastern part of the county, water flows downstream to the Ohio River (and ultimately to the Gulf of Mexico).

Storm water from Medina County has a long journey before it flows to either watershed basin. At Mugrage, storm water is first intercepted by this buffer on its way to the park's recreational fishing pond. The deep roots of native plants function as a giant water filter, slowing erosion and the movement of excess sediment and nutrients. The healthy pond inhabitants are the first tangible impacts the buffer has on water quality within this community.

The park district seeks both to connect our residents to nature and to serve as an example for how the community can incorporate best-management practices. The interpretive panels explore further concepts of native vegetation vs. non-native and invasive plants, the role of pollinators and host plants in the life cycle of native wildlife, the function of a watershed, and the ability of vegetation to filter storm water and stabilize soils. We encourage you to visit Mugrage throughout the seasons for inspiration for your own planting. The small strip of native plants is located on the slope adjacent to the sledding hill and can be admired from the paved multi-purpose trail. The visibility of wildlife, butterflies, and birds utilizing the native planting should encourage property owners to consider similar plantings. The dual beauty and function will be attractive to homeowners, businesses, and community areas. Beauties like cylindric blazingstar, black-eyed Susan, and Indiangrass have root potential between 6 and 15 feet deep. While the wildlife will enjoy the food and shelter benefits above ground, the roots work below taking up water and nutrients.

The utilization of a vegetated buffer strip to intercept storm water is a concept the park district believes can be easily adopted by anyone. If others follow, many small contributions to the watershed and ecosystem health will be part of a greater contribution across the county. Together, we can enlighten public perceptions about native species and the importance of protecting watersheds to evolve into a more responsible ethic for landscape development and management for all.

DONATION CORNER

Tree of Life

In Memory of Linda Slepian
Sheila Benson

In Memory of Reggie Campbell
Sheila Benson

In Memory of John "Jack" McCandlish
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In Memory of Kathy Ann Moore
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Monetary donation to MCPD Police Department
Harold Dravenstott

Susan Hambley Nature Center

Finished beaver skull
Paul Hruby



Celebrate Medina County Park District's 60th anniversary by taking part in the Park Perks Challenge! This is a self-guided adventure where you will need to successfully complete challenges to collect perk points to earn park prizes! Challenge yourself across three categories: *Research It*, *Seek and Find*, and *See You There*, all designed to help you explore and learn about Medina County parks.

The challenge runs through October 4. Download the form at www.medinacountyparks.com. Hard copies are available at the nature centers or park headquarters.