



Medina County
Park District

Northeast Ohio
NATIVE PLANT SPECIALIST PROGRAM
Program Guidelines

Native Plant Specialist Course Themes

Each Native Plant Specialist (NPS) course is made up of three 4-hour sessions held three successive weeks. The session themes are listed below. Depending on what plants are present and blooming, some subjects may be covered in a prior or later session than shown. One course each is offered in spring, summer, and fall.

- First Session: **Botanical characteristics** of plant families and species, identification using a botanical key, scientific names, and stewardship of native plants
- Second Session: **Ecological relationships** including non-native species, noxious weeds, and relationships with wildlife, pollinators, other plants, etc.
- Third Session: Written field exam on material from first and second sessions;
Human uses, including use of natives for sustainable landscaping, ethno botanical, and other human use; course survey

NPS Course Details

- The NPS Program is modeled after an award-winning program offered through Colorado State University County Extension offices. Utilizing qualified field naturalists and land resources from Medina County Park District and surrounding counties, the NPS program provides the same quality program for passionate plant people in Northeast Ohio
- All NPS courses are held in the field. Participants meet at the time and parking location specified by the program coordinator. All sessions start promptly. Smoking is prohibited on trails. Participants may only attend the course they are enrolled in.
- ***Newcomb's Guide to Wildflowers* will be used as the base course text and should be brought to every course session.** Plant identification with an emphasis on scientific names and families and keying using this text is a significant focus of the course. Each course will cover 40+ plants, with at least 15 to be keyed using *Newcomb's*. Additional recommended materials to bring to each class: NPS guidebook (you will receive at your first class), hand lens, pencil, water and snacks/lunch, and appropriate clothing for weather and comfort.
- Sessions will be held in all weather conditions with the exception of extreme conditions (snow or hazardous lightning or heavy downpours). If you suspect weather conditions warrant cancellation, call the program coordinator the evening before the session to see if class will be cancelled. If a session is cancelled, the class will be held on the reserved make-up day. Please note there will be no make-up sessions for those who miss a regularly scheduled session.
- Courses require walking and being on your feet for extended periods. Please be prepared with appropriate clothing, equipment, footwear, etc., so you will be comfortable in a variety of weather and trail conditions. Restrooms may be available at the trailhead but will not be present anywhere else on the trail.
- A FREE keying and terminology class will be offered to all participants who would like to refresh their

botanical knowledge and **is required for those who have a minimal background in botany**. Once accepted into the program, you will be provided with the dates the class will be offered.

NPS Course Exam

- Option 2 participants are not required to take the final exam, although most do so as a personal test of their knowledge. Those taking a NPS course in fulfillment of certification requirements must pass a written final exam with a “C” or better. The exam is given at the beginning of the third session of the course.
- The exam is conducted on the trail where you will be asked to identify living specimens and provide additional information. Participants will have 1.5 hours to complete the exam. Scientific names should be those used in *Newcomb’s Guide to Wildflowers*. The exam is “open book;” therefore, spelling of technical terms counts.
- The exam will cover only material from the first and second sessions. You may use your required textbook, *Newcomb’s Guide to Wildflowers*, and your *NPS guidebook* to complete the exam.

NPS Course Refund Policy

A full refund, less a \$15 processing fee, will be issued if notification is given to the program coordinator 30 days prior to the course date. If notification is given less than 30 days prior to the course date, no refund will be issued.

Native Plant Specialist Program Options

Option 1: Native Plant Steward

Apply to take one or more courses and earn a Native Plant Steward certificate. There is no educational contact requirement for those taking a NPS course under the Native Plant Steward option. **Steward** participants are not required to take the field exam, although they may wish to do so as a personal test of their knowledge.

Option 2: Certified Native Plant Specialist

Apply and be accepted to become a Certified Native Plant Specialist by fulfilling requirements.

Requirements for certification status are as follows:

- Demonstrate the interest and ability to educate others through employment or volunteer status with an agency
- Complete all three (3) NPS courses (spring, summer, and fall) in this or future years
- Pass all field exams with a grade “C” or higher
- Teach at least 20 people **per course taken (cumulative total of 60)** about Ohio plants using knowledge gained from program
- Report the number of public educational contacts made to the Northeast Ohio Native Plant Specialist Program Coordinator Shelley Tender (reporting forms will be provided)
- Specialists maintain certification by educating the public each year

More on educational contact requirement to obtain and keep certification:

- Forms to record your educational contacts – those you teach about native plants – will be provided to you by the program coordinator. The completed form must be returned to the coordinator for you to receive credit. This information also helps us document that the NPS program has had an impact on the public, which helps ensure continuation of the program.

- If you are employed or volunteer with a specific agency, educational contacts from programs taught for agencies other than your own may be counted. The title of the program does not need to be specifically about native plants as long as some information learned from a NPS course is used in the program. For example, educational contacts can be counted if the program is about noxious weeds using information from a NPS course.
- Specialists may also count individual educational contacts made outside of formal public programs. Examples of these are educational contacts made about plants while roving on the trail, at the front desk of an agency, or information provided to friends and neighbors.
- The cumulative educational contact requirement for certification can also be met by any one of the following: an actively maintained website or blog or a published article or an aired TV show or radio or video program.

Certification as a Native Plant Specialist

Upon completion of all requirements listed above, you will be awarded certification as a Native Plant Specialist! A certificate and special Native Plant Specialist t-shirt will be presented to you by the program coordinator.

Sabbatical Status

Sometimes, life gets in the way, and we understand that. If you need to take a break to focus on other things, you can go on sabbatical status by contacting the program coordinator. Sabbatical status means you temporarily suspend your NPS certification and are not required to make any educational contacts. During sabbatical status, specialists will be marked as inactive. Certification can be reactivated at any time by first contacting the program coordinator and then fulfilling the annual educational contacts. Specialists do not need to retake the courses to be reactivated. Sabbatical status shall remain in effect for no longer than 24 months.

Those who wish to be dropped from the program (permanently forfeit certified status and receive no further information from the program coordinator) can only be reactivated by repeating the required coursework and educational contacts.

For More Information

For more information about the Native Plant Specialist program, please contact program coordinator:

Shelley Tender
Interpretive Services Manager
Medina County Park District
stender@medinaco.org
330-239-4814