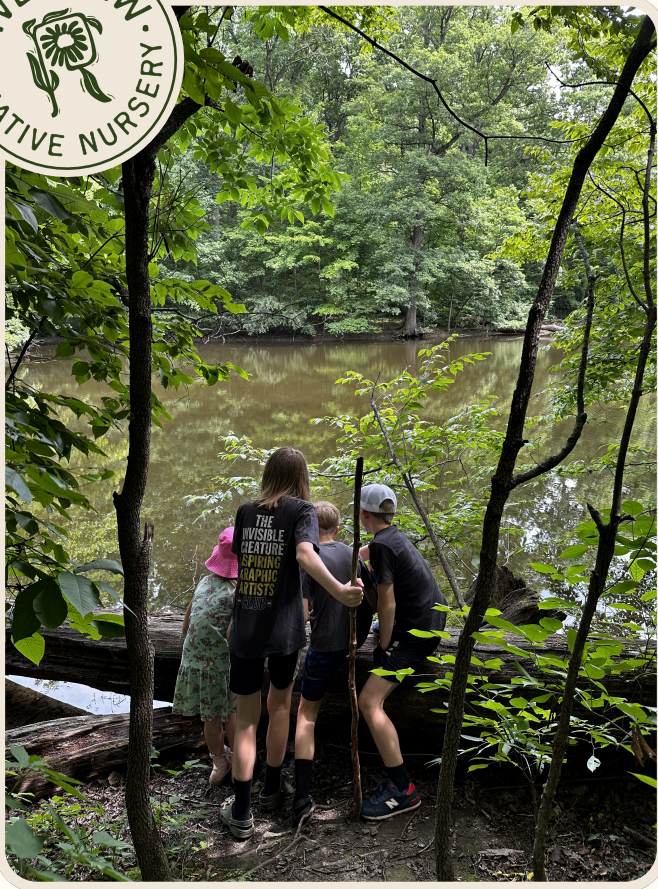


Embracing our place

A New Land Ethic

Rethinking our relationship to the land to begin healing



Aldo Leopold, American writer and conservationist, believed that we need to expand our definition of community to include not just our fellow humans, but the land as well. Soils, waters, plants, animals, and people are bound together in a web of relationships. Care for one cannot be separated from care for the others.

When we recognize this interconnectedness, we begin to develop what Leopold called a "land ethic" — an ecological conscience that inspires us to care for the health and well-being of the places we call home.

Today, biodiversity is declining at an alarming rate. North America alone has lost nearly 3 billion birds since 1970, largely due to habitat loss and the disappearance of the insects they depend upon. Yet this story is not only one of loss. It is also a story of opportunity.

These Commitments of Care are simple actions we can take in our own yards to help heal the land around our homes. **We can create hope with our own hands** and experience the joy of seeing life flourish because of the choices we make.

You don't need to do everything, and chances are you're already doing some of these things. We simply invite you to ask: "Can I do a little more?"

As our efforts grow over time, so too does the abundance of life around us. Our own lives—and the lives of countless birds, pollinators, and other creatures—can be enriched by the care we extend to the land.

Commitments of Care

Choose one. Choose five. Choose twenty. Every act of care matters.

I will embrace this place as my partner. I will get to know what it really needs, and all that it offers.

I will keep the native plants in my yard and remove the invasive exotics.

I will do this place no harm by avoiding toxic fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, and rodenticides.

Before you resort to killing a plant or creature, get to know its name and place in the ecosystem. Many of these "pests" are beneficial and provide food for other creatures, and by poisoning them you can harm wildlife that relies on them.

I will use nature-based practices to support the health of my landscape.

I will keep and compost all the biomass (leaves, twigs, grass, etc) that grows here.

This is the food your place made for itself. By getting creative with compost, you can create a healthy soil biome while reducing the load on our landfills and the release of greenhouse gasses.

I will keep dead trees as long as there is no hazard to persons or property.

Standing or fallen, dead trees provide food and shelter for insects and perching sites for birds. The branches of dead trees can be removed if they are dangerous.

I will create a brush pile to provide shelter.

I will leave some leaf litter for ground-feeding birds, who will scrape through the litter for insects.

I will water very seldom and when I do, I will water deeply.

I will keep water in my yard, removing tile running into drains.

I will avoid shearing and prune instead.

I will prune in winter, remembering every cut is a wound.

I will limit or eliminate my lawn for less mowing, fertilizing, watering, and pollution, and to make more room for native plants.

I will plant two thirds native plants to provide food and shelter for wildlife.

I will mimic the multiple layers of growth found in many natural settings: trees, shrubs, vines, and herbaceous plants.

I will select plants that will provide berries, seeds, nuts, and insects for birds.

I will provide evergreens for winter shelter.

I will get to know the names of my plants, birds, and bugs, including them as family and friends — the greater community of creation.

I will carefully consider everything I bring to this place.

Ask yourself: Will it be useful for a very long time? Can it be composted or repurposed? Does it really need to be plastic?

I will question and let go of all my inclinations to suppress nature.

I will spend time in my landscape just observing, not fussing.

I will think of more ways to make this relationship fun, interesting, and rewarding. I will be faithful; through pestilence and abundance, through sun and storm, through downpours and droughts, I will take care of my place and all the wonders it provides, so that we all shall live.