



Sacred Grounds DMV

District of Columbia / Montgomery Co. / Prince George's Co.

Congregation Toolkit 2022-23

National Wildlife Federation



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1. Introduction



The goal of the program is to offer your congregants a practical way to put their faith into action by caring for creation through gardening. Planting native plants in our yards and congregation grounds and making other improvements improves water quality and wildlife habitat, helping people and wildlife.

The work you will do is an act of faith. Your congregation will be enabling congregants to participate in a hands-on way of healing local lands and waters by planting and nurturing living plants. You will be praying with your hands and putting your faith into action as a congregation and as individuals.

By focusing our efforts on an individual watershed, your members can have a big impact on the local streams that then run into our prized but degraded Chesapeake Bay!

This is a proven program. In the last two years, 11 congregations engaged hundreds of congregants and neighbors who planted thousands of native plants. This is an enjoyable and fulfilling project that congregants love - it builds community within your congregation and outside too.

You will play an ambassador role bringing this opportunity to your members and we'll provide all the help and resources you need to do it.

All you need to do to be successful is to inspire your congregants with your enthusiasm for planting native plants and get the word out in as many exciting ways as possible.



"I don't see any cons, I see all pros, our church is the kind of church that would be receptive to this kind of message and information. I just think we need more education. I don't know what our native species are, how to find them, or whether they're good for shade or sun, or whether they are resistant to animals. But if I could be given the information, I could be very motivated. And I suspect other people in our church would also."
- Congregant

2. Timeline and Congregation Role

Use this bit.ly to keep track of all Sacred Grounds activities:

bit.ly/sacred_grounds_calendar

3. Organizing Your Sacred Grounds Team

As you get started, think about your motivations for joining this team.

Congregants may have a variety of motivations:

- Interest in the activity, such as gardening or protecting the environment
- Putting faith into action
- Building relationships with others
- Feeling a part of the community



A successful team will enable congregants to achieve their personal goals. A successful team balances getting the work done with providing a positive experience for the members. If the team is all work and no fun, it will not be successful.

Checklist for building your team

- Encourage your team members to sign up for the IPC Faithful Green Leaders Training. Team members that participated last year found the training inspiring and useful. See link in calendar section above.
- Decide which team members will serve as the leads, keeping in touch with NWF. It is helpful to have separate leads for the Grounds project and for Outreach to Congregants for the Planting Hope Pickup Day.
- Set a regular meeting time for your team. Most teams meet monthly. If you set a regular meeting time everyone will know when the meeting is and you won't have to figure it out each month.
- Plan the agenda for your meetings in advance. The agenda should focus on areas where it is helpful to have everyone's input. Try to resolve things like dates before the meeting. This may require checking the congregational calendar or consulting with the office before the meeting.
- Include inspiration in each meeting. A song or prayer is a good way to do this. Some teams provide time for each member to share something about themselves to start off each meeting.
- At the end of each meeting review everyone's action steps.
- Follow up with an email with the action steps immediately after the meeting.



4. Native Plant Garden Tours



Join team members from other participating congregations in your county for an orientation to the importance of native plants and see what native plants look like when planted around homes and in yards. This tour will give you the information you need to feel confident when you speak to other congregants about Sacred Grounds. Whether you are a gardener or not, and whatever your familiarity with native plants, you will learn from the experts conducting the tour.

This tour is especially designed for green team members, but additional congregants are welcome to join.

Checklist

- Invite team members to participate in the tour
- Decide if you will invite others - this is a great opportunity to interest others in joining your team



5. Discovery Phase – Focus Group Discussions

In order to help you to be as successful as possible in engaging your congregants, we are using the approach of Community Based Social Marketing. In this approach we start with a discovery phase to get insight into your congregants' attitudes toward planting native plants and identify benefits and barriers that they perceive in participating in planting native plants.

If you have not yet already done focus groups, you will recruit participants for each of the 3 focus group discussions to be facilitated by NWF. Eight different participants for each focus group is ideal. NWF will analyze the results of the focus groups and share the results so that you can use them to plan your outreach campaign.

Checklist for Setting Up Focus Groups

- Choose dates and times in collaboration with NWF. The groups will meet for 1 hour and 15 minutes. Choose different times to accommodate different people's schedules.
- Decide if you will open the focus groups to the entire congregation, or instead decide on certain groups to invite. The focus groups should be limited to people who have yards, since the main goal of this program is to inspire them to plant native plants. Also, with focus groups it is better to have more homogeneous groups, if possible (such as separate for gardeners/non-gardeners, parents/non-parents, etc.) Each group should have no more than 6 participants. In order to take account of no-shows, you can allow up to 8 people to sign up for each focus group. We are asking you to arrange 3 groups – for a total of 24 people.
- Set up a registration/rsvp using Doodle or a similar program. Set the options so that they can only choose one time and once that group is filled, they no longer have that option.



- See the sample invitation below and revise as needed. Some thoughts on any revisions: Think about why the invitees would be motivated to participate. Your note should start with this. Also make clear to what extent it is confidential. Be clear about why their participation is important.

Consider what to put in the subject line of the invitation. If possible, add the person's name and reply needed such as, "Sam, do you know Sligo Creek/Upper Patuxent River? REPLY NEEDED". If at all possible, personalize the note with invitees' names.

- Send out invitations 2 weeks before focus groups begin. After 2 days, follow up with invitees who did not respond. You can add a reminder message on top of the original one and resend. After 4 days send another reminder.
- After 7 days, review responses. Send invitees a confirmation stating which group they will participate in and including the Zoom Link.
- Send reminder/confirmation the day before each focus group.

Focus Group Outreach Templates

Sample Invitation to Focus Group Discussion

Dear PERSONAL NAME,

Do you love living or worshipping near Sligo Creek or Upper Patuxent River? Do you ever wonder about what you can do to help protect our local environment? What do you think FAITH has to do with caring for nature? **As a member of NAME OF CONGREGATION, your views are important to us.**

Our congregation has chosen to join Sacred Grounds, an effort to care for creation along the waterways flowing into the Chesapeake Bay, in cooperation with several other congregations in our area and the National Wildlife Federation.

Before we begin, we need to get a better understanding of our members. We have questions about how you relate to Sligo Creek or Upper Patuxent River or other nearby creeks and rivers, how you make decisions about caring for your yard, and how you think our congregation can best inspire your participation.

You are invited to join a focus group discussion to share your views on these questions. This confidential conversation will be held online and facilitated by a consultant.

Please click here to register for a focus group. Please indicate all of the times that you are available to participate. We would appreciate a response by DATE.

Your views will help our team of volunteers to shape this program so that it works for you and NAME OF CONGREGATION. Thank you!

NAMES OF TEAM MEMBERS

Reminder Note

Subject: NAME, did you miss this?

Dear NAME:

Can you help NAME OF CONGREGATION by participating in a focus group discussion? This should be really interesting and we would really appreciate your help. Please see below and register online by DATE.

Thanks! NAME [include the previous message]

Sample Confirmation Note

Subject: Confirming your focus group discussion

Dear NAME,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the NAME OF CONGREGATION focus group discussion about Sacred Grounds..

This is to confirm that you will participate in the focus group on DAY, DATE, TIME.



Please click on this zoom link in order to participate: ZOOM LINK

The focus group discussion is scheduled to last for 1 hour and 15 minutes.

If for any reason you find you are unable to attend, please let me know so that we can invite another participant.

Again, thank you in advance for stepping up to help our team to plan this effort.

NAME

6. Creating Your Action Plan for Congregational Outreach



Based on the results of the focus groups completed in the discovery phase, you are now in a great position to tailor your outreach campaign to your members’ perceptions about planting native plants along with your unique opportunities. This is your chance to season this program with your congregation’s special flavor. We’ll be explaining how behavior change strategies can help you get more congregants involved.

Checklist

- Attend Focus Group Results Meeting to learn about the focus group results and discuss how you will use them.
- Meet with your team to use the Action Plan Worksheet (in the Appendices) to set your congregation's goals, and choose the activities you will do to engage your congregants.



Leveraging Social Influences—

creating opportunities for social learning, encouraging public commitments, and making behaviors observable.



Designing Choice Architecture—

making desirable behaviors easier by purposefully structuring the context, timing, and presentation of options.



Appealing to Emotions—

leveraging positive emotions, such as pride



Levers of Behavior Change <https://rare.org/a-new-toolkit-for-conservation/>

Examples of Tactics: Community Based Social Marketing

Removing external barriers – providing help & tools that remove obstacles and make it easy to take action

- National Wildlife Federation will provide list of nurseries that sell native plants to overcome the barrier that people don't know where to obtain these plants
- Youth volunteers implement yard work to overcome barrier for people who cannot do the work themselves or cannot afford it
- Discount at plant store or free equipment rental to overcome cost of implementing changes
- A ride to the plant store to overcome barrier of lack of transportation

Commitments – asking people to commit to taking action which helps to insure follow-through

- Ask congregants during the webinar to pledge at plant native plants (will provide link later)
- At the end of a presentation (webinar or other), ask congregants to raise their hands if they commit to adding native plants to their garden at home native plants
- After a sermon about taking care of Sligo Creek/Upper Patuxent River, ask congregants to stand if they are committing to participate

Prompts – reminders to take action

- Send a follow up email at planting time in the spring reminding members to plant native plants
- Place a flower on each seat in the sanctuary as a reminder at planting time in the spring
- Provide a wallet card with names of native plants that congregants can take when shopping

Social norms – modeling action for others so that they are inspired to follow suit

- Highlight participating congregants in a column in the newsletter so that they can see others in their community are taking this action
- Honor all of the participating congregants during a worship service so that the rest of the congregation sees that their friends are participating

Effective messaging – sharing information in a captivating and clear way

- Use messages reflecting your faith's approach to stewardship and connecting to your community's culture
- Take photos of participating congregants planting native plants in their yards and label them with information about what they are doing
- Use a catchy name or slogan to describe your campaign
- Send short regular updates on a weekly basis

Incentives – rewarding action in ways that are meaningful to people

- A congratulatory certificate signed by clergy
- Individual bible study session with special teacher
- Reserved parking space for holiday worship service
- Sticker to place on window indicating that the congregant is fulfilling the responsibility of stewardship

7. Congregation Webinar – Inspiration: Why Plant Native Plants

Your congregation will host an inspirational and education webinar for your congregation and your neighbors. The purpose of this webinar is to inspire your congregants to pledge to participate in planting native plants. In your first year in Sacred Grounds, NWF will present the webinar. In future years, you will present the webinar yourselves.

Checklist

- Choose a date. Consider time right after existing congregation service or another event when most of congregation already tuned in.
- Invite clergy to introduce a connection with faith and caring for creation at start of webinar
- Select team member to present your action plan and invite congregants to pledge to participate
- Select team member to give presentation about native plants (provided by NWF)
- Customize invitation/flyer template (add anything from your faith or show pictures of members planting, etc.)
- Arrange for webinar to be announced at worship service
- Submit webinar announcement to newsletter
- Post webinar announcement on social media (e.g. congregation Facebook site)
- Invite neighbors (if you wish, via listservs, other)
- Your publicity ideas:



Draft Webinar Agenda : “Inspiration: Why Plant Native Plants”

Goals:

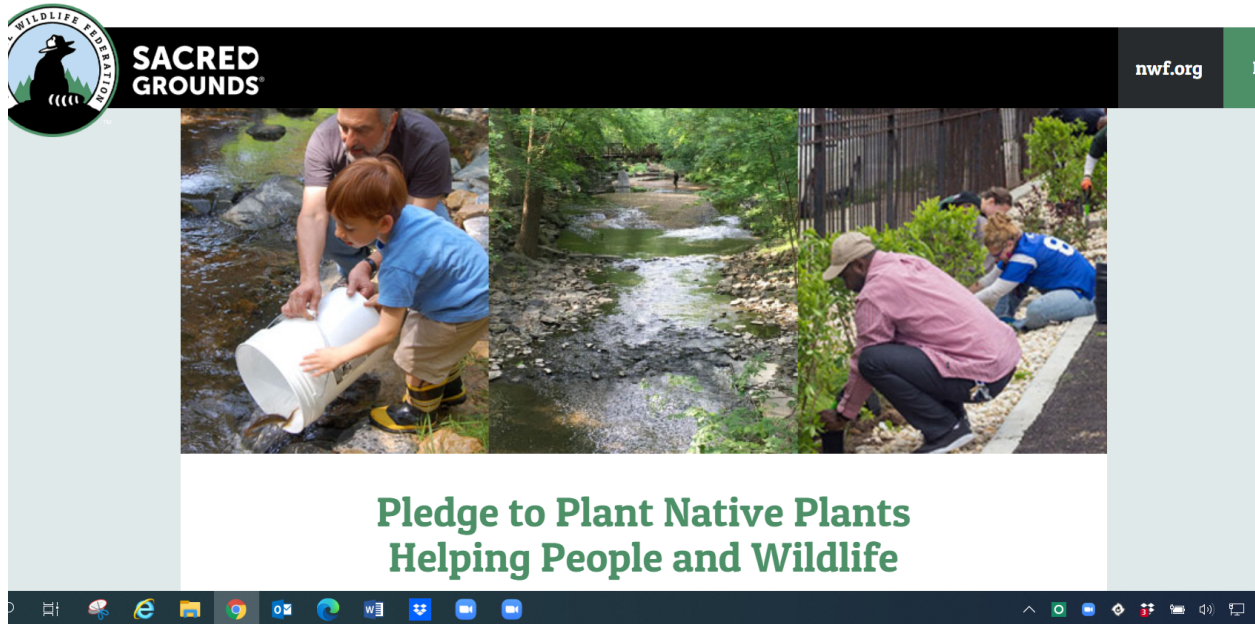
- inspire, build excitement, why we need to act
- Provide information on ways to act (plant natives, rain-gardens)

Time	What	Who	Notes
12:15	Welcome, goal and agenda	Congregation	Congregation green team leader
12:20	Opening Prayer	Clergy	
12:25	Introduce partners		If any Sacred Grounds partners are participating, welcome them now
12:30 (10 mins)	Our precious rivers		Overview of local rivers health and problems
12:40 (15 mins)	Caring for Creation: How we can help		Sacred Grounds (wildlife crisis and solution); call for pledges
12:55	Congregation opportunities for action	Congregation green team leader	Congregation leader – congregation’s action plan; talk about how your congregation will play a leading role and goal of X homes by June XX; call for pledges – 5-8 min
1:05	Q and A	Green Team	
1:15	Thank you, next steps, prayer and adjourn	Congregation green team leader	

8. Native Plant Pledge:

Link to Pledge: <https://www.nwf.org/NativePlantPledge>

The National Wildlife Federation



The Native Plant Pledge is the best way to get people to commit and then for each congregation (and NWF) to know if they want to pick up plants during your Planting Hope: Native Plant Pick Up Day. There is a drop-down menu listing each congregation so be sure to tell your members to look for their congregation. NWF will send you regular updates to let you know the number and names of people who pledged allowing you to track towards your overall goal (number of pledgers) and to also recognize these people in your newsletters, website, or at congregation services. We do also collect email addresses and regular home addresses which will help us follow up with surveys and map the addresses to show the collective effort. If you find your members do not want to pledge but do want to get free plants, let us know so we can work out an alternative if needed.



9. Workshop (virtual): How to Garden with Native Plants to Help People & Wildlife

The purpose of this webinar is to provide congregants with practical information about HOW TO plant native plants and get assistance for rain gardens and conservation landscaping. We will share what native plants are good for planting and where to get them. In addition to watershed and gardening information, the workshop will include information about how congregants and congregations can apply for county financial assistance to implement conservation landscaping and rain gardens in their yards and congregation grounds. We will host two webinars, one for Prince George's County congregations and one for Montgomery County congregations with county experts and information.

[Rainscapes Rebate Montgomery County](#)

[Rain Check Rebate Prince George's County](#)

[Rain Check Rebate for Washington DC](#)

Checklist

- Invite members to workshop with a note from you and template flyer (will be in communications packet)
- Arrange for workshop to be announced at worship service
Submit workshop announcement to newsletter
- Post workshop announcement on social media
- Invite neighbors and community leaders (if you wish)
- Your publicity ideas:



10. Planting Hope: Free Native Plant Pick-up



This is the culmination event of the program where your congregation will host a free plant pick up at your congregation grounds. The goals of the event are:

- To make it easy for congregants to take action by providing them with plants.
 - Inspire congregants to take further action by showing them that their peers are enthusiastic about caring for creation and protecting local waterways.
 - Interest members of the congregation in taking further steps by providing them with information about other things they can do at home to protect area waterways and wildlife, including RainScapes program (Montgomery County), Raincheck Rebate (Prince George's County), National Wildlife Federation's Wildlife Habitat Certification, etc.
- share information on where to get plants on their own and which plants are especially valuable for wildlife
 - Recruiting for your team's next project

We encourage you to:

- Get lots of people involved
- Make your event visible
- Make your event fun and exciting
- Include a spiritual aspect (insert into plant packet, blessing of the plants, etc) for Creation

Checklist

- Invite participation from across your congregation. Meet with leaders of ministries/teams and ask them to be involved, especially youth ministries/leaders
- Look for weekly update on registration numbers/names from your congregants, follow up as needed
- Plan activities
- Publicize your event
- Recruit team of volunteers
- Arrange to pick up plants week of event (TBD location by county)



- Organize volunteers to prepare plants day before or morning of (put in compost bags, add identification tags, flyers of plants and other information; all will be provided)
- Add in any congregation material you wish to share with your neighbors or members
- Organize pick-up sheet by member/neighbor name and sun/shade request for check-off during pick up (to track who did or didn't pick up)
- Have volunteer in charge of getting member/neighbor check off during pick up and secure home address and email (if you don't have it already)
- Plan for follow-up email/newsletter announcement to thank participants and encourage additional congregants to pledge (template will be provided with encouragement to customize)



Sample Email Reminder

Takoma Park Presbyterian Church sent this note to congregation members who pledged as a reminder to pick up their plants:

Hello Native Plant Adoption Participants -

Thank you for [joining our pledge](#) and signing up to plant native plants this Mother's Day to celebrate Mother Earth!

For those who signed up, we will be distributing native plants ***this Sunday May 9th from 1:00-3:00 pm*** outside [the Takoma Park Presbyterian Church \(TPPC\)](#).

The good news is that we were overwhelmed by the response and hope we can do this again sometime soon. Because of the tremendous response and to include as many participants as possible, we will only be able to provide three very healthy native plants to each participant at this event.

The other good news is that as all Master Gardeners know, THREE is the magic number to plant together so this is the start of a great patch!

Overall, this weekend ***TPPC and four other congregations will distribute over 1000 native plants to help protect our valuable Sligo Creek watershed!***

Many thanks to the ***Caring for Creation Sligo Creek Project organizers and sponsors*** who are making this possible.

Thank you for joining us in making a difference - we encourage you to keep adding natives, consider putting in a [raingarden or other means to reduce your run-off](#), and [certify your yard as wildlife friendly](#).

For more information on how to take action see links below or contact the TPPC Green Team (add name/contact info).

[Takoma Park Presbyterian Church](#) is an [Earth Care Congregation](#).



Planting Natives Video

Silver Spring United Methodist Church made a video about planting natives which was sent to all pledgers: [Click here to see their video.](#)

Newsletter Article

Christ Congregational Church used this newsletter article to keep encouraging members to plant native plants

Sacred Grounds- Caring for Creation

We are getting closer to our goal of 25 families that will plant native plants and potentially become Certified Wildlife Habitats. Thank you to those CCC Community members who have pledged in the last week: Chuck Mason. **We need at least 5 more individuals** to pledge – won't you join us? Remember there will be a workshop in April to teach you how and where to plant natives AND on May 9 we will be distributing FREE Native Plants to those families who have pledged!

Question – I don't live in Silver Spring, or Montgomery County or the state of Maryland – can I participate? Of course, anyone who plants native plants in their yard is helping their local watershed and the environment.

Link to pledge to plant native plants by June 15 – (will be shared later)

Link to apply for National Wildlife Federation's Certified Wildlife Habitat – <https://www.nwf.org/certifiedwildlifehabitat>

Link to apply for Prince George's Raincheck Rebate (<https://cbtrust.org/grants/prince-georges-county-rain-check-rebate/>) or Montgomery County's RainScapes rebate (<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/dep/resources/images/responsive/DEPtext.png>)

11. Congregation Grounds Native Plants Garden

National Wildlife Federation will help your congregation plan and plant a native plants garden on your congregation grounds. Congregations will be provided some funds from NWF for a native plant garden, and your congregation can apply for other grants.

Design & Budget for Your Garden

We have a native plant garden to help create your design. Once you have selected your design, you can make a budget for your garden. Consider the cost of these expenses and get approval from your congregation for these expenses.

- To prepare the ground you will need 8-12 inches of mulch, which will be ordered from ChipDrop.com (free)
- Shovels and rakes for planting (you may be able to borrow these)
- Hose – you must have access to water for the first year or so, while the plants are getting established
- Note that after the first year, when your garden is established, you may need mulch. You will need 1-2 inches of mulch, not more.

How to Prepare Soil for Planting a Native Plant Conservation Landscape or Rain Garden

If you are converting turf to native plants, you need to plan ahead. Preparation will begin in the summer so that you can hold your planting day in the fall. If you have bare soil, no preparation is needed. If you need to prepare the soil, we recommend the “lasagna method.”

- Cut whatever’s growing there very short.
- Lay cardboard (tape removed), sometimes a couple layers, overlapping to keep out sun.
- Cover the cardboard with a thick – like 3+” layer of compost or mulch.
- Hold that down and in place if needed.
- Leave this in place for months to kill what’s underneath.
- You don’t remove the cardboard, but plant thru it, moving the compost so there’s not more than a couple inches around plants.

Be careful if you’re working near trees. You don’t want to deprive the tree roots of moisture for too long, and either of these will tend to change the water table in the exact area, which can be a stressor to large old trees, particularly oaks.

Planting Your Garden

This is the fun part! Organize a planting day for your ongregants.

- Soil should be prepared in advance – if day of, need 3-4 people
- Generally need no more than 10-15 people for a small plot
- Appoint someone to explain process, make assignments so everyone has role, some jobs are hard work so be prepared to take turns

- Make sure people are not breaking up or trampling soil
- Consider how many volunteers you need for the size of the plot, rake soil flat, water plants in containers, dig holes with trowels or shovels depending on the size of the plants, wet the holes, release roots with a gardening knife, plant the plants and cover with soil and mulch, watering (if carrying buckets, you will need more people for a bucket brigade), cover the entire garden with mulch
- Refreshment table
- Monitor the rain and water within one week if needed. In spring you may need to repeat watering weekly depending on the weather. Established plants are resilient but new plants need to be watered
- Later you will post signs with images of plants to aid in weeding

Plant Maintenance Day

If your garden is planted in the fall, you should plan a maintenance and clean-up day for March or April, before new growth is coming up.

- Instruct all weeders on which are desired plants and pull up what is not – what is a weed in a native plant garden
- How much weeding is needed will depend on weather conditions – check the garden at least monthly

Remember you need to continue to monitor the weather and water the plants if necessary.

12. Congregational Faith & Native Plants Walk

Lead a **spiritual nature walk** with members of your congregation. This Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake Activity Kit includes teachings from a diversity of faiths about the spiritual and ecological significance of trees, water, and being good caretakers of the local watershed.

[Click here to access IPC's Spiritual Nature Walk Activity Kit](#) or visit: /bit.ly/ipc_spiritual_walk_kit

Seeing is believing! Showing your congregants is the best way to teach them about how caring for nature is part of their faith, and the impact that native plants can have. Consider hosting your own **native plants walk** highlighting a local area or the homes of your own members; below is a garden tour that Christ Congregational Church hosted on their own using their own congregation member yards! Add a blessing at each garden to incorporate faith into your walk and remind everyone we are caring for creation as we plant native plants at home!

Checklist

- Choose leaders for your walk
- Choose a location for your walk

- ❑ Include the teachings provided by IPC to your faith and location. [Click here to access liturgical resources](#) or visit: bit.ly/ipc_creationcare_liturgical_resources
- ❑ Publicize the walk with announcements at worship service, in newsletter, and on social media
- ❑ Your publicity ideas:



13. How to reach us:

- **Naomi Edelson**, National Wildlife Federation, edelsonn@nwf.org; 202-657-2024
- **Joelle Novey**, Interfaith Power & Light DMV; joelle@ipldmv.org; 202-256-1450
- **Madison Mayhew**, Interfaith Power & Light DMV; madison@ipldmv.org
- **Sarah Redden**, Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake; sarah@interfaithchesapeake.org
- **Mirele Goldsmith**, Wise Philanthropy Institute, mirele@wisephilanthropy.com; 917-679-2121
- **Kit Gage**, Friends of Sligo Creek, kgage@verizon.net; 301-787-0187
- **Abel Olivo**, Defensores de la Cuenca, abel@defensoresdelacuenca.org

Appendices

Sacred Grounds Action Planning Worksheet

Communications Resources

Planting Hope Pick-up Day Leader's Guide

Sacred Grounds Action Plan Worksheet

August 2022 - June 2023

Congregation Name:

Green Team Leader/s Name and Contact Information:

Overall Goal: *Care for Creation by caring for Chesapeake Bay's people and wildlife by planting native plants at congregation member's homes and on congregation grounds. This will help reduce stormwater runoff from our lawns into our rivers and streams reducing flooding and pollution and creating more wildlife habitat. This second year goals (for most congregations) will be to deepen and expand engagement of your community and reach beyond to other congregations in the region.*

Steps to Success:

- Install and maintain native plant gardens on congregation grounds (designs, planting day, maintenance days); use a model for planting at home
- More members and neighbors' plant native plants at home (action plan, presentations, pledge, pickup day)
- More members and neighbors take additional steps at home – increase size of planting and focus on applying for county rebate programs (presentations, pledge, rebate workshops)
- Develop members and neighbors connection with their own watershed - (Northwest Branch, Patuxent, Anacostia (nature walks/cleanups)
- Spread the Green Word: share the learning with other congregations (video, articles in media, faith community forums, social media, personal outreach to other congregations)
- Deepen connections among congregations in each cohort, such that they have lasting relationships (joint leader meetings, joint walks and cleanups)
- Develop 3-5 year congregational action plans to sustain congregation's work

CONGREGATION'S OBJECTIVES

Please set a goal for how many members and neighbors (optional) will pledge to plant native plants at their home by June 2023. (Goal is to aim for 30-100+). Consider the following in setting your goal:

1. Number of congregation households _____
2. Households with garden ____ (if possible to estimate)
3. How many pledged or picked up last year?

Your goal: _____

IDEAS

Please brainstorm ideas for how you will engage and excite your members. Use ideas that worked well last year and consider how you might add or improve as needed. Discuss these questions to help you make your plan. See toolkit for additional ideas.

How can you make it easier for your congregants to plant native plants?

- 1.
- 2.

How will you share your information to energize congregants?

- 1.
- 2.

How will you tap into emotions and connect them to planting native plants?

- 1.
- 2.

Seeing others participating is inspiring. How will you make your enthusiasm and actions visible to the congregation?

- 1.
- 2.

How will you connect your faith's teachings and rituals with Sacred Grounds to touch members spiritually?

- 1.
- 2.

What assets does your congregation have? (People and resources in our congregation and community to help implement our strategy)

1. People with expertise (e.g. publicity, gardening, educating youth, etc.)
2. Clergy involvement (e.g. sermon, blessing of garden):
3. Other ministries or committees to engage:

4. Publicity channels (newsletters, bulletin board, worship service announcements, events of other ministries)

5. Anything you would like to add

ACTION PLAN

Native Plants Pledge

The native plant pledge is the central tactic used in Sacred Grounds to get people to commit to planting native plants at home. You should be promoting the pledge throughout the year. What tactics will you use to promote the pledge? (Summarize ideas inspired by questions above and add your new ideas)

1.

2.

Conservation Landscaping Rebates for Homes:

This year we will focus more on getting members to apply for these municipal rebates to create conservation landscaping at their homes. Please consider how you will promote the incentive program to get people to apply. Summarize ideas inspired by questions above and add your new ideas. What tactics will you use?

1.

2.

Sacred Grounds Garden as Inspiration for Members

We encourage you to use your Sacred Grounds garden to inspire members to plant more native plants at home. What tactics will you use to do this? Summarize your ideas from above:

1.

2.

Collecting Participant Information: Our grant requires we track several things; please make a plan to track the following:

1. Number of total participants in all activities (count each person once)
2. Copies of sign up sheets for each event
3. Number of total pledges and new pledges
4. Number of applicants for county rebates
5. Number, type and copy of publicity (e.g. announcements at worship service, newsletter articles, and other methods)

We recommend you use your green team meetings to keep track of how you are doing. At the end of the year you will submit this information to the National Wildlife Federation (edelsonn@nwf.org).

Please use this brainstorm as a guide to creating your congregation's detailed Sacred Grounds Action Plan and calendar for 2022-23.

Promotional Materials & Communications

Below is information you can use to help you promote Sacred Grounds MD events and pledge to plant native plants. It also includes information based on the focus groups to help guide you to any additional messaging to promote more people pledging to plant native plants. Included is:

1. **Communications Checklist**
2. **Text of Pledge to Plant Native Plants**
3. **Newsletter Blurbs to promote inspirational presentation, pledge, plant pick-up day, and garden tour events**
4. **Messaging advice based on focus groups**

Successful Communications Checklist

As you plan your communications, keep these general tips in mind:

- Remind congregants of upcoming program events at every opportunity - services, newsletter, social media, etc. People need to hear things multiple times. Some research suggests that people need to hear something 7 times before it sinks in!
- Customize your messages! Your congregants will pay more attention to stories of their friends and neighbors than to general messages. Customize the newsletter blurbs below with your congregants' stories. Use names and photos to personalize the stories.
- Use photos! Collect and take photos of congregants who have pledged to plant native plants, people gardening at home, people with favorite native plants, etc. The most powerful message is showing peers taking action. Include pictures of local streams and rivers such as Sligo Creek, with people if possible.
- Communicate the number of people who have pledged in order to encourage others to come onboard. For example, "# OF PLEDGERS congregants have already pledged to plant native plants! Thank you to NAMES." This inspires people to want to join in.
- Include messages from the clergy. People see clergy as role models and will follow them. And they will be inspired by the idea that planting natives is a way of living their faith.
- Share the presentation recording for people who missed it.

GRAPHICS:

Here is a link to some graphics you can use for all the events as you wish. It includes sample piecemeal images, flyer examples (will need to be customized and updated) and logos. You should be able to take them out from the google doc and add to your newsletters, FB page, or e-notes.

[Click here to access graphics](#), or visit: bit.ly/sg_graphics

[Pledge to Plant Native Plants](#)

Link to Pledge: <https://www.nwf.org/NativePlantPledge>

We hope you will keep including this in communications with your congregation members after your webinar.

Below is the text of the pledge that you will ask congregants to sign. Feel free to use this language in your communications.

Pledge to Plant Native Plants Helping People and Wildlife

Please join your fellow congregation members in helping people and wildlife by *Caring for Creation*. We'll do this by planting native plants in our yards that are suited to the local wildlife, soil and rainfall here in the Maryland/District of Columbia region.

Native plants help protect the local streams and rivers we love and enjoy. These waterways are a source of sustenance for birds, frogs, fish, and butterflies, and a place for children to play. Our actions will protect people who live alongside and downstream from pollution and flooding. All life depends upon water.

By planting native plants, we plant with a purpose and put the teachings of our faith into practice. By working together with people of all faiths we can care for the Earth that we share.

Make a pledge today to plant natives in your yard, and we'll provide you with a starter kit of free plants, as well as the information you need for the plants to thrive. We're aiming to recruit 200+ homes—will you be one of them?

Sample Newsletter Announcements

Inspirational Presentation

Title: Sacred Grounds: Using the Power of Native Plants to Help People and Wildlife

Add: Presentation Date & Time

Add: Zoom Link (if virtual) (NWF can provide one if you wish)

What brings you joy? This year (your congregation name) is participating in an exciting new program to encourage congregants to plant native plants at home. To kick off the program, Sacred Grounds MD conducted focus groups with our congregants and members of other area churches, mosques and synagogues. We learned that gardening brings joy, as well as being an expression of appreciation for the gifts of nature (God, creation.) The purpose of Sacred Grounds is to help people and wildlife by planting native plants on our congregation grounds and at members' homes. Native plants protect people and wildlife because they are suited to the soil and rainfall of Maryland. They provide food and homes for local wildlife and help the soil to filter water which protects our local streams and Chesapeake Bay from pollution and flooding. Join us for an educational and inspirational presentation about the power of native plants, and how you can plant them at home in your yard or in pots.

Pledge to Plant Native Plants (add link to pledge here)

Below is an example of how to include a story from one of your own congregants in your communications.

Join Jane in Pledging to Plant Native Plants at Home this Spring

One of Jane's favorite things to do is walk with her family by the Patapsco River. But something has changed there. Years ago, Jane used to drink right from the River. But after the flooding in Ellicott City, the water became polluted and it is no longer clean enough to drink. Now Jane is excited to be able to do something to help clean up our local rivers by pledging to plant native plants at home. This year (YOUR CONGREGATION) is one of nine congregations participating in Sacred Grounds - a program to connect faith and the environment by planting native plants at congregation grounds and their member's homes. Native plants, which are suited to the soil and rainfall of Maryland, help the soil to filter pollution and slow the flow of water into streams and rivers. We will be giving out free plants and

helping you with information and advice so your plants will thrive. Our goal is for XXX congregants to participate. Please join Jane and the members of our Green Team in this exciting project. Pledge now to plant native plants this spring. (ADD LINK)

Technical Workshop (April 2022, one in Prince George’s County and one in Montgomery County)

Title: Using Native Plants to Care for Earth at Home:

Creating Joy and Beauty with Wildlife Habitat & Rain Gardens

Virtual Webinar

Add: DATE and Time TIME (NWF will provide shortly)

LINK TO REGISTER FOR WEBINAR (NWF will provide shortly)

Many congregants of YOUR CONGREGATION find joy, peace, and inspiration outdoors. By planting native plants, we can take part in protecting nature / Earth / creation [Add your own faith language] that nurtures us. Join us virtually from [TIME] on [DAY] to learn from experts about how you can create wildlife habitat and protect our local streams by planting native plants. You’ll also learn how you can create and design a rain garden that is eligible for municipal funding worth hundreds or even thousands of dollars - from the (Fill in the best one: Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection or Prince George’s Department of Environment).

We will share tips on the following:

- What are the best native plants for my yard?
- Where can I buy them?
- How will they help with flooding and pollution into our local streams and Chesapeake Bay?
- Designing a garden with native plants
- Other features to help birds and butterflies thrive at our homes
- County financial aid application/rebate information
- How to be an ambassador for wildlife
- And any other questions you may have!

Register and receive the Zoom link here: (attach link)

Planting native plants protects nature / God’s creation for our children and future generations. [Add in your own faith teaching here.]

Planting Hope: Plant Pickup Day

Title: Planting Hope: Plant Pickup Day

DATE, TIME, LOCATIONS (add your own)

Just in time for Mother's Day and the spring planting season, we're giving away at least three native plants to each home that registers and pledges to plant them!

Join us, and neighbors at churches, mosques, and synagogues participating in Sacred Grounds MD, by planting native plants at your home. These native plants will help reduce stormwater runoff and thus improve the quality and quantity of water heading from our homes to local streams. And they provide food for birds and butterflies! Let's help our families continue to safely enjoy Sligo Creek (or Patuxent River) as well as our neighbors that live downstream in the Chesapeake Bay region.

Fill out this form to reserve your plants: (Will send pledge link) at (name of congregation). Your Green Team will be in touch with you about the date, timing, logistics, and COVID safety protocols.

NOTE: You MUST reserve your plants via this form. Sacred Grounds is coordinating distribution among several congregations and will be allotting plants according to the orders you submit on the form.

ADD YOUR OWN FAITH TEACHING HERE

Thank you for helping people and wildlife!

Native Plant Garden Tour

Join us on a tour of native plant gardens near Sligo Creek or Patuxent River. By planting native plants at home, we can care for creation/nature/Earth, helping our neighbors – both the people and the wildlife. Native plants help prevent flooding and provide food for local wildlife. On DATE, TIME. local native plant expert NAME OF EXPERT will show us examples of the beauty of native plants in local gardens.

Together, by caring for creation, we can ensure our children have a clean and safe community well into the future. [ADD YOUR OWN FAITH TEACHING HERE.]

Messaging Ideas from Behavior Change Levers & Focus Groups

These ideas are organized according to the 4 levers of behavior change that we are using to engage congregants in planting native plants. Think about what participants told us in the focus groups and how you can target your messages to their interests and concerns. Remember, you only need to pick one or two of these ideas to customize your communications.

Choice Architecture: How can you make it easier for your congregants to plant native plants?

Focus Group Findings

- Need specific information about selecting plants for own conditions
- No yard
- Can't do the work of digging and planting
- Concerned about deer, rabbits, etc.
- Can't easily obtain native plants

Choice architecture is changing the context to eliminate barriers and make it easy to participate. Simplify message and decisions by streamlining or providing shortcuts, provide support in making a plan, use commitments to bind future decisions. Sacred Grounds provides two things including the pledge form and the free plants on Planting Hope: Plant Pick Up Day. Consider ideas such as delivering plants, a plant sale, having a volunteer go to congregant's yard to advise, have young people help elders with planting, make a video about how to plant.

Messaging: Reinforce "We're making it easy for you" by providing tips, giving examples of what others have done, showing with a photo what a native plant looks like, etc.

Information: How can you share information congregants need in ways that make it come alive?

Focus Group Findings

- Think of gardening only as planting vegetables and trees
- Don't know what's native and what's not
- Don't know local creeks, where water flows
- Don't know how planting native plants can help with water quality, runoff

Communicate the importance of the behavior, provide step by step instructions, offer training, communicate in clear unambiguous way, give feedback on performance of behavior. Communicate in compelling ways with stories, pictures, experiences. Sacred Grounds provides tour, two webinars, handout with planting instructions. Consider doing your own tour, put up a map of the watershed and ask each congregant to put in a pin for their home, visit a local stream, set up a gardening chat group, invite congregants to send in photos of plants in their yards to be identified by a volunteer.

Messaging: Provide information about what's native and about the connection between planting natives and water quality (mention impact on fish, frogs, and children who play nearby.) Give specific examples of local streams congregants are familiar with, provide info about water quality (sound bites, not too much,) and show how streams are connected through the watershed (don't assume people know what a watershed is.)

Emotional & Spiritual Appeals: How will you tap into emotions and connect them to planting native plants?

Focus Group Findings

- Love and gratitude for nature
- Feelings of peace, calm, appreciation for beauty
- Love for important people who garden, such as parents and grandparents
- Concern about kids' exposure to pollution
- Pride in practicing faith
- Concern for justice and equity

People take action because they feel moved to do so, not because of information. Tap into core emotions that drive specific actions, put a human face on campaign and focus on single stories over abstract statistics, tailor messages to be personally relevant, relatable and appealing. Consider a spiritual nature walk, dedicate plants to people we love, write a prayer for planting native plants

Messaging: In terms of love, in our messaging we might want to emphasize how caring for Sligo Creek is something we are doing to take care of each other by showing intergenerational groups planting together. We might highlight messages about “who I’m planting this for” – my kids, my parents, my neighbors downstream with a quote and a photo.

Social Influence: How will you activate peer influence by making your enthusiasm and actions visible?

Focus Group Findings

- Doing things as a community is important
- Our congregants care about stewardship of nature

People look to the behavior, beliefs and expectations of others for what they should do. Leverage these by making the behavior observable, find a way for people to show they are doing it, promote cases of success, use trusted messengers, facilitate community exchanges, encourage public commitments. Remember that person to person is the most powerful way to communicate. Consider calling congregants to invite them to the webinar. Highlight a congregant and their plant with a photo and caption in your newsletter. Put up a “thermometer” in the lobby or on the website graphing how many people have pledged. Ask all who are participating to stand during worship service. Ask congregants to speak during worship service. The message is “look around and see we are all doing it!”

Messaging: Focus group participants are already convinced that their fellow congregants care. Now we need to show them that the congregants are taking action and actually planting native plants. By using Green Teams in the congregations to lead the way we are already employing trusted messengers that others will want to follow. In our messaging we can reinforce this by making sure to emphasize the role of the Green Team members in our communications, during the presentations, etc. Whenever possible we should use photos of members of the congregation and tell their stories in communications. As congregants begin to pledge and participate we should use their names, photos and stories to reinforce the new social norm. The message is “look around and see we’re all doing it.”

Faith-based Messages

Tips for using faith-based messages:

- Think about choosing one faith teaching that resonates with your community and using it consistently as a theme or “slogan”
- Be sensitive to adjusting the sample language to your community. Which terms do you want to use - “creation,” “God,” “nature,” or “Earth?”
- Ask clergy to reinforce your message by mentioning the program and incorporating the theme of native plants and protecting water into sermons and educational opportunities.
- Consult with clergy about how to incorporate these messages below into your communication. Specific faith-based messages:

All of the faith-based messages we tried out in the focus groups resonated with some people and not with others. Understanding why different people liked the 5 different messages gives some insight into how to use these messages.

a) You can heal God’s creation right in your own yard by planting native plants.

People liked this one because it was personal - it resonated with those who wanted to know what they could personally do where they have control, in their own yard. The pitfall here is that some people feel that doing something in their own yard is too little to make a difference, so it is important to include information about how many congregations and people are participating so actions at home will add up.

b) Native plants support wildlife, so when you plant them you are caring for creation.

People who liked this one, liked it because they care about wildlife. There are lots of people who love wildlife and are excited about birds and butterflies coming to their yard. Give these people ways to share their excitement and it will influence others.

c) Love your neighbors! Planting native plants protects people downstream from pollution.

Those who liked this one liked it because it was about protecting people and about justice. If you are trying to reach people involved in social justice activities, this is a message to use. However, keep in mind that many people won’t understand what “protecting people downstream from pollution” means. You will need to explain further, such as “native plants hold soil that filters out pollution before it enters streams. That means that a stream that flows through your community, and then through another one, will be clean, safe, and less likely to flood.” It would be even more effective to be concrete and specific by naming the communities downstream who live there, and how pollution and flooding impact these communities.

d) By planting native plants, people of all faiths can work together to care for the Earth that we share.

A lot of people like the idea of collaborating with people of other faiths to care for Earth and they are interested in actually meeting people of other faiths and doing something together. To be more concrete, you can mention the other congregations participating in Sacred Grounds MD.

e) Planting native plants protects God's creation for our children and future generations.

This message appeals to people who feel a sense of responsibility for the future. It would be a good one to use with parents and grandparents.

You may be able to slip all of these messages in at different times. For example, when you talk about how acting together is impactful, you can say "each of us can take care of our little corner of creation and that adds up." With wildlife, you can say something like, "we can demonstrate our appreciation for the miraculous diversity of the creatures on this planet by making sure birds and butterflies have the food they need." And when you talk about streams, you can say something like, "loving our neighbors requires doing what we can to protect them from pollution and flooding."

If you have any questions about these materials, contact Naomi Edelson at National Wildlife Federation at edelsonn@nwf.org or 202-657-2024.

Your ideas for improvement are welcome!

Planting Hope Native Plant Pick-up - Leader Orientation

Overview of Your Leadership Role

- Recruit 3+ volunteers
- Remind pledgers to pick up their plants
- Collect plants and materials in advance (location will vary based on county/congregation)
- Set-up and run Pick-up Day, orient volunteers
- If desired, plan additional activities and promote the event more widely

More Details

In Advance

- Recruit 3-8 volunteers to organize packages to give away and run event
- Watch for updates on number of pledges so you can decide if more outreach is needed to reach your goal
- Send out 2-3 reminders to pledgers to come to pick up plants (email/phone lists will be provided from pledge page)
- Invite any local elected officials (mayor, council members, etc.) to pick up plants too (take pictures of them!)
- Decide on the length of time for the event - a shorter time is easier on volunteers
- Think about the atmosphere you want to create. Choose an appropriate location
- Arrange for set-up (tables, chairs, easels, clipboards, pens)
- Prepare any materials from your congregation such as welcome poster, prayer
- Pick up the plants and materials from the distribution point. Keep plants watered and safe from deer, shaded area is best to keep plants from drying out (location and time TBD)
- Prepare bags of materials (in addition to the plants, you will receive id tags, flyer, prayer card, Sacred Grounds poster board, and other info to be placed in compostable bags)
- Write your thank you email and newsletter article to thank pledgers and volunteers

Decide if you will add plants to the bags the night before or morning of Pick-up Day (keep in a shady, deer proof area)

You will receive at least 180 plants. You will decide how many plants for each person depending on number of pledgers; please give each home at least 3 plants of the same species (it will look nicer when they are planted)

Pick-up Day

- Orient volunteers
 - Review talking points so everyone can speak about purpose of Sacred Grounds
 - Assign tasks:
 - Set up
 - Check-in pledgers
 - Plant distributors
 - Greeters to talk to people about plants - this is very important because this is a community-building and educational program
 - Your expert to answer gardening questions
 - Photographer

- You will receive a list of pledgers to print on THURSDAY before Pick-up Day. This will be organized by last name and include their preference for shade or sun. Everyone who picks up must be checked off.

- If you distribute plants to people who have not yet pledged, it is very important to collect their contact details (email, home address, name) and encourage them to pledge online

- Take photos of everything!

Days After Pick-up Day

- Send photos to Joelle Novey at IPL (joelle@ipldmv.org)
- Send thank you email to everyone who picked up plants and to volunteers
- Submit newsletter article and photo to your congregation
- Watch out for a request for you to email your list with link to evaluation survey

Optional

- Some congregations are making Pick-up Day into a celebration. Review ideas.

Planting Hope Pick-up Day Checklist

Date	Task	Your Notes
In Advance		
	Recruit volunteers	
Begin 2 weeks before Pick-up Day	Send out 2-3 reminders to pledgers to pick up plants (list will be provided by NWF from pledge website)	
	Think about the atmosphere you want to create. Pick location. Arrange for set-up (tables, chairs, easels for posters, cardboard to mount posters, clipboards, pens)	
	Prepare any materials from your congregation such as welcome poster, prayer	

	Write your thank you email and newsletter article to thank pledgers and volunteers	
Location & Time TBD	Collect plants and materials (TBD)	
	Assemble or pick up bags of materials from IPL	
THURSDAY before	Print list of pledgers you will receive from NWF	
Night before or morning of Pick-up Day	Add plants to the bags	
Pick-up Day		
	Orient volunteers	
	Assign tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● set up tables and posters and other (if you have it) ● check-in pledgers, collect contact details ● plant distributors, organize by sun or shade or partial (sign-up sheet is organized this way) ● greeters to talk to people about plants ● expert to answer gardening questions ● photographer 	
	Review talking points so everyone can speak about purpose of Sacred Grounds	
After Pick-up Day		
	Collect photos, send to Joelle at IPL	
	Send thank you email to all participants & volunteers	
	Submit newsletter article to congregation with photo	
	Distribute evaluation survey	

Volunteer Orientation

Process

Here is what's going to happen. People will come up to the table and be checked in. If they have not pledged in advance we will collect their contact info. They will be given a bag with plants and information. Greeters will talk to people on line or after they pick up their plants.

Community-building

We want everyone to feel welcome and happy. Please greet everyone in a friendly way. If people are standing in line, talk with them. Don't rush the process. If it takes a few minutes, and they interact with you, that's great!

Education

We want everyone to know why we are doing this. Greeters are responsible for making sure everyone learns about the purpose of the day.

Welcome! Thank you for coming! Can I tell you about why our congregation is doing this?

We're seeing a lot more heavy rains in Maryland because of climate change. Rain that falls on the street and on our lawns, carries pollution into streams in our neighborhoods, and those streams flow into Chesapeake Bay.

Native plants – the plants that are suited to this region - have deeper roots that hold the soil in place and slow the flow of the stormwater, reducing erosion and pollution. Plus, they are the ones that our native insects and birds depend on for food to raise their young (right now is their nesting season).

So planting these native plants is good for people and wildlife. Do you have any questions?

Frequently Asked Questions

- How many plants am I getting?
 - *3-6 of one kind*
- I didn't sign up. Can I still get a plant?
 - *Yes, we have some extras. Please sign in with your contact information and sign the pledge.*
- How do I plant it?
 - *You're going to receive a sheet with instructions in the bag with the plants. Basically you just dig a hole, place the plant in it, and water.*
- What kind of plant is this?
 - *There is an identification tag in your bag with the name of the plant and any requirements for its care.*
- Does it need sun or shade?
 - *You should know which is which when handing them out. Some can take partial sun or shade.*
- Can you help me figure out what else to plant?
 - *There's a member of our congregation here who knows a lot about native plants. May I introduce you to them? Also see the additional resources on the back of the plant flier in your bag*
- What are native plants?
 - *Native plants are ones that have evolved in our region. They are suited to our soils and rain patterns and support our local wildlife. Some you might know are Black Eyed Susans*

(our state flower), Asters, Oak Trees... There are many plants we have imported from other regions. Although they grow here, they mostly don't have the same benefits to nature.

- Isn't the plastic bag you are giving me harmful to the earth?
 - *These are compostable bags that will deteriorate quickly and without leaching harmful chemicals*
- Is our congregation the only one doing this? How can so few plants make a difference?
 - *We're doing this with 11+ other local congregations, so the numbers really add up. This is the Sacred Grounds program initiated by the National Wildlife Federation with lots of other partners. And many others in our region love native plants and there is a real movement to change how we landscape our homes.*