



# Explore, Teach, Conserve Podcast

Interview with Gary Wyatt & Julie Weisenhorn about Spring Tree, Yard, & Garden Care

As the spring spreads across our landscapes, it seems like we're all attentive in different ways to the changing season. At my home on the Lake Superior shoreline, I'm on the lookout for eagles and other migrating birds, the early rhubarb sprouts in my yard, and soon the apple and serviceberry blossoms. My colleagues, Gary and Julie, are following some other interests.

## Julie

I have a lot of landscape projects in my backyard. So, I don't have a 40-acre property like so many people think Extension educators do. I know Gary, you've got a really big property, I do not. I have two city lots and that's it, and our houses and garage cover most of it. But I have a rain garden, I have some plantings in the front of our house that absorb water. I also have some terraced beds in the back, and it's a lot of small spaces put together.

So every year I'm always looking at one or two of those spaces and trying to figure out, you know, what could I do differently here. This year, one thing I am going to do is I'm going to be putting down White Dutch Clover as a ground cover, as a living ground cover and mulch. It is a legume. It fixes nitrogen and makes that available to other plants in that bed, and it also acts as a nice, pretty tough ground cover that blooms from May through October. That clover is really going to make a nice ground cover, maybe prevent some of the mud from coming into my house. Plus be a great resource for pollinators out there.

## Gary

Nate, I've planted some chestnuts over the years in my silvopasture, and I'm going to check on those. I need to prune those up a little bit. I have them in tree tubes that right now they're about six feet tall. And then I've ordered some fall raspberries, fall-bearing raspberries. We'll see how that is - grow around here, my landscape, I always like to get out in the woods, maybe check the deer stands during the first week in May and look for morel mushrooms too, so it's fun to look around for morels.

## Julie

And Gary I'm glad you mentioned that about morels because that is one of my favorite spring things to do. And if the listeners have never mushroomed before, have never hunted mushrooms, go with somebody who knows, you know, really well what they're looking for so that you learn the right mushroom to pick.

## **Nate**

Welcome to the Explore, Teach, Conserve Podcast by the University of Minnesota Extension. I'm Nate Meyer, and we're really excited to talk with Gary Wyatt from the University of Minnesota Extension's Forestry team and Julie Weisenhorn from Extension's Horticulture team. They'll share their expertise and some great tips about getting your trees, yards, and gardens ready for spring.

Hi Julie and Gary. Welcome to the podcast.

## **Gary**

Hi Nate, glad to be here.

## **Julie**

Hey Nate. Good to be here too.

## **Nate**

Gary, how about you tell us a little bit about your programming and your role in Extension.

## **Gary**

I'm an Extension Educator with the University of Minnesota Extension, based out of our Mankato Regional Office. And I teach about agroforestry, which is five practices: windbreaks, silvopasture, alley cropping, riparian forest buffers, and forest farming. And then also invasive species, which mainly are terrestrial plants like woody plants like buckthorn. And then bio energy and willow, with willows and poplars.

## **Nate**

Perfect Julie, how about you.

## **Julie**

Well, I am an Extension Educator in Horticulture and I primarily, I have a background in landscape design and focus a lot on that, particularly resilient landscapes. You know, what can people do to really have a landscape that thrives and doesn't just survive.

## **Nate**

I'm glad you could both join us today because the pandemic has given many of us more time to spend in our yards and local natural surroundings. Now the season's changing again and bringing new opportunities to get outdoors. What are some things that you think our listeners can be looking for or doing to prepare their trees, yards and gardens for the warmer weather? Should we be spring cleaning the outdoors?

## Julie

Well I'll go first on that one because I love the term spring cleaning that you said, Nate. Actually, we are advising people to clean up less in their yards. Mostly because there's a lot of things that we haul off of our properties that actually can be just reintroduced into our properties. Like leaf mulch, for example. And those leaves will break down and they will add carbon to our soil. They also provide a really great overwintering location for queen bees that are nesting in the ground. So when you're cleaning up, just don't - kind of take a breather, don't be quite so tidy.

Plants always make their way to the surface and out into the sunshine, if you're concerned at all like about your spring bulbs. So, I went out to my garden, and I just kind of pushed the leads aside. So, you can also leave habitat for bees, for stem nesting bees. And that would just entail cutting back your perennials that have hollow stems to maybe, you know, five to eight inches tall. And then, anything that you cut off, just put it in the back of your garden bed, tuck it under a tree. Put it someplace where the bees can find it for laying their eggs in there for next year.

## Gary

Well as you're walking around your landscape this spring, and maybe you've already done that, you can look for winter damage on trees, and maybe conifers. We've noticed a lot of needle cast disease in spruce, and you can look at our website to find out more information on that. Also critters, really rabbits, are very active in winter and can girdle tree stems or shrub stems, so you may want to prune those out if they've been girdle completely around. That means that stem will die on a shrub and you'll find out the most attractive shrubs that rabbits like in the wintertime. So you want to prune your apple trees, certainly, maybe done that between January and March here, but if you need to do some added pruning there might be some limbs broken off or something that you need to do. That can be done in early April as well. Look also for maybe some moles and pocket gophers in your lawn and actually if you need to reseed some of your lawn, I looked at some of the bags of seed in some of the hardware stores and some of their bags of seed that are really cheap are basically annual ryegrass. I looked at the label and it says 79% annual ryegrass. So always look on the back of your seed that you're buying for your lawn and make sure it's all perennial type grasses and blue stems, bluegrass and so forth, like that. Make sure you're planning perennial seed instead of annual seed for grasses.

## Julie

That's a great point Gary because as people are also choosing that grass seed, they should look at the kind of environment that they're planting it in. Is it going to be full sun? Is it going to be part shade? Is it going to be full shade? And then choosing seed accordingly. And I'm so glad you pointed out about the annual ryegrass, because that is a sad looking lawn the next year when none of that annual ryegrass comes up. So choosing those perennial varieties, and we're recommending as Gary mentioned, the Kentucky bluegrass. And then also find fescues. They're really nutrient tolerant, they don't need a lot of care,

they're pretty drought tolerant too, and they're a great choice for sunny spots, part sun and even shade.

## **Nate**

This is a time of year when many Minnesotans are also starting to think about their gardens and fruiting trees or shrubs. What can our listeners be doing to prepare for growing more vegetables and fruits this year?

## **Julie**

Well, the first thing that I would recommend is, if you have never had a soil test or have not in the past five years, you should probably have a soil test submitted. So very easy, we actually have a video on our Extension Yard and Garden web page on how to take and submit a soil test sample soil sample from your yard. And this is especially important if you're changing the function of an area of your yard. For example, let's say you're removing some of your turf and you're putting in a vegetable garden. That's a really different purpose for that space. So you'll want to get a soil test done for that and then amend your soil appropriately, according to the recommendations from the soil test results.

The other thing too is as you've been kind of dreaming and scheming about your new plants for your yards and gardens, this is a really good chance to add plants that are beneficial to bees and other - butterflies, to birds, also even to some of our evening pollinators like moths This is a great opportunity to do that, and if you are choosing plants, choose some that are specific for pollinators. They don't have to be natives, they can be cultivars of native plants, but all of that would be terrific. So that would be a good recommendation, and we have a wonderful web page called Flowers for Pollinators on the Extension Yard and Garden web area.

## **Gary**

If you're thinking about tree fruits or fruit shrubs, we have an excellent website, [extension.umn.edu](http://extension.umn.edu). Look up for tree fruits and you'll find out a lot of information on apples, cherries and plums, and other stone fruits. You may want to consider some shrubs if you have a smaller landscape. Think about serviceberry and look at honeyberry. Honeyberry is kind of a new type of shrub. Does have particular pollinator varieties that you must coincide with, or bear with, like a Cinderella and a Tundra and so forth. You need to make sure you have the right pollinators to produce the berries and the fruit. Also hazelnuts, currants and cranberries are also nice shrubs to have in your landscape.

## **Julie**

You know Gary, I'm so glad too that you mentioned serviceberry. That is my, I bet it's my all time favorite shrub. It's delicious. It has beautiful white spring flowers, and it's really a tough plant for Minnesota. It works really, really well and there's shrub varieties, as well as tree

varieties too. And those shrubs that are edible don't take up a whole lot of room. I mean you can, you don't you think you could put them into almost any size garden?

### **Gary**

That's right. They usually fit into any size and actually we do recommend even the self, most of them are self-pollinating we do recommend at least two varieties to be planted. Honeyberries you do have to have two varieties, but the serviceberries are self-pollinating. And if you have kids at home still, I'd say honeyberries and serviceberries you can just pick right off the plant, and off the shrub, and eat them right there in the yard and they would love them.

### **Julie**

And they're really high in antioxidants too, I understand from the growers. So I have honeyberry in my backyard. I have Tundra, Aurora and Boreal, the three, those three cultivars, and the bumble bees are all over those plants in the early season.

### **Nate**

Spring is also a great time to get out for long walks. What are some things listeners should be looking for?

### **Julie**

Oh, my gosh. They can be looking for our spring ephemerals. So these are early season wild flowers. Bloodroot is one of my favorite ones. It is a big, not a big plant, it has big leaves that are really interesting, they have big deep lobes in them. They have a white flower with a yellow center and the bees love them because they're very easy to do business with. The bees can get to the pollen and the nectar really easily with those flowers. They close up at night, and they open up then in the sunshine and that's a great plant. I remember my mother teaching me about that plant when I was a little kid.

Others are things like hepatica or mayflower, which is an early season also, that's another wildflower. We'll see marsh marigolds, which are down in kind of marshy, damp areas. It's a great native plant. It's like a cluster, like a little pot of gold kind of looking plant. Also, looking at some of our birds that have come back. And then, of course, looking for bees and butterflies that have emerged and are out seeking the nectar out of flowers and also feeding on the pollen to bring back to their nests. So those are some of the things when I'm walking around, I was just out in Carver Park yesterday with my husband and my dog, and I was looking all over for whatever I could find that was blooming or starting to come up. And not much yet, but it was, it's going to be very shortly now.

### **Gary**

We talked about pollinators earlier, willow is probably the earliest pollinator shrub that we have in our landscapes, or we can plant in our landscapes. I just actually cut off some of

our pussy willows that had the catkins on and look very pretty. So I cut a few and put them in a vase and they'll last for a couple of weeks actually like that.

The other trees that are just budding, just walk around your landscape and just notice the buds of different plants. I noticed the stinging nettles coming out in the woodlands, those are edibles. And we do have a Nature in Place website that'll be going online this spring talking about some of the edibles that you can eat in your landscape like dandelions, stinging nettles, lamb's quarter and purslane, and a lot of those red clovers and so forth.

## **Julie**

You know Gary, we did an experiment with solarization once, and purslane was the only plant that didn't die. In fact it thrived under the solarization. So it's a good crop I guess. Kind of slimy, though.

## **Nate**

Our listeners love to learn more about and help with citizen science and stewardship. Where can they find some great fact sheets or other good information about caring for their trees, yards and gardens this spring?

## **Julie**

Well, I'll put a plug in for the Extension Yard and Garden web page. We have different sections there, we have a Yard and Garden News, which is written every couple of weeks. It's all this newsy information of timely things that educators are seeing in landscapes and in farms. And it's really good information and very timely for Minnesota. We also have great sections in that web page too. Everything from managing soil and nutrients to what's wrong with my plant, it's diagnostics. What insect is this for identification, and then things like just sections like on trees and shrubs, and vegetables, and native grasses, and native plants, and flowers or pollinators, and landscaping and lawn care. Horticulture is a huge area and we try to cover most of it that pertains to Minnesotans.

## **Gary**

We've got some excellent resources at the University of Minnesota Extension website. I just wrote a Community Food Forests fact sheet that's available there. So if you're interested in doing citizen science, or maybe some community work, you get together with Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists and talk to your community leaders, the city council, about possibly some of these islands that are being mowed in the city that are triangles, that are very short, they're small. They have to carry a mower there every couple weeks to this location and maybe you can actually plant some edibles in those triangle corners, or something and reduce the mowing of that particular property. So that's kind of a Food Forest Community type project you can go with.

Also, we have a Growing Edibles fact sheet, or Growing Edible Fruits and Nuts is a fact sheet online. Also, if you like to hunt and gather wild edibles, we have a Minnesota

Harvester Handbook, and that's available online - actually at the Minnesota Bookstore. Also, if you're thinking about community science, we have some projects with our forestry team - mulberry. There's a red and white mulberry. Red is native and white is non-native. And actually I have white that's in my landscape. I don't think I've identified a native red mulberry in my landscape, although both are edible. They produce edible berries. But we're doing some citizen science on mulberries - which one do you have in your landscape? Do you have red or white?

And also look at the Plant Disease Clinic. We always recommend people that have problems with their plants or trees, they can send in samples to the Plant Disease Clinic, and they have a great website that you can look online to find out more information about that.

### **Julie**

Another good resource too is if you have questions or want identification on something, you can always send it to Ask Extension. That is a link on our Yard and Garden web page. You can upload photos and your question, and Master Gardeners are right there ready to answer them for you. So that's a great, a great resource as well.

### **Nate**

I know you're somewhat familiar with social media apps. What's a hashtag or a brief message you wish would really take off? Like millions of people are sharing it.

### **Gary**

A hashtag that I think I would like to see is edible landscapes, #EdibleLandscapes.

### **Julie**

I didn't expect that at all from you Gary. Well, my hashtag would be #RightPlantRightPlaceRightPurpose.

### **Nate**

Thanks for listening to this episode of the ETC. Huge thanks to Gary and Julie for joining us. Visit [extension.umn.edu](https://extension.umn.edu) and click Learn About and then Yard and Garden or Natural Resources to learn more about the topics, as well as finding your way to all the different resources that Julie and Gary described today.

Did you know that April is also Citizen Science Month? If you are interested in participating in collecting and analyzing scientific data, like for the mulberry study that Gary mentioned, I encourage you to visit [extension.umn.edu/natural-resources](https://extension.umn.edu/natural-resources) and click environmental education and community science or forestry to explore different opportunities. You can also follow our Master Naturalist and Natural Resources Facebook and Instagram Profiles to learn more about participating in the upcoming City Nature Challenge 2021. We hope you'll join us.

This episode was recorded over Zoom from our homes during the Coronavirus pandemic in 2021. We hope you enjoyed the opportunity for some advanced training during your daily walk, while sitting at your desk, or wherever you can listen in. Look for the ETC and subscribe on any of your favorite podcast services. Give us a "thumbs up" or drop a comment to let us know you value the podcast. Pass it along to others. We look forward to sharing another episode soon. In the meantime, we hope you stay safe, be healthy, and enjoy #NatureInPlace.