The Wonders That Native Plants Provide

As the warm weather stirs plants back to their growing season, we should all remember and appreciate native species and all the benefits they provide.

While the definition of what makes a plant native varies, it’s generally accepted native plants are those that have grown together and evolved over long periods of time. Locally, native plants are adapted to the soils present, annual moisture levels, and our four-seasons of vastly changing weather. These plants are a component of a healthy ecosystem and with the soil hold the foundations of life.

Native plant phenology, the study of cyclic and seasonal natural phenomena, especially in relation to climate and plant and animal life, allows for a diversity of species through the seasons, meaning plants grow and mature at different times. While trees and shrubs stand out year round, early developing spring ephemerals like bloodroot (at right) and trout lilies begin the show and late summer plants such as tall goldenrod and purple coneflower bloom into the fall. And in turn with this timing, other organisms depend on these life cycles for their own.

Native Plants – Our First Defense Against the Flooding Associated with Climate Change

One often overlooked benefit of native plants is their ability to capture and hold stormwater. Because native plants are well-suited to their local climate, they have physical characteristics that better equip them to withstand the extreme temperature and water conditions that climate change creates. Most importantly for the Chicago River System, native plants have deep varied root systems that aerate the soil and allow for three times the amount of rainwater to be absorbed, filtered, and retained.

Whether a species returns from migration, hatches from a chrysalis that overwintered, or reemerges from torpor, all seek and require plants to sustain their species in one form or another. Leaves provide habitat for butterfly eggs, such as milkweed varieties for the monarch butterfly. Caterpillars feed on the leaves, and pollinators, on the nectar in the flower blooms.

See page eleven for membership opportunities, or visit our website, www.chicagoriver.org for more information on getting involved.
Like everybody else, this spring Friends of the Chicago River has canceled or postponed events, programs, meetings with elected officials and government partners, and volunteer activities. For the first time since 1992 Chicago River Day won’t take place on the second Saturday in May and our 15th annual Big Fish Ball canceled. Most unfortunately, our student programs through the Chicago River School Network including field trips to the river for thousands of kids are off.

Staff and I are constantly evaluating the situation, looking forward to when we can return to our usual efforts, our volunteers can once again support our mission, and schoolchildren can discover the wonders of the river.

From our kitchen tables, Friends’ staff is working on many critical projects and programs. These range from planning large scale community-wide events to launching a new pilot project that places Seabins into the river to collect trash as part of our Litter Free Chicago River campaign to virtually working alongside government and civic leaders in an effort to improve stormwater management by introducing nature-based approaches into our ever evolving blue-green corridor and across the watershed.

This essential work to provide people with healthy, safe, accessible natural areas has become even more important than ever and is starting to be finally recognized across all sectors of government. Numerous studies prove that access to nature boosts the immune system, lowers blood pressure, reduces stress, improves mood, increases ability to focus, even in children with ADHD, accelerates recovery from surgery or illness, increases energy level, improves sleep, not to mention physical benefits from hiking, biking, fishing, paddling and just being outside.

During this time, I ask that if you had intended to give to Friends of the Chicago River—if you planned to volunteer, to visit the McCormick Bridgehouse & Chicago River Museum, or to donate—that you show your support, if it’s within your capacity to do so, with a donation to help us improve and protect the Chicago River system for people, plants, and animals.

If you’d like to contribute to Friends, whether personally or through your business or foundation, you can visit our website at chicagoriver.org. You will automatically become a member of Friends and join a diverse cohort of people who want to see a healthy and clean river now and for future generations—something we need now more than ever.

Thank you for your continued support during this time. Stay safe and healthy,

Margaret Frisbie
Executive Director
Welcome to the Board – Elizabeth O’Brien

Friends of the Chicago River is pleased to welcome Elizabeth O’Brien, a partner in the Real Estate Practice Group at Levenfeld Pearlstein, LLC to Friends’ Board of Directors.

“I am honored and privileged to be invited to collaborate with such esteemed board members,” O’Brien said, “all aligned in the same mission. I hope the combination of my professional perspective and personal passion for Chicago waterways will make an immediate and direct impact.”

O’Brien is an alumna of Loyola University Chicago School of Law, an associate board member for the Greater Chicago Food Depository, and on the board of the Howard E. Eisenberg Foundation.

Friends Awards 2019 Educator of the Year

Kristen Turgeon, a science teacher at Von Steuben Metropolitan Science Center on Chicago’s north side, has been named Friends’ Educator of the Year for 2019 for her efforts using the Chicago River as a teaching tool. Turgeon has helped her students learn science and instilled stewardship for the waterway as well. The veteran teacher is an active participant in Friends’ Chicago River School Network (CRSN).

“The CRSN program allows me to connect with my students in a positive way that I cannot do with my traditional curriculum in the classroom,” said Turgeon. “My students leave the CRSN activities with a new appreciation of their local ecosystem.”

Turgeon teaches biology and chemistry at Von Steuben. She holds a bachelor’s degree in biochemistry and a master’s degree in Teaching Science at the Secondary Level from the University of Iowa. At Von Steuben, she sponsors the Environmental Club where she supports students in recycling efforts and sustainability both at the river and elsewhere in the school community. While getting in the river with her students is her favorite activity, Turgeon also participates in her school’s learning garden.

Turgeon accepted the award on February 29, 2020, at the Chicago River Student Congress, Friends’ annual conference. At the Congress, 350 students taught and attended workshops and viewed displays created by their peers and by professionals from local colleges, nonprofits, and government agencies.

The CRSN provides K-12 teachers the training and personalized assistance they need to immerse their students in the history, evolving ecology, and improving health of the Chicago River, impacting 24,000 students last year.

Kristen Turgeon teaches her students from Von Steuben in the Chicago River at Kiwanis Park adjacent to the school.
Welcome to a New Season at Friends’ Bridgehouse Museum

As Friends of the Chicago River’s most public facing education program, the Bridgehouse Museum educates tens of thousands of visitors each year on Friends’ mission, provides an educational look at the Chicago River system’s history, and allows the public to take a peek inside one of Chicago’s most iconic structures. The tower’s art, engineering, and architecture are stunning to behold.

Despite the possibility of scheduled delays, signature programs and events such as Summer Cruise, Lunchtime Lecture Series, and Bridge Lift Breakfasts will return along with some fresh new programming. The Bridgehouse Museum is also available for private rentals. We have hosted many different events such as cocktail parties, birthdays, and even weddings.

This year we are excited to announce that a long planned refresh of some of the museum’s permanent exhibit, including the lobby, first floor, and fifth floor will be complete. Friends has been working with the design studio, Space Haus, to develop new panels for all three of these spaces. The lobby area will see a new look for the entry to the museum while the first floor will be outfitted with new panels highlighting the history of the region through early settlement. The fifth floor of the museum will get the biggest content makeover with all new panels highlighting our modern day river with a look into the bright future of the Chicago River System.

Another highlight of the season for the Bridgehouse Museum is the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the opening of the DuSable Bridge. May 14, 1920, was the day that the Michigan Avenue Bridge (later renamed the DuSable Bridge) opened to traffic. One hundred years later the Bridgehouse Museum occupies the adjacent bridgetower, and the public can take a look inside of the iconic structure, even during bridge lifts. We will celebrate this historic moment in time later this summer with a special performance by Fifth House Ensemble. The 10-piece orchestra will perform their original piece, Rivers Empyrean, which contains a new commission developed by composer Patrick O’Malley using real ecological data.

The exhibit will include fresh new photos of wildlife including this osprey from local photographer Lisa Musgrave.

Fifth House Ensemble will perform at the Bridgehouse Museum to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the DuSable (Michigan Avenue) Bridge sometime this summer.

This year the McCormick Bridgehouse & Chicago River Museum is planning to open for its 15th season one week later than usual on May 16 in coordination with the City’s plan for the Chicago Riverwalk. Please keep an eye out for details of this special event and all museum programs on both the Bridgehouse Museum and Friends websites.
Turn Your Lights Out for Bird Migration

May 9 is World Migratory Bird Day and in recognition of these amazing creatures, Friends of the Chicago River encourages all our members and friends to lend support. Each year billions of birds fly north to summer breeding grounds and along the way they encounter all kinds of hazards including many avoidable ones put forth by humans.

To help birds make the migration, consider providing access to their basic needs. Make water available in a birdbath or pond; provide food and shelter through the addition of native flowers, shrubs and trees; and add brush piles that provide additional cover. Other essential actions including keeping your cat indoors; avoiding the use of pesticides or poisons, and protecting birds from flying into windows by keeping outer room lights off at night. Audubon estimates that one billion bird die each year in the USA from collisions caused by lights at night and flying into glass. Tell your office building to turn out the lights too.

This year’s theme is “Birds Connect Our World” – so let’s connect our behavior and theirs.

Great blue herons migrate as far south as Central America, returning to the Chicago area in early spring.

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Aquatic turtles travel over grasses and forbs on land to find suitable ground to dig holes and lay their eggs. And when a plant’s flowers turn to seed, another new food source is provided.

What feeds on the insects that feed on the plants? Other animals do, including more insects, birds, and bats. Trees in the hot summer sun with their trunks, branches, and leaves provide cooler areas of shade.

These plants serve as shelter and habitat for breeding practices of countless species. And when the growing season is complete, and the seeds are dispersed, the dormant stems and leaves blanketing the ground continue to serve as habitat during our cold months. Even after life, a dead oak tree can provide food and dwellings for red-headed woodpeckers and a family of raccoons. Over time the plant material breaks down providing nutrients for the soil and beginning the cycle again.

While their stems, leaves, and flowers are seen and utilized above ground, these plants play a vital role below ground as well. Often, like the tip of an iceberg, most of the plant isn’t seen. Native plant root systems run deep. In some cases, as with the grass known as big bluestem, the roots may reach nine feet into the earth below. They absorb water at higher rates than non-natives with short roots, helping to hold water, provide filtration services, and reduce flooding events and combined sewer overflows.

It is qualities like these that highlight the wonders native plants provide an ecosystem. Easily sought after for their beauty, their central role in the world and everything’s lives is often taken for granted. You are encouraged to learn more about native plants and how they can be incorporated to your own property and supported on public lands.

Native plants in July in northern Illinois.
Dear Volunteers, Partners, Sponsors, and Friends:

Friends of the Chicago River has postponed Chicago River Day, originally scheduled for Saturday, May 9, 2020. We have done this in the interest of the public’s health and to protect you during the COVID-19 outbreak. This decision was made in consultation with our partners, the Forest Preserve District of Cook County and Chicago Park District.

We will reschedule Chicago River Day sometime in the fall. It takes time to plan an event of this scale, and we will make an announcement in May if a new date is viable at that time.

Thank you so much for your patience and understanding during this difficult time. We continue to find ways to protect and improve the river while working from home. If you can, please continue building your connection to the river by taking a walk along its banks, looking for birds or spring flowers. Take care of it, and be sure to let it take care of you!

Annette Anderson
Volunteer and Events Coordinator

Chicago River Day supports Friends’ Litter Free Chicago River partnership. For more information and learn how to sign up or be a Chicago River Day sponsor, please visit our website: www.chicagoriver.org.

Friends wants to thank our sponsors for making the 2020 Chicago River Day possible:

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Pumpkinseed
Lepomis gibbosus
Illustration by Jen Pagnini
www.mooloco.com
River Dyed Anyway

Friends was dismayed to learn that someone dyed the Upper North Branch a candy-colored green on Chicago's northwest side on March 14. Friends has tolerated the St. Patrick's Day tradition of dyeing the river, recognizing that when it started the river was quite polluted. In fact, for decades worse things were happening to it every day. In recent years we have taken the position that it's time to rethink the practice.

When reports surfaced that the Upper North Branch had been dyed, Friends’ Executive Director Margaret Frisbie told WTTW: “Fifty to 60 years ago, when this began, the river was in much different shape than it is now. But after decades of environmental advocacy, the waterway is far cleaner and teeming with wildlife. We think the river has evolved enough. We need to stop abusing it,” she continued, “and celebrate its life, not its destruction.”

Next year Friends will be on the lookout.

Crooked Creek Ecosystem Coming to Life

Terrific progress was made along Crooked Creek over the winter with the removal of the remaining areas of invasive brush along the creek’s edge. This completed 81 acres of land restoration near south suburban Palos Hills in partnership with the Forest Preserves of Cook County. Since the clearing last year, invasive species coverage was reduced from 100% to nearly 0% in the area. A prescribed burn was able to be conducted for the first time in decades in March of 2019 – a vital component of restoration in our region.

The response from native ground cover has been positive and areas along the creek have had vegetation return which will benefit native wildlife including birds and insects. This will allow for improvement of rain water absorption and reduce soil erosion. Friends has been awarded an additional Chi-Cal Rivers Fund grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Fund to continue restoration work along Crooked Creek in 2020.
Friends Plans Interactive Workshops to Strengthen Wildlife Connectivity in the Chicago River System

Expanding on a multi-year, grant-funded effort to improve habitat in the Chicago River system for native wildlife species, Friends will be organizing a series of interactive river wildlife connectivity corridor workshops with our partners this summer. Habitat connectivity is a key component of our blue-green corridor initiative, which envisions the future of the river as a continuously connected urban system of greenways, clean waterways, trails, and healthy ecosystems.

The workshops will be focused on mapping existing core river edge habitats – larger parcels that can support multiple species – and then identifying gaps between these nodes. Based on our analysis and the expertise of urban wildlife scientists and biologists, we will then catalog specific restoration and protection strategies to enhance connectivity. Friends has studied similar efforts throughout the country to guide our work, and our research has helped to set the process and topic areas for this project.

Together with our partners, such as the Urban Wildlife Institute, we hope to create a detailed list of specific improvement projects that can be implemented collaboratively in the coming years. This project is also intended to leverage our past successful habitat restoration projects, such as our work with osprey nesting platforms, bat maternity colonies, and turtle nesting restoration. By taking this opportunity to look at the bigger picture, we hope to make greater impacts on the ecological health of the Chicago River System.

Friends is currently preparing for the workshop process by collecting relevant data, precedents, and strategies and summarizing them in our Chicago River Wildlife Conservation and Landscape Restoration Framework Plan. The Plan is expected to be completed by early summer, 2020.
2019 STORMWATER AWARDS

In February the Lake County Stormwater Management Commission bestowed the 2019 Stormwater Awards to select individuals, communities, groups and organizations that exemplify their core mission of flood damage reduction, water quality improvement, natural resource protection, and enhancement. The year’s award winners include:

- Richard A. Welton Stormwater Manager of the Year – Jim Bakk
- Stewardship of the Year – Andy Hay
- Community of the Year – City of Highland Park
- Development of the Year – Synergy Flavors, Inc.
- BMP Project of the Year – Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago
- Education, Outreach and Media Award – WRLR 98.3FM – Grayslake’s Meadowview Elementary School

REDUCING AQUATIC LITTER

In January Chicago Alderman Scott Waguespack (32nd) announced the introduction of comprehensive legislation tackling the pervasive problem of plastic pollution in Chicago waterways and the Great Lakes. Alderman Waguespack was joined by organizations in support of the ordinance including the Alliance for the Great Lakes, Chicago Recycling Coalition, Field Museum, Illinois Environmental Council, Illinois PIRG, Shedd Aquarium, and Friends of the Chicago River. If enacted, Chicago will lead the Great Lakes region in reducing single-use plastic, eliminating dangerous polystyrene and protecting public health.

“All of the research points to the grave risk of plastic pollution in our waterways,” said Alderman Waguespack. “It is time to effect meaningful change and protect our resources and communities.”

Pumpkinseeds are one of the most vibrant of Chicago’s native freshwater fish. They are yellow, orange, or blue in color, with green and blue stripes over their sides and a yellow-orange underneath. The pattern of its scales resembles that of the sunlight reflected on the water’s surface and helps with camouflage. The pumpkinseed also has a prominent dark orange-red spot on the margin of its gills. When threatened by a predator, it flares its gills to make it seem up to four times larger than it actually is. Along its dorsal fin are 10 to 11 black spines. These spines are very sharp, which also aid the fish in defense.

Pumpkinseeds resembles bluegill and are often found in the same habitats. They prefer shallow ponds and rivers that are warmed by the sun. They also like areas with plenty of vegetation where they can find food and shelter. Like other sunfish, they prey on insects, mosquito larvae, mollusks and crustaceans, worms, and even other smaller fish. They have been known to feed on crayfish, and occasionally, on frogs or tadpoles. Unlike other sunfish, pumpkinseeds are more tolerant of low oxygen levels, but less tolerant of warm water. They are active throughout the day, and rest at night near the bottom in protected areas near submerged logs and rocks. They are an easy catch while fishing.

Many anglers consider them a nuisance fish, as they bite so easily and frequently get in the way of catching other fish. Although they have an excellent flavor and are low in fat and high in protein, they are not a popular sport fish due to their small size.

Pumpkinseeds can be disturbed by shoreline development and erosion. Their susceptibility to silt and pollution makes the pumpkinseed a good indicator of the cleanliness and health of water. If we want to help pumpkinseeds, and indeed all fish, we should plant native plants that retain soil on the shoreline and reduce both physical and chemical pollution in the Chicago River system.
Friends of the Chicago River gratefully acknowledges all the ways members, donors, and partners helped us achieve our mission to improve and protect the Chicago River system for people, plants, and animals from January 1, 2020, through March 23, 2020. Individuals, businesses, and organizations who have given or pledged $250 and above are listed below.

### The Otter Society
The Otter Society is Friends’ giving society and recognizes individuals, businesses, and foundations that contribute $1,500 or more annually to the General Operating Fund or the Voice for the River Endowment. Chicago River Legacy members, who are thoughtfully providing for Friends in their estate plans, are also recognized as Otter Society members.

- Anonymous (4)
- Mike Alber
- Vince and Sally Anderson
- Kenneth Arenberg and Susanne Swisher
- Cindy Axley
- A. Carl Ball Family Foundation
- Judith Bassoul
- Alvin H. Baum Family Fund
- Kent Brown and Jane Jacobsen-Brown
- Craig and Kate Coit
- Grant Crowley
- Carolyn Eleanore Damon Family Foundation
- Philip Enquist and Joanna Karatzas
- Albert Ettenger and Susan Lannin
- Sally Fletcher
- Margaret Frisbie
- Norm and Cynthia Goldring
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- Timothy and Shannon VanTassel
- Wendella Sightseeing Company, Inc.
- Richard Wilson
- David Wong
- The Wrigley Building
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### Voice for the River Endowment
- Kenneth Arenberg and Susanne Swisher
- Kent Brown and Jane Jacobsen-Brown
- David Wong

### Chicago River Legacy Society
- Kent Brown and Jane Jacobsen-Brown
- Carolyn Eleanore Damon Family Foundation
- Sally Fletcher
- Margaret Frisbie
- David Wong

### INDIVIDUALS
- Recurring/Monthly Donors
  - Anonymous
  - Cindy Axley
  - Edward DeYoung
  - Margaret M. Goddard-Knop
  - Ryan Granholm
  - Kathy and Jim Gysler
  - Jonathan Lehman and Zachary Huelisng
  - Julia Lobdell
  - Kim Olsen-Clark and Ian Clark

- Tributes
  - Thomas and Diane Judge, in memory of Friends’ canoe guides Charles Cerny and Mark Sorteberg

- $5,000 and above
  - Anonymous
  - Judith Bassoul
  - Kent Brown and Jane Jacobsen-Brown
  - Albert Ettenger and Sue Lannin
  - Larry and Denise Kaplan
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  - Richard Wilson

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  - Craig and Kate Coit
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  - Stacee A. Hasenbalg and Bahram Forouhi
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  - Daniel Kilduff and Ellen Fryda
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  - Victor and Barbara Zaveduk

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  - Anonymous (3)
  - Mike Alber
  - Vince and Sally Anderson
  - Cindy Axley
  - Jerome H. and Joann F. Brooks Memorial Fund
  - Grant Crowley
  - Philip Enquist and Joanna Karatzas
  - Sally Fletcher
  - Norm and Cynthia Goldring
  - Eugene and Sasha Jarvis Charitable Gift Fund
  - Rebecca and Oscar Jasso
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  - David Reinisch and Julie Kiefer Fund
  - Timothy and Shannon VanTassel

- $250 to $999
  - Anonymous
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  - The Knowles Foundation
  - Living Waters Consultants
  - National Charter Bus
  - Nineteenth Century Charitable Association
  - Tom Olsen Agency, Inc.
  - John G. Shedd Aquarium

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Calendar of Events

To help protect everyone’s health and safety in response to the COVID-19 virus Friends is being cautious regarding our upcoming special events. Please double check our website or contact us if you have questions. Many of the dates have changed.

Paddle the River with Friends
chicagoriver.org/programs/education-and-outreach/canoe-with-friends

Chicago River Day
chicagoriver.org/get-involved/volunteer/chicago-river-day-2019

Bridgehouse Museum Opening
Our museum will feature new exhibits by design studio, Space Haus. Find out more at bridgehousemuseum.org

Big Fish Ball
chicagoriver.org/get-involved/attend/big-fish-ball

Summer Cruise
The Summer Cruise, is a fundraiser with musical entertainment, complimentary food, and an open bar.

Your generous support directly impacts Friends’ efforts to improve the Chicago River’s health and vitality in three important areas: education and outreach; on-the-ground projects; and public policy and planning.

Members receive:
- Free general admission plus discounts on bridge lift, tour tickets, and merchandise at our McCormick Bridgehouse & Chicago River Museum,
- Discounts on our canoe trips,
- A subscription to The River Reporter newsletter,
- Volunteer bulletins, email alerts, and other opportunities for hands-on involvement, plus
- Invitations to special events such as Chicago River Day, Big Fish Ball, and Summer Cruise, and
- Listing in Friends’ Annual Report.

Otter Society members represent Friends’ most important philanthropic partnership. In appreciation of their generous support, they enjoy unique benefits at three levels of giving. To learn more about how you can participate as an individual, household, or business, please contact kolsenclark@chicagoriver.org or call (312) 939-0490, ext. 19.

Interested in joining our monthly giving club? Support Friends year-round through automatic monthly contributions as small as $10 per month. Contact membership at friends@chicagoriver.org or call (312) 939-0490, ext. 10.

Friends of the Chicago River is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. Please send this form and payment to: Friends of the Chicago River at 411 South Wells Street, Suite 800, Chicago, IL 60607, or join online at www.chicagoriver.org/get-involved/membership.
While many of us are working from home there are still lots of ways to help the river. You can:

1. Sign up for Overflow Action Days and commit to reducing your water footprint and the amount sewage, stormwater, litter, and pollution that ends up in the river.
2. Make a plan to host your own Litter Free Chicago River workday using Friends’ useful Litter Free Toolkit.
3. Make your own environmentally-friendly cleaning supplies.
4. Make a contribution to Friends of the Chicago River to help us maintain our momentum.

Find out about these river supporting ideas and more at chicagoriver.org.