

# Ground Facts

August 2000

*Parvis e glandibus quercus --Latin saying  
Translation: Tall oaks from little acorns grow.*

## Challenges of Native Habitat Landscaping

As you may have noticed at the Saturn team member entrances, native habitat landscaping is different from conventional landscaping in that there is no fixed landscape plan. Instead the plan is really a “process” for creating and nurturing a constantly evolving habitat of locally adapted native species. Though an “end point” is not clearly defined, it can be described as the attainment of the most moist and shady habitat possible for a given piece of land with some consideration to appearances.

This type of landscaping has been a big challenge to the Land Use Team. There are not many examples around in which native habitat landscaping has been tried, so we are learning as we go and trying to teach others what we learn. What follows is a brief summary of what we are trying to achieve, the steps we have taken, and the setbacks we have suffered.



Native landscape plantings at team member entrances.

Ideally, the “end point” for the team member entrances is to have a shady canopy of trees made up of hickories, oaks, and maples with a rich understory of wildflowers and berry-yielding shrubs. This would be good habitat for songbirds, butterflies, and a wide variety of wildlife. However, there are three conditions that alter this ideal. Disturbed soil,

very small areas, and high, close human traffic/visibility all impose trade-offs for reaching this goal.



Because of harsh site conditions (heat, no water, and no fertilizer), the hardiest species were planted first. These species include sumac, eastern red cedar, and hawthorn. We also added a few red maples, oaks, and hickories to speed up the process. Mulch was also added to help enrich the soil in preparation for the next stage in the process. Soon after, seeds and nuts of various “deep forest” species (oaks, hickories, buckeyes) were planted as were other more common species (hackberry, cherry, elm) that came in on their own.

However, there have been some setbacks. On occasion, summer grounds maintenance help has removed some planted material mistaking them for weeds. Also, germinated seeds and nuts have been mistaken for weeds. Herbicides have killed or injured other plants. This has all resulted in too much open space that stimulates more weed growth. Compared to mowing and weedeating, landscape maintenance is a low priority. This, too, has resulted in landscaped areas becoming overgrown and unattractive.

As a solution to these problems, the Land Use Team is working on a webpage that will include information about native seedlings and exotic invasive species found on the Saturn site. Other solutions include some combination of more grounds maintenance training, adjustment in land management priorities, or changes in designated “no-mow areas” and landscaped areas.

We will never achieve true, deep forest conditions since we are working on such a small scale. So as a compromise, we are working toward larger shade trees of native species and clumps of shrubs underneath. This delivers a neat appearance for team members and visitors, but it still meets a desirable ecological goal.

