



## Hamilton Watershed Stewardship Program

A Program of:



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### Who are we?

The Hamilton Watershed Stewardship Program is a Hamilton Conservation Authority program that works with private landowners to protect, enhance and restore the environmentally significant natural areas and watercourses on their property. We have been working with private property owners in the watershed since 1994, providing advice on environmentally friendly ways of managing properties with natural features, such as woodlots,

### What is Naturalization?

**Naturalization, also known as natural or ecological succession, is a new term for an old idea. When land is left to its own devices – it isn't mowed, ploughed or cut, it changes. It grows a variety of plants. This change in management will allow plants to grow and, over time, create different habitats that are essential to wildlife.**

### Why is Naturalization Important?

In Southern Ontario, where a large percentage of land is privately owned, larger land parcels may be eligible for tax incentives if the property is actively farmed or a managed forest. With no specific fiscal incentive, very few large tracts of land are being left to naturalize. The lack of these "naturalized" or successional areas in our watershed is an issue of concern, as it has aided in the decline of species that utilize these areas, such as Henslow's Sparrow, Loggerhead Shrike, Showy Goldenrod, American Badger, Aweme Borer Moth, and Barn Owls.

### What are the Benefits of Naturalization?

Along streams, the added vegetation helps to stabilize soil and to shade and cool the water. Plants filter excess nutrients and pollutants from runoff prior to its entering the watercourse. Shrubs and small plants along the stream become overhead cover for resting fish, provide forage for birds, and act as migration corridors for wildlife.

Along the south or west edge of wooded areas, naturalization protects the forest from strong winds and the hot afternoon sun and creates new habitats for small wildlife.

## **Simple things you can do on your own!**

- Help improve water quality in local streams by creating a naturalized area along your creek.
- Naturalize a portion of your lawn; reducing the amount of yard work while creating precious habitat.
- Explore your naturalized area and keep a journal of your sightings.
- Encourage the presence of wildlife by adding nesting boxes and structures to naturalized areas.

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Naturalization also means that there is less mowing to do which can save money and time. There are real benefits to naturalization – both environmental and economic. All it takes is the willingness to let it happen and the patience to let it run its full course.

The naturalization process can be assisted by planting into the naturalized area. Adding native plants, trees and shrubs will “speed up” the time it takes for plant communities in the naturalized area to change. Even so, it will take a number of years (5 - 25) from the time an area is left to naturalize to the time when the area becomes a shrubland or forest.

For a time the area may, in some people’s opinion, look “weedy” but patience is rewarded. Those “weeds”; asters, goldenrods, various plants and grasses, will produce mid-summer and fall flowers with bright yellows, purples, whites and blues. A variety of birds will nest and feed; toads and frogs will prey on insects. The nectar from wildflowers will support populations of butterflies and bees, which help to pollinate more than 75% of the worlds flowering plants, many of which provide medicine and food for human consumption.

As the years go by and plant and wildlife communities change within naturalized areas, property owners will have the opportunity to witness a diverse array of species right in their own backyards. A naturalized area is truly alive and vibrant.



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**Interested in learning  
more about natural  
features on your property?**

**Call us to arrange a free  
on-site consultation!**