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- **Mid-Ohio Valley Climate Corner:
Addressing climate change in your own
backyard**

[Local columns](#)

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(Photo Illustration/MetroCreative)

For anyone in the Mid-Ohio Valley who senses the importance and urgency to act on climate change, these can be frustrating and discouraging times. Public officials in West Virginia seem inextricably committed to fossil fuels, especially coal. And public officials in Ohio seem to be hopelessly corrupt and under tightening influence of the fossil-fuel industry.

It's important in keeping motivated for this cause to exercise personal agency and a sense of purpose in one's own life. One way to achieve a modicum of success is to strive to make small changes in one's personal life to address climate change. Spring is the ideal time to set some climate goals in your own backyard—a first step is the lawn, as Dr. Douglas Tallamy, botanist at the University of Delaware and author of the book, "Nature's Best Hope," expresses through his slogan, "shrink the lawn."

Lawn ownership and lawn care are an obsession with most American homeowners. Americans spend, collectively, three billion hours on lawn care per year. Lawn irrigation consumes over 8 billion gallons of water daily. Over 40 million acres of U.S. land are taken up by lawns; this compares to 20 million acres of national parks.

The machines that we use to mow our multitude of lawn areas are not required to have emission controls. By contrast, a healthy ecosystem built upon native plants produces oxygen, cleans water systems, captures carbon, builds topsoil, and prevents floods.

Another advantage to an ecosystem based on native plants is that this biosystem is friendly to pollinators, which are in trouble. As one group of pollinators, honeybees are essential to the multi-million-dollar fruit industry. The rusty-patched bumblebee population, for example, is down 90%. The solution to helping pollinators is straightforward: shrink the lawn, put in native plants, keep the dandelions (an important early source of pollen for bees), restrain from using pesticides, do not rake leaves in the fall (leaves and brush piles support larvae growth in colder months), and watch for nests.

If you are financially able, consider planting some trees in your back yard (approximately ten trees can be bought for the price of one tractor lawn mower). Tallamy uses the phrase “keystone species” to describe tree species that have a disproportionately large effect on the abundance and diversity of other species in the ecosystem. Among these keystone species are oak, cherry, and willow trees. We took a small step in this direction on our property by planting two oak trees in our backyard last fall. Such trees will host hundreds of species of caterpillars.

There is a movement in the U.S. called Homegrown National Park (<https://homegrownnationalpark.org/>), which is attempting to link individual property owners all over the U.S. to restore habitat. Most national parks are located in the western U.S., and this means that migratory corridors in the eastern side of the country are blocked to native populations of plants and animals. Conservation efforts that are confined to national parks will not preserve species in the long run because these areas are too confined and small. By associating with this movement one can make a small individual contribution to ecological restoration and collectively move us ahead with national restoration.

A local success story of ecological restoration is the pollinator garden on the west bank of the Muskingum River in Marietta near the confluence of the Muskingum and Ohio rivers. Under the uniting leadership of Rebecca Phillips, scores of volunteers, public officials in Marietta, and residents of the west side have come together to plant and care for asters, cup plants, native daisies, cone flowers, and other native species. The pollinator garden has added color, land stabilization, habitat for numerous pollinators, and serves as a model for other communities.

Another opportunity we have to build our resources of native plants is the establishment of a new nursery in Mineral Wells, called Native Roots, which specializes in native plants. One of the sister owners of this nursery, Jen Johnson, opened the Mineral Wells facility in early May this year and is participating in several events to promote native plants in the region.

Continue to press your legislators to make policies that address climate change but make your own personal contribution to addressing climate change with some native plants in your own backyard.

George Banziger, Ph..D., was a faculty member at Marietta College and an academic dean at three other colleges. Now retired, he is a volunteer for Mid-Ohio Valley Interfaith, and Harvest of Hope. He is a member of the Green Sanctuary Committee of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Marietta, Citizens Climate Lobby, and of the Mid-Ohio Valley Climate Action team.