

# Connecticut Gardener



*Because gardeners never stop learning*



🌱 **Pollinator Pathways & Green Corridors**

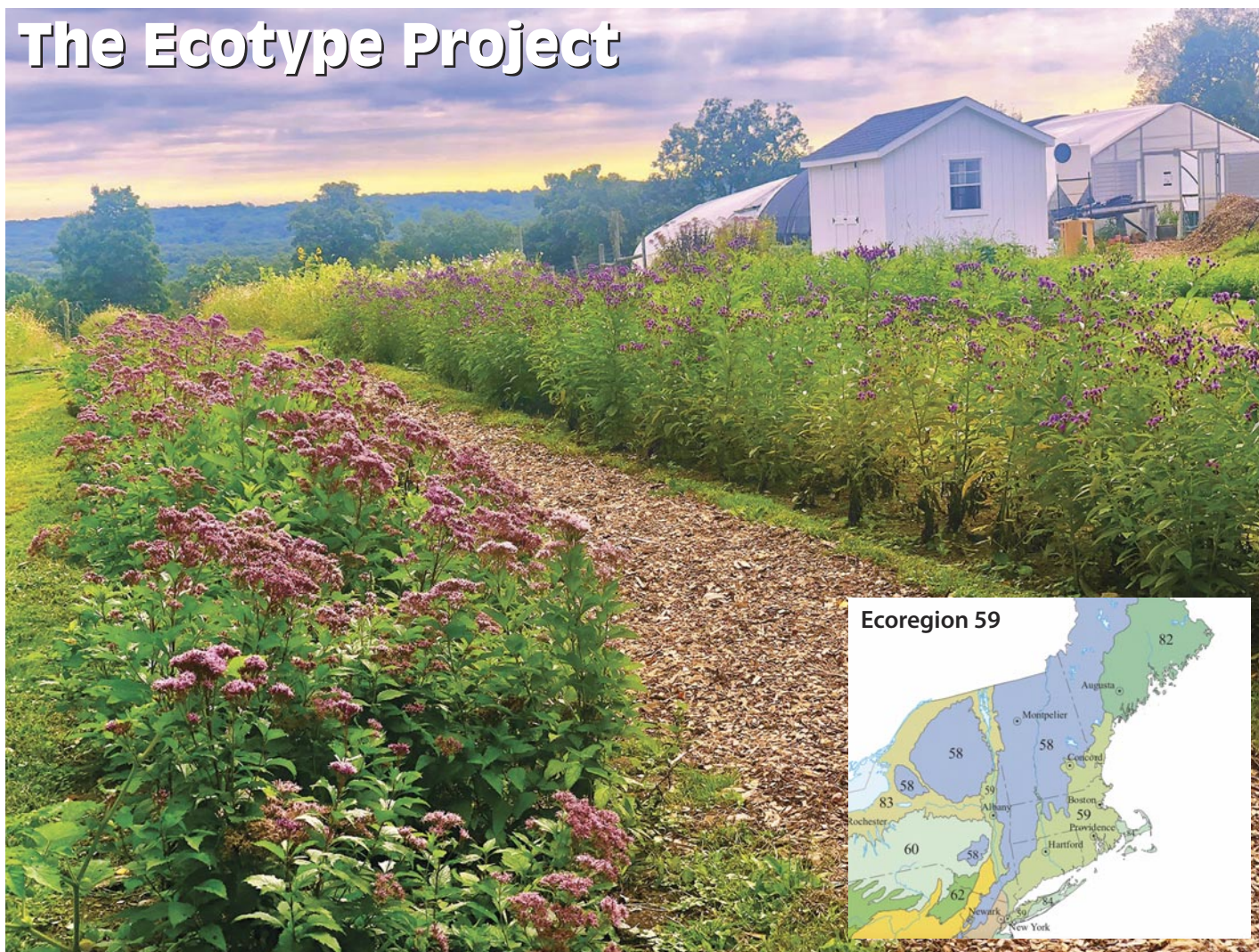
🌱 **Kaleidoscopic Columbines** 🌱 **Connecticut Onions**

🌱 **Interplanting Bulbs & Perennials** 🌱 **Invasive Wineberry**

🌱 **The Ecotype Project** 🌱 **The Well-Dressed Gardener**

**\$6** 🌱 **In the Late Spring Garden** 🌱 **Calendar**

# The Ecotype Project



Ecotype Founder Plots tended by farmer Jean Linville at the Hickories organic farm in Ridgefield.

**By Sefra Alexandra**

**I**N THE PAST DECADE The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Connecticut (CTNOFA) has worked toward building a regional food system built on knowing where your food comes from, supporting your local farms and knowing your farmers.

CTNOFA is now championing the same principle in a new arena: knowing where your landscape plants come from and supporting your local farmers and nursery growers.

The rise of enthusiasm for native plants and pollinators has swept our state in the last few years, thanks to the hard work of organizations like the Pollinator Pathway Northeast and Aspetuck Land Trust (*see article on page 20*).

Rewilding our landscapes with native plants enhances our regional biodiversity in ways that make it possible for us

all to thrive. What we know, however, is that to do this right – to put the right plants in the right place – requires us all to learn a new language of seeds, species, and to renew our commitment to the principles of regenerative conservation agriculture. We must learn the language of provenance: where native seed is coming from and where it is being grown.

## **Ecoregions**

When we are planting native plants it is important for us to put our bug eyes on and view the landscape the way our local pollinators see it. They do not see the man-made delineations of where one backyard, town, or state ends, but rather interact within the boundaries of different types of habitats.

In an effort to create a shared framework by scientists, farmers, conservationists and homeowners addressing the various facets of ecosystem health, the

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) created Ecoregions of the Continental United States maps.

For our purposes in this article we will look at the Level III map that illustrates a broad-stroke mosaic of habitats and communities comprising Ecoregion 59, which covers most of Connecticut.

What Eciregion 59 illustrates to us in terms of the native plant populations is that the genetics of the seed collected anywhere within Eciregion 59 can be distributed throughout this area, with the confidence of knowing we are indeed putting the right plants in the right place.

We do this in an effort to imbue our living seed banks, (aka our soils) with the species that fortify our wildlife corridors with food sources and habitats our pollinators need to be successful.

## **The -ochories**

Seeds have a number of different dis-



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persal mechanisms known as “ochories.” The wind does it: anemochory; water does it: hydrochory, the birds assist: ornithochory and even ants help do it: myrmecochory. When these plants are present on the landscape, nature is able to play its role by proliferating them and effectively rewilding the lands around us.

### Straight Species & Ecotypes

Straight species means regionally specific native plants that occur naturally on the landscape, which are also known as ecotypes.

Ecotypic plant material is genetically specific and co-evolved in the region in which it was grown. The collection of these truly local wild seeds or ecotypes is done by trained botanists who adhere to strict protocols to ensure that we are sustainably stewarding the natural populations. When we gather these place-based genetics we are aiding in the proliferation of the diversity of what is locally adapted to our climate, our pollinators’ preferences and even local pests. These seeds represent the arcs of regional adaptation that are best suited for our soils and that are also able to

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Photo / Darryl Newman

Monarch chrysalis hanging off a sign.

# 2021 PLUG AVAILABILITY

Wild collected. Locally grown.

Botanical Name

Common Name

## FORBS (Herbaceous/Flowering Perennials)

<i>Agastache foeniculum</i> .....	Anise Hyssop ( <i>non-ecotype</i> )
<i>Aquilegia canadensis</i> .....	Native Columbine
<i>Asclepius incarnata</i> .....	Native Swamp Milkweed
<i>Asclepius incarnata</i> ssp. <i>pulchra</i> .....	Eastern Swamp Milkweed
<i>Asclepius syriaca</i> .....	Common Milkweed
<i>Asclepius tuberosa</i> .....	Butterfly Weed
<i>Caulophyllum thalictroides</i> .....	Blue Cohosh
<i>Chamaecrista fasciculata</i> .....	Partridge Pea ( <i>available June</i> )
<i>Eupatorium hyssopifolium</i> .....	Hyssop-leaf Boneset
<i>Eupatorium perfoliatum</i> .....	American Boneset
<i>Eurybia</i> (Aster) <i>divaricata</i> .....	White Wood Aster
<i>Eutrochium</i> (Eupatorium) <i>dubium</i> .....	Coastal Joe Pye Weed
<i>Eutrochium</i> (Eupatorium) <i>maculatum</i> .....	Spotted Joe Pye Weed
<i>Eutrochium</i> (Eupatorium) <i>purpureum</i> .....	Joe Pye Weed
<i>Gentiana clausa</i> .....	Bottle Gentian
<i>Helenium autumnale</i> .....	Fall Sneezeweed
<i>Hibiscus moscheutos</i> .....	Swamp/Rose Mallow
<i>Iris versicolor</i> .....	Blue Flag Iris
<i>Liatris novae-angliae</i> .....	Northern Blazing Star
<i>Liatris spicata</i> .....	Blazing Star ( <i>non-ecotype</i> )
<i>Lobelia cardinalis</i> .....	Red Cardinal Flower
<i>Lobelia siphilitica</i> .....	Blue Cardinal Flower
<i>Monarda fistulosa</i> .....	Wild Bergamot
<i>Penstemon digitalis</i> .....	Beardtongue
<i>Penstemon hirsutis</i> .....	Hairy Beardtongue
<i>Pycnanthemum muticum</i> .....	Short-toothed Mountain Mint
<i>Pycnanthemum tenuifolium</i> .....	Narrowleaf Mountain Mint
<i>Pycnanthemum virginianum</i> .....	Virginia Mountain Mint
<i>Rudbeckia laciniata</i> .....	Tall Coneflower
<i>Solidago odora</i> .....	Sweet Goldenrod
<i>Solidago sempervirens</i> .....	Seaside Goldenrod
<i>Solidago speciosa</i> .....	Showy Goldenrod
<i>Symphotrichum</i> (Aster) <i>cordifolium</i> .....	Blue Wood Aster
<i>Symphotrichum</i> (Aster) <i>novae-angliae</i> .....	New England Aster
<i>Symphotrichum</i> (Aster) <i>puniceum</i> .....	Purplestem Aster
<i>Verbena hastata</i> .....	Blue Vervain
<i>Vernonia noveboracensis</i> .....	New York Ironweed
<i>Zizia aurea</i> .....	Golden Alexander

## GRAMINOIDS (Grass/Grass-like Plants)

<i>Andropogon gerardii</i> .....	Big Bluestem ( <i>available June</i> )
<i>Carex pennsylvanica</i> .....	Pennsylvania Sedge ( <i>available June</i> )
<i>Carex stipata</i> .....	Awl-Fruited Sedge
<i>Dechampsia flexuosa</i> .....	Wavy Hair Grass ( <i>available June</i> )
<i>Eragrostis spectabilis</i> .....	Purple Lovegrass ( <i>available June</i> )
<i>Juncus tenuis</i> .....	Slender Rush
<i>Panicum virgatum</i> .....	Switchgrass ( <i>available June</i> )
<i>Schizachrium scoparium</i> .....	Little Bluestem ( <i>available June</i> )

Above is an example from Planters Choice Nursery (a wholesale nursery) of what they’re growing for the Ecotype Project. Not in the trade? Contact them and they’ll help you locate their nearest retail partner.

A portion of all profits from the sale of these plugs goes to fund regional conservation efforts. Funds are currently going to the Ecotype Project.

[Quotes@planterschoice.com](mailto:Quotes@planterschoice.com)

# The Ecotype Project — continued from previous page

shift with our variances in local micro-climates.

Most native seed utilized in the Connecticut nursery trade today is sourced from seed growers in the Midwest. The challenge is that plants grown from this stock may exhibit bloom times that are maladapted to our pollinators' migration, feeding and nesting timelines here in the Northeast. Even if they're from the same species, those seeds have evolved in a climate unlike ours.

Another consideration is that a great number of native plants sold here are, in fact, native plant cultivars or nativars.

## Nativars

Nativars are clonally propagated native plants selected for uniformity of various aspects of their visual appeal. These plants, often propagated from cuttings, in essence create a monoculture on the landscape. The genetic diversity inherent to wild, truly native species can be lost – a loss which makes them susceptible to changes in climate or new pest pressures.

When planting a native habitat, it is important to include species that have successional bloom times to ensure we are providing food throughout the seasons. You will marvel at the entomological diversity on your landscape with these ecotypic/straight species. Together we can help to safeguard and steward the wild genetics that have been adapting to your landscapes since time immemorial.

## The Ecotype Project

This program at CTNOFA aims to increase the availability of ecotypic plant material for habitat restoration in the Northeast. The Ecotype Project is the table at which botanists, farmers, nursery growers, land trusts, landscapers, and gardeners come together to provide mutual support and education around the provenance and production of native plants for rewilding our landscapes. We are working with organic farmers to amplify the production of these local native seeds as the demand for this specialty crop far outweighs the supply. After we grow, collect, and clean



*Zizia aurea* (Golden Alexander)

Photo / Darryl Newman

the seeds we distribute them to local nurserymen such as Darryl Newman of Planters' Choice and Sal Gilbertie of Gilbertie's Organics, who then make these plugs available through local plant sales (see box on pg. 17). With the help of all our stakeholders, and you, these plants can make their way back into the landscape where they belong.

## In Conclusion

This season when you are buying native plants, ask the questions: Where did the seeds of these plants originate from? What ecoregion are they best suited to? Were they grown out locally?

The provenance of place in regards to seed becomes more and more important as natural wild landscapes are rapidly decreasing due to anthropocentric development. We are not just homeowners but also land stewards and, as such, we must protect these place-based natural resources. When we collectively redefine, reseed and rewild our shared living seed banks on an ecoregional scale with ecotypes, we are supporting regenerative restoration of our land.

Whichever ecoregion you find yourself in and whatever site you select to plant, implementing just a few of these ecotypic native plants will bring your

landscape back into symphonic resonance with the great ecologies that are humming all around us! 🌸

To find out more about the work being done with ecotypic seed across the Northeast, please visit:

- The Ecotype Project – [ctnofa.org/ecotypeproject](http://ctnofa.org/ecotypeproject)
- The Wild Seed Project – [wildseedproject.net](http://wildseedproject.net)
- The Native Plant Trust – [nativeplanttrust.org](http://nativeplanttrust.org)

*Sefra Alexandra is the Ecotype Project coordinator. She has been leading CT NOFA's pollinator health and native seed initiative – The Ecotype Project – which works with farms to amplify the amount of local native pollinator seed that is available in Connecticut. This effort aims to supply nurseries, homeowners and farmers with the plants they need to help regeneratively restore our native ecologies, support local pollinators and ensure local food security in Ecoregion 59. She holds a MAT in Agroecology from Cornell University.*



Sefra Alexandra