

It's like you're in wilderness, right in the middle of Naperville."

That feeling of isolation and a passion for bird conservation has kept Suchecki hard at work for nearly a decade, protecting Springbrook Prairie.

Habitat Host Trains Others to Plant for Wildlife

Leslie Cummings discovered wildlife gardening completely by accident. She is an editor of a trade publication, and a National Wildlife Federation folder addressed to a long-gone editor happened to land on her desk. The folder was filled with information about National Wildlife Federation's habitat steward program and focused on the use of native plants in gardens. Her curiosity piqued, Cummings read everything she could about native plant gardening. She took out two-thirds of the turf in her one-quarter acre Berwyn garden and began to plant native grasses and flowering forbs. She added a bird bath and later, several smaller water sources at different heights for birds. The water sources attracted a lot more migrant birds — warblers, vireos

and sparrows — than she had seen prior to converting her garden. So far, she's seen 35 bird species in her tiny Berwyn garden and 10 species of butterflies, not to mention countless spiders, beetles, and other microfauna.

"I got an immediate return on my investment in terms of helping birds get through the winter and in terms of less maintenance on my garden. You just can't compare native plants to cultivated plants when it comes to attracting wildlife. When I see a bird sipping from a cup plant or winter juncos on my hyssop or finches on the prairie coneflower, it's just great," Cummings said.

The positive reaction of neighbors who stopped to admire her garden over the fence was a catalyst. Its low maintenance and wildlife attraction qualities were popular with her local audience and Cummings soon realized she wanted to share her enthusiasm and educate even more people. She studied native plants and landscaping as part of National Wildlife Federation's six-month distance learning program that trains volunteers to become Habitat Steward Hosts. The program trains the trainer



In autumn, seeds from purple coneflowers and other native plants in Leslie Cummings' backyard attract goldfinches and other birds.



Leslie Cummings stands in front of her backyard habitat for birds.