

The Federated Garden Clubs of CT, Inc. March 2011

## **Program Suggestions for Garden Club Environmental Issues/Conservation Chairmen**

Each garden club's Environmental Issues/Conservation Chairman has the opportunity to inform and educate club members on the many issues that are directly affecting our environment and our quality of life. The goal is to become better stewards of the land and protect the natural environment.

The Chairman or a Committee member, may make monthly reports, prepare hand-outs, suggest speakers, plan a field trip, organize a club project, work with the youth group for a school program, and keep club members informed of the latest news. Be creative!

Researching the following topics is easy on the Internet, but books are still valuable, especially for identification. Choose topics that interest your club members.

The following topics and websites have been recommended by Louise Weber, Environmental Issues/Conservation Chair for The Federation.

### **Conservation and Environmental Issues - Gardening**

#### **Organic Gardening**

As gardeners, we should all understand the benefits of organic gardening and learn to practice it. [www.organicgardentips.com](http://www.organicgardentips.com)

#### **Composting**

Learn how to make "black gold". For a good explanation see [www.gardeningknowhow.com/composting-basics](http://www.gardeningknowhow.com/composting-basics)

#### **Soil Fertility**

- Have a free soil test at the CT Agricultural Experiment Station.
- Invite a speaker from the Ag Station to discuss soil. [www.ct.gov/caes](http://www.ct.gov/caes)

#### **IPM or Integrated Pest Management**

Reduce the need for pesticides and herbicides. [www.epa.gov/pesticides/factsheets](http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/factsheets) - excellent health and safety factsheets

#### **Weeds**

Learn to identify and control. [www.njaes.rutgers.edu](http://www.njaes.rutgers.edu) has lists and photos.

#### **Growing Vegetables**

Raised beds, saving seeds, beneficial insects, companion planting, etc., may also be researched.

## Flora and Fauna

Understanding the natural world is the first step in protecting its bio-diversity. Learn to identify the plants and creatures that inhabit our world and the role they play in the eco-system.

### **Register your garden as a Certified Wildlife Habitat**

To qualify for registration see [www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife/certify.cfm](http://www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife/certify.cfm)

### **Trees**

Identify trees; learn to recognize pests and diseases. For a Tree Owner's Manual, non-native pests and diseases, and educational links see [www.ctpa.org](http://www.ctpa.org)

### **Native Plants**

Native plants are adapted to our climate and provide sustenance for our wildlife. [www.ct-botanical-society.org](http://www.ct-botanical-society.org) has excellent lists and photos.

### **Birds**

Identification and habits, nesting boxes, bird feeders [www.all-birds.com](http://www.all-birds.com)

### **Butterflies**

Identification, host and nectar plants, plant a butterfly garden. [www.butterflywebsite.com](http://www.butterflywebsite.com)  
[www.butterfliesandmoths.org](http://www.butterfliesandmoths.org) has a good data base.

### **Insects**

Identify the difference between pests and beneficials. Rodale's "Controlling Pests and Diseases" is an excellent reference, with photos.

### **Wildflowers**

Identify native wildflowers, plant a wildflower garden.  
[www.newenglandwild.org](http://www.newenglandwild.org) - New England Wildflower Society  
[www.wildflower.org/plants](http://www.wildflower.org/plants) - has excellent plant database

### **Deer, woodchucks, skunks, mice, etc.**

Discuss non-toxic ways to deter them. Google an animal for specific deterrents.at  
[www.gardeningknowhow.com](http://www.gardeningknowhow.com)

### **Invasive Plants**

- Learn how the spread of alien plant life upsets the balance of nature.
- Identify those that are a problem in your area and learn how to remove.
- Watch for new invasives, such as Mile-a-Minute Vine.
- [www.hort.uconn.edu/cipwg](http://www.hort.uconn.edu/cipwg) is the Connecticut Invasive Plant Working Group's web site and has a complete Invasive Plant List.

## General Environmental Issues

### Local Issues

- Learn about your community's issues. Become involved. Show up at meetings.
- Get to know your Conservation Director and Director of Parks and Recreation. Ask them to speak to your club.
- They can be very helpful when planning a project on town land.
- Learn about land trusts and open space.

### Recycling

Most communities now recycle. To find recycling centers in CT see [www.earth911.com](http://www.earth911.com)

### Water

- Learn about the quality of your drinking water. Currently, there is discussion about the type and amount of fluoride being used.
- Where does bottled water come from?
- Pharmaceuticals in our water? [www.cleanwater.org](http://www.cleanwater.org) (latest news) [www.ewg.org](http://www.ewg.org)

### Air

- Learn about air quality, both indoors and out, especially in urban areas.
- Watch the news for any reversals of the Clean Air Act and call legislators. For the latest news, see [www.cleanair.org](http://www.cleanair.org)

### Chemicals in Food, Cosmetics, Household Cleaners, etc.

It is impossible to avoid chemicals completely, but it is possible to reduce our exposure by learning which products are safest. The Environmental Working Group lists products according to the amount of pesticide residue and chemicals found in cosmetics and household cleaners. [www.ewg.org](http://www.ewg.org) See also [www.foodconsumer.org](http://www.foodconsumer.org)

### Genetically Modified Organisms

- There is much debate over this new technology and how it affects the environment and our [www.health.gm.org](http://www.health.gm.org) (genetically modified foods)
- Organic consumers organization: see [www.gefoodalert.org](http://www.gefoodalert.org) (latest headlines)

### Long Island Sound

- There are many groups monitoring the health of LIS. [www.longislandsoundstudy.net](http://www.longislandsoundstudy.net) -has the latest issues, research, and news.
- [www.lisrc.uconn.edu](http://www.lisrc.uconn.edu) Long Island Sound Resource Center has info, data, coastal access.
- [www.soundkeeper.org](http://www.soundkeeper.org) lists resources, hazardous waste days in CT.

## More helpful web sites

1. [www.ct.gov/caes](http://www.ct.gov/caes) CT Agricultural Experiment Station - This is an excellent resource for CT gardeners. It has a long list of available speakers on many topics.
2. [www.ctconservation.org](http://www.ctconservation.org) - Land conservation.

3. [www.organiclandcare.net](http://www.organiclandcare.net) - NOFA, Northeast Organic Farming Association
4. [www.ct.nres.usda.gov](http://www.ct.nres.usda.gov) - Natural Resources Conservation Service
5. [www.flowersplantsinct.com](http://www.flowersplantsinct.com) - plants and gardens in CT, list of invasives banned in CT
6. [www.helpfulgardener.com](http://www.helpfulgardener.com) - creative ideas
7. [www.sciencedaily.com](http://www.sciencedaily.com) - a huge amount of information
8. [www.ct.nofa.org/resources](http://www.ct.nofa.org/resources) - latest CT environmental headlines, project ideas
9. [www.enn.com](http://www.enn.com) - Environmental News Network - ecosystems, sci/tech, environmental policy
10. [www.greatgardenspeakers.com](http://www.greatgardenspeakers.com) - listed nationally and by area

<b>Possible club projects, depending on the size of your club:</b>
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1. **Butterfly Garden** - Select a spot, perhaps at a school or park, research and plant.
2. **Invasive Plant Eradication** - Search for invasives and remove from gardens, parks, etc.
3. **Bird Nesting Boxes** - Build birdhouses with the Juniors and include husbands. Grow gourds and learn how to turn them into birdhouses.
4. **Plan a “Weed Walk” or a “Wildflower Walk”** – Take field guides and identify what you find. This is fun for a small group and very educational.
5. **Educational Exhibits** - Create poster-boards of native plants, invasive plants, garden birds, etc. to illustrate discussion topics.
6. **Plant daffodils** - Choose a spot in a park, by public buildings, or schoolyard. This is a fairly low cost project for a small club. Consider other spring bulbs.
7. **Visit a water treatment facility.** Find out how to test for well-water contamination.
8. **Plant Sales** - Promote the use of native plants. Educate the public on invasive plants.
9. **Read the Awards booklet** you receive at the FGCCT Awards Meeting in October to see what other clubs are doing to win awards. Take pictures of your project, keep a budget, and take notes so you will be prepared to make a Book of Evidence for a possible award.