

a voice  
for the natural  
landscaping  
movement

# Wild Ones®

NATIVE PLANTS, NATURAL LANDSCAPES

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The membership fee is just \$30  
per year – and it's tax-deductible.



In more ways than one, brown *is* the new green. In an article in *Ode* magazine, British journalist Nick Rosen explains how advertising has ruined “green,” and argues that environmentalists should wear a different color now: Brown. “Advertisers will never want to hijack such a color [brown],” he says. “Brown is a reminder of what we talk about when we talk about the Earth. It’s a reconnection with our own dirt. Brown is pure environmentalism.” *Ode* magazine, March, 2009.

## Talking about your landscape? For best results, remember these points, and cut back on the jargon.

By Janet Allen

If you're like most Wild Ones, your yard looks a bit different from most landscapes in your area. People may be curious about that, and that makes your yard (and you) a good subject for newspaper and magazine articles, and a good topic of conversation with other people.

### Talking with the media

My yard is decidedly different from most yards in my area, so reporters have interviewed me a number of times – frequently enough for me to have discovered some of the pitfalls. Although readers probably found the resulting stories interesting, the stories didn't always successfully convey my ideas and our Wild Ones mission. Here are three things I've learned.

First, writers and reporters are experts on writing and reporting stories, but usually not experts on native plants or natural landscaping. They may not even know much about gardening in general, so clearly describe the plants or landscaping practices you're talking about, and provide examples.

Second, for articles not specifically profiling your garden, reporters usually interview other people as well – sometimes people with a very different perspective on landscaping. Be aware of this possibility, think about the possible points they might make, and

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Celebrating 25 years  
restoring native plants  
and natural landscapes.

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provide some supporting information from our Wild Ones perspective on those issues.

Third, the reporter's goal isn't the same as yours. They're looking for an interesting story featuring anything quirky or out of the ordinary – not to advocate for our Wild Ones mission. Not everything you discuss in the interview will end up in the article, so skip the extraneous details, and emphasize your important points. Provide interesting anecdotes and examples that illustrate those points.

For example, in one of the first stories about my habitat garden in the local paper, I mentioned that I provided moist sand for butterflies. This was really just an experiment, and certainly not the most important way I provided habitat for butterflies in my garden. But this was the kind of unusual thing they were looking for – and it was featured prominently in the article, including a “how to” section so readers could make their own sand area.

Describing the larval host plants I provide would have more accurately represented how my garden helped butterflies, and I would have preferred seeing a list of such plants to guide readers. But this was my fault, not the reporter's. I should have provided some compelling anecdotes about those host plants, perhaps

describing how exciting it is to see monarchs arrive each year and lay their eggs on my milkweeds – the only plants their caterpillars can eat. And that ultimately, providing milkweed is the only way we will continue to have monarchs.

**Jargon alert**

Avoid using jargon. I probably use more jargon than I realize when describing our landscaping practices. I'm so comfortable with these terms I forget that other people may not be familiar with them. One example is “larval host plant,” mentioned above. Perhaps if I had instead called them “caterpillar food plants,” the reporter would have understood their importance and included the idea in the article. And choose colorful language. I try to create a different perspective on pollinators by mentioning the joy of having the “busy-ness and buzziness” of bees in my yard.

Spell out the names of plants, emphasizing their

botanical names, noting that common names can be misleading. For example, in one article, the writer listed plants in my garden without using the botanical names, so the article simply said I grew “verbena.” I expect that the typical gardener probably thought of the ornamental, non-native “verbena” that is typically sold. What I had planted, of course, was the native *Verbena hastata*.

Speak slowly. After all, if you're talking at top speed – which can happen when you're talking about a subject you're passionate about – how can reporters record your ideas accurately? Even if they're taping the conversation (and they'll let you know if they are), it's easier to transcribe a tape of someone speaking clearly and slowly. (I'm still working on this.)

Finally, it's a good idea to think about the important points you want to make about your yard and landscaping philosophy, and write them down. Highlight the big ideas, illustrated by interesting anecdotes or snazzy phrases, and put them in a document on your desktop, real or virtual. When you talk to reporters, try to stick to your “script.”

**Talking with others**

Having a summary of your ideas in your head also comes in handy

when talking to other people who are interested in your yard. It's especially useful if you have a yard tour. I've printed my summary sheet to hand out at the end of a tour. It helps people remember those key ideas about our goals and mission.

**The message**

Whether in an interview, letter to the editor, yard tour, or just talking to others, I strive to remember the mantra: Educate and inspire. Try not to criticize current landscaping practices, but rather build a compelling case for the many benefits of our eco-friendly practices for ourselves, for our pets, and for wildlife. Especially important are the benefits to our children and for all future generations. And most important, share the joy your landscape brings to you, your family, and others. \*

For a good example of a yard tour flyer go to [www.wildones.org/download/touryard.pdf](http://www.wildones.org/download/touryard.pdf). See the species list on page 4 of the flyer.



The stately American elm (*Ulmus americana*) once graced the streets of thousands of towns and cities. Unfortunately, when Dutch elm disease wiped out most of these trees, they were replaced by wind-pollinated, unisexual-flowered street trees.

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