



Prairie restoration at a private residence.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE PIZZO GROUP

# Fire and Ice

PRAIRIE RESTORATION AND REBUILDING PROVIDES IMMEASURABLE VALUE

ILLINOIS IS A LANDSCAPE sculpted by fire and ice. Rolling landscapes carved out by glaciers covered in flower filled prairies, and large open woodlands called savannas once so open whole armies could march through. Fire was a natural part of this landscape. Lightening and people kept this land open. Whatever the reason, our historic landscapes are fire dependent—not fire tolerant. Shaping the environment is nothing new. We have the honor and privilege to restore it back to its former glory. “Over 90% of land in Illinois is privately owned and thus, each of us must play our part in creating stepping-stone habitats in our home landscapes which include native plants,” adds Barrington Area Conservation Trust Executive Director of Conservation Susan Lenz.

Sustainable landscapes and restoring ecosystems may seem like a complex and in-depth topic but, just like nature, the intricate system is just the combination of many simple parts and processes that are well within our abilities.

A place to start is with a butterfly, the monarch. We know the characteristic black and orange wings. Some even know its caterpillars only feed on milkweed plants. There are over 20 species of milkweeds that live in our area. The one people are most familiar with is the short butterfly milkweed



Prescribed fires play a role in prairie restoration.

with its orange flowers. If you plant butterfly milkweed in your perennial garden, you are guaranteed butterflies and most likely, monarchs, and almost 100 other species of pollinators. Planting one perennial in your garden helps so many.

We have all seen it, that pond in the subdivision, park, or corporate campus with the shoreline eroding away, dirty water, and geese taking over. Installing a shoreline of wildflowers and perennials prevents shoreline erosion with their deep and plentiful roots. Wildlife love this perennial garden, but geese hate it! Geese evolved in this system and it means one thing to them—danger. Instinct tells them that the chance of predators waiting to ambush them is higher in these areas.





A restored woodland with native shooting stars.



Prairie restoration helps maintain wetland shores.

### COST OF INVASIVE SPECIES

Historical accounts of the region tell of forests and woodlands with breathtakingly large trees and forest floors of wildflowers where one could ride on horseback completely unhindered. We know the reality now—barely being able to see into these woods and walk into one. This is due to several non-native species of trees and brush filling in the understory and pushing out and outcompeting the native species. The slow creep of invasive species has pushed out our beautiful butterflies and songbirds, as well. Our woods are eerily silent now whereas they were filled with the songs on birds, frogs, toads, and crickets.

### NATIVE SOLUTIONS

Native plants can be designed into any traditional landscape. Flowers of all shapes, colors, and sizes will be out your door or in your neighborhood for all to enjoy. Solve problems in the landscape such as wet areas, dry areas, and areas too hard to mow by creating a garden with plants that thrive in those very conditions. When the garden takes root, the cost in time and money to maintain it drops. Dense plantings keep the weeds out.

Nature is healthy for us, too. Scientific studies have shown the benefits to our body and mind of having nature around us. Our mood improves, our blood pressure drops, our tension dissipates, and we breathe deeper. We sleep better when our brains are on nature. It can and should be nature that is at your scale.

Mosquitos and Ticks! When you restore the open nature of our woodlands to savanna the breezes move through them with ease. The wind brings dry air in and mosquitos hate dry air. Restoration of the ecosystem requires fire. Ticks winter in leaf litter. Burning the prairies, wetlands, and woodlands in the dormant season burns them up. Burning helps maintain the open character for more breezes. More open woodlands are home to birds and other insects that eat mosquitos and ticks. Restoration is healthy for us.

### A CUSTOM PRAIRIE PLAN

The three steps to the prairie process are: Design/Plan, Restore/Build, Maintain/Steward. It all starts with a plan. Create the plan that understands

“Native plants are important in supporting biodiversity and sustaining a healthy ecosystem. Not all plants are the same. It is important to select native plants that are appropriate for the area to support a variety of living things including pollinators, insects, birds, animals, and others. Douglas W. Tallamy, author of “Bringing Nature Home,” studied insect populations on a native white oak and a non-native Bradford pear tree to assess the population of insects that are supported by native versus non-native trees. He found 410 caterpillars of 19 different species on the oak tree and only one caterpillar on the pear tree confirming the importance of planting natives to support insects which are essential to our ecosystem. As a bonus, native plants are indigenous to Illinois and often require less maintenance.” – Susan Lenz, Barrington Area Conservation Trust.

you, the natural systems present, any permits, your timing, and budgets. The plan should be detailed in the actions and timing to take advantage of the opportunities in the weather or natural systems.

### RESTORE VS. REBUILD

Restoring and building are different. The former is working with a piece of nature that still exists and the latter is creating something brand new. Restoring a remnant piece of nature has immediate rewards. Building sustainable landscapes and naturalized areas nature needs just a little more time. Maintenance and stewardship are different, too. Maintenance implies that the site stays the same over time, which is good for landscaping. Stewardship is dynamic. Stewarding a plan is working with the site and the natural systems. It is rewarding to walk a site and see it evolve through proper stewardship.

*Jack Pizzo is a landscape architect and ecologist and is owner of Pizzo & Associates, Ltd. He practices what he preaches on the properties he owns. Jack's sons, Joe and Nick Pizzo, grew up with restoration all around them. They are carrying on the family tradition of fine ecology.*

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