

# Give native plants a fighting chance



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It's thistle season. The sky is filled with seeds riding the wind on delicate parachutes.

While this may look lovely, it is a nightmare for Land Care volunteers who meet regularly to remove invasive weeds and restore native plants along the South Trail. This popular trail stretching from the Royalwood Bridge to Creek Bend Road is a corridor for weeds such as Canada thistle, burdock, and leafy spurge.

In 2015, Wilma Sotas initiated public events to address the weed problem along the trail as part of Save Our Seine's 25th anniversary. This led to the formation of today's Land Care group. Fenella Temmerman finds it hard to go for a walk without a weeding kit — garden gloves, pruning snips, and a bag to collect flowers and seeds. She posts event notices on the trail and recruits new

volunteers.

Fenella is experimenting to find the best way to control each weed.

"I can't believe how easy it is to get it wrong," she said. "Someone cut thousands of thistle flowers and left them in the grass. The cut flowers still went to seed and there are billions of seeds, all laying in the grass. It is impossible to remove them — they just fly."

The Land Care group is up against some formidable plants. Invasive weeds are very good at seed dispersal and produce a lot of seeds.

Leafy spurge produces 140 seeds per stem. The seed pods explode, hurling the seeds up to 4.5 metres.

Canada thistle produces an average of 1,500 seeds/plant, up to a maximum of 5,000. Wind carries these seeds up to 800 metres and they remain viable in the soil for up to 20 years!

One burdock plant produces an average of 15,000 seeds. The seeds are inside sticky burrs that hitch-hike on passing mammals. People typically transport these hitch-hikers up to 250 metres on our clothing and up to five kilometres on shoes. The burrs eventually rub off — releasing the seeds.

I asked Fenella why she enjoys this dif-



Photo by Fenella Temmerman

Use gloves to strip thistle flowers and seeds off plants to bag and remove from the site.

ficult work.

"I love seeing the changes in the plants and bird life once the weeds are removed," she said. "Yesterday, I found four monarch eggs on one plant. That was a reward in itself."

Removing weeds gives native plants an opportunity to reclaim the space. The next

time you stroll along a Seine River trail, don't forget to bring your weed kit. Give our native plants a fighting chance.

*Michele Kading is a community correspondent for St. Vital and the executive director of Save Our Seine.*