

The Biodiverse Lawn

by Wendy Fachon



BIODIVERSITY IN A RHODE ISLAND LAWN

Clockwise from top left: Thyme-leaved Speedwell, *Veronica serpyllifolia*; Black Medick, *Modicago lupulina*; White Clover, *Trifolium repens*; Common Chickweed, *Stellaria media*; Mouse-ear Chickweed, *Cerastium vulgatum*; Yellow Wood Sorrel, *Oxalis europea*; Corn Speedwell, *Veronica arvensis*; Dandelion, *Taraxacum officinale*; Common Blue Violet, *Viola papilionacea*; Common Cinquefoil, *Potentilla simplex*.

A biodiverse lawn of grass and weeds is a naturally evolving community of plants, each performing an important job and contributing to the well-being overall. Dandelions have deep taproots that pull up essential minerals from deep beneath the ground. Clovers extract nitrogen, a necessary nutrient, from the air and fix it into the soil, making it readily available for other plants. Speedwells spread rapidly to provide groundcover in bare spots, stabilize the soil and prevent erosion. Weeds tend to be nature's remedy for repairing disturbed and damaged ground, so that prairies and forests can grow again.

A lawn that grows only one species of plant, such as bluegrass, is called a monoculture. It is a wasteland for pollinators. It lacks nourishment—no flowers, no pollen and no nectar essential for sustaining wild bees, honey bees, butterflies and other pollinators. Maintaining the perfect monoculture lawn requires the application of chemicals, including herbicides to eliminate all other plant life and pesticides to eliminate insect pests. These chemicals are harmful to pollinators, pets and children. They pollute groundwater and run off into streams and rivers, where they cause harm to fish and birds.

NATURE AS THE ALTERNATIVE

Upon close inspection, the natural composition of a chemical-free lawn includes many tiny delightful flowers—white, yellow, blue and violet—hidden amid the green. The flowers, with their uniquely-shaped leaves, provide clues to identify which plants are edible.

Most of them are packed with vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients, and many offer medicinal value. Sheep sorrel makes a delicious French sorrel soup, and it has been historically used to treat inflammation, scurvy, cancer and diarrhea. The leaves and flowers of the common blue violet can be added to salads or used to make an infusion to soothe a cough and sore

throat. Dandelion greens can be sautéed with garlic, mixed into smoothies or consumed raw to aid digestion. Dandelion root tea stimulates the flow of bile, helps with mineral absorption and soothes the stomach lining.

The StoryWalkingRadioHour explores this topic with guest Katrina Blair, author of *The Wild Wisdom of the Weeds*, which presents 13 such common weeds that grow everywhere. Valuable information about each weed includes recipes for food, medicine and self-care. Blair shows how common weeds, growing in the grass or vegetable garden, are a free and abundant source of sustenance for humans and for one another.

Wendy Fachon is host of the *Story Walking Radio Hour*. Listen to her interview with Katrina Blair at DreamVisions7Radio.com/the-story-walking-radio-hour-with-wendy-fachon. Learn more about Story Walking at NetwalkRI.com or StoryWalking.com. **See ad on page 25.**