

Planting the Seed

Native tree seeds collected from Peel Village Golf Course enhance the local environment.

BY CHRIS RICKETT AND FRANK MERRAN



Unlike most restoration projects, volunteers from the Brampton Horticultural Society, Chinguacousy Garden Club, and the Etobicoke-Mimco Watersheds Coalition collected and sorted seeds by tree species from the Peel Village Golf Course.

During the fall of 2006, volunteers from the Brampton Horticultural Society, Chinguacousy Garden Club, and the Etobicoke-Mimico Watersheds Coalition scoured a woodlot at the Peel Village Golf Course to collect native tree seeds for planting. Numerous species of seeds were collected, including shagbark, downie, butternut, and bitternut hickory; bur and red oak; along with sugar maple and basswood; to plant in a one-acre forest restoration area on the golf course.

The partnership between the Toronto and Region Conservation

Authority (TRCA) and Peel Village Golf Course is part of a broader plan that includes a forest restoration project for habitat along the Etobicoke Creek at the golf course and in the City of Brampton, Ontario, Canada. Unlike most restoration projects that plant saplings, this particular site utilized tree seeds and recreated the natural pit-and-mound micro-topography of a mature forest. Pit-and-mound typically results where trees fall, creating pits where their roots once sat and mounds where their bio-mass breaks down. This pattern was simulated by gouging out small pits with an excavator and

leaving adjacent mounds. With a microhabitat created that could support vernal pooling and a diverse number of species, volunteers planted the seeds they collected in the pits and mounds.

Fast forward to the summer of 2007 and the restoration area has seen a number of tree seedlings burst forth. Oaks, which have had a hard time reproducing in the area, have been the most successful, with each pit-and-mound having on average three or four red or bur oak seedlings. Two black walnuts were also found, along with some sugar maples, but none of the hickory seeds were successful.



Pit-and-mound techniques were used to simulate the natural micro-topography associated with many of the tree species identified at Peel Village Golf Course.

While planting from seedlings means taking a longer view of restoration, direct seeding produces plants that are often much more drought-tolerant than planted saplings, as their taproots will immediately grow down from the germinating seed. To augment habitat opportunities and provide some additional natural cover, in the spring of 2007 volunteers complemented the sprouting seeds by surrounding the pit-and-mound areas with bare-root native tree and shrub saplings. During this spring planting event, volunteers also helped develop a butterfly meadow on the golf course. A half-acre plot was filled with black-eyed susans, wild bergamot, butterfly milkweed, wild strawberry, hairy mountain mint, and a number of different asters. The site has been so successful that within a few short months the new butterfly area was teeming with butterflies and insects, with some of the asters already measuring three feet high!

Overall, the work at the Peel Village Golf Course has utilized community partnerships, the resources of course management, the City of Brampton, and TRCA to lay a great foundation for expanding and enhancing the natural systems within the Etobicoke Watershed. Its success has planted the seed for a future of an improved environment within the community.

UPDATE

In May of 2008, 45 people came out for the annual spring planting at Peel Village Golf Course. Employees from Chrysler, members of the Chingua-cousy Garden Club and Brampton Horticultural Society, along with friends from Eco Ambassadeurs du Monde worked hard to expand the existing butterfly gardens with an additional 2,000 native wildflowers. The butterfly garden planting event included a barbeque and provided an excellent opportunity to learn about the importance of butterflies and the

many types of wildflowers that can be found locally. Plantings included: wild columbine, hairy beardtongue, sky blue aster, and butterfly milkweed. This past September, Peel Village Golf Course hosted a fall planting event, inviting friends and neighbors to plant native trees and other natives around the course.

CHRIS RICKETT is the watershed planning project manager for the Watershed Management Division of Toronto and Region Conservation. For more information on Toronto and Region Conservation, visit www.trca.on.ca. FRANK MERRAN is the manager of Peel Village Golf Course, a municipal course owned and operated by the City of Brampton in Ontario, Canada. It has been designated as a certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary since 1998. For more information about the course, please visit www.brampton.ca/peel_village/home.taf. For more information on the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program, please visit AudubonInternational.org.