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683 Hatcher's Run, Cortland NY 13045

In late 2011, we moved into a new house less than 2 miles west of Cortland, NY (hardiness zone 5a / 5b). The back 100+ feet of our lot, which led to a seasonal creek, had been declared “forever wild” when the development was created. In between the house and that area of untouched brush and trees out back was about .60 acre of scattered Black Cherry trees (*Prunus serotina*) . . . and nothing else. No other trees, and the undergrowth had been bulldozed off – which is probably good, considering that we wanted to encourage native plants, and the brush seemed to be mostly Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*) and other exotic invasives.

This photo shows what the backyard looked like during our first winter (2011-12); I told my wife I was getting used to rocky brown, maybe we should skip putting in a lawn!



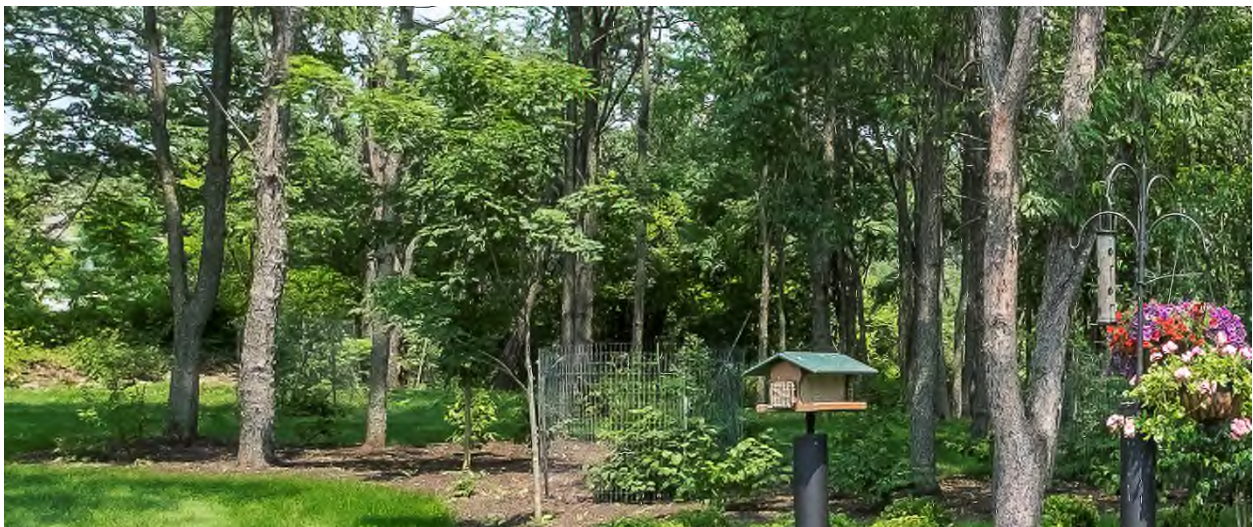
As our plans changed and developed, we ended up with several distinct plantings of native shrubs and trees. Everything out past the pond and flower garden area is a native except for the Norway Spruces put in early by our landscaper, and one viburnum. There are 3 separate beds fairly close that run roughly west to east (parallel to the house), 2 to the left and 1 to the right. We have largely maintained a lawn in between to keep down weeds, etc., and have gradually removed most of the individual deer cages. There were two larger fenced areas planted in 2013; the one to the right rear of the yard has been mostly unfenced, but has not fared as well as the others. All the way back is a larger area still fenced, with some larger trees in it. In the center left there is a fenced area that we created in 2017 for 15 “potted seedlings” (3 each of 5 different kinds), and we have not mowed the weeds or grass in that area. There are also a number of free-standing trees planted around the yard behind the first beds. Finally, there is a hedgerow along the western edge of the property which we have attempted to populate with native plants. (See the schematics in the separate document.)

In the spring of 2012 we did put in a lawn, and we also began our project of adding other varieties of trees and introducing native understory plants, as this next photo (from May 2012) shows:



In the above photo, note the three “deer cages,” to protect new plants from being devoured by deer. The left cage contains a Chokecherry tree (*Prunus virginiana*), the middle and right-hand cages contain Pagoda Dogwoods (*Cornus alternifolia*) and other plants as well. Between the left and center cages are two new Sugar Maples (*Acer saccharum*). One each of the dogwoods and sugar maples had to be removed later (dead or diseased).

In 2013, we worked with another native plant landscaper, and (among other things) we connected those three cages, removed the left-hand cage (you can see the small Chokecherry there), and interspersed other native understory plants. (This photo is from July 2015, the earliest photo I could find showing the new bed.)



The project was not without setbacks! The next winter (2013-14) after creating this new bed was the coldest in many years, and a number of the Spicebush plants in our yard (especially those which had been planted or transplanted in 2013) appeared to have died altogether. We responded by simply leaving them alone, and [almost?] all of the affected plants eventually put up new growth from their roots. Here is one of the Spicebush plants in September 2014!



Below is a photo from early September 2014, showing the interior of the western (left-hand) part of that bed that had been created in the summer of 2013. This new “front left-hand bed” is about 70 feet long, and by this time included five Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*), several Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*), two Red Elderberry (*Sambucus racemosa*), as well as several Beaked Hazelnut (*Corylus cornuta*) at the east (right-hand) end. In addition to these shrubs, we planted some wildflowers and ferns.



And here are two views in August 2023:



The above photo shows from the left end to the remaining Sugar Maple; the photo below shows from the Sugar Maple to the right end.

