

The "O" Horizon

In ecology, 'litter' refers to the "O" horizon, the uppermost layer of organic material in soils, comprising dead plant material which has been shed by the living, above ground portion of the existing floristic community. As litter decays and enters the nutrient cycle, its components become available to the biotic and abiotic processes of the site.

This proposal seeks to expand the concept of litter to include the largely organic layer of material which accumulates on open ground, specifically in relation to the wide commercial availability of "fast food" as a franchised array in the urban and suburban landscape.

Ecology as practice must always address its own ideological preoccupations. In the impregnation of packaging material from a maximally-distributed purveyor of "fast food" with contextually indigenous grasses and herbaceous dicots, a question is being asked. "When dispersed into the environment as litter, can any percentage of the seed reliably be expected to germinate and persist in situ, establishing as population, and thereby becoming part of the succession of communities there?"

The recession of glaciers from the American Northeast 10-12,000 before present left broad expanses of the continent dominated by exposed, compacted mineral substrate. The first flora to follow the glaciers were generalist, rate-selected organisms adapted to arrive-to and succeed in a broad range of sites and conditions. Once established, their influence on the soils enabled a succession of communities to follow, culminating eventually in the dynamic interrelation of highly developed and diverse eco-types which existed in-tact, if somewhat modified by sustainable human activity before widespread settlement.¹

The ongoing recession of industry from the American Northeast leaves broad expanses of exposed, compacted mineral substrate. In these places, novel floristic communities appear spontaneously wherever neglect and site factors permit. These communities, a cosmopolitan mix of indigenous and non-indigenous generalists, are the earliest in the succession of flora and pre-adapted to thrive in disused calcareous open lots, loading dock wetlands, and other novel post-industrial ecological niches.²

The species represented in this proposal were selected because they are indigenous to the floristic region in which Detroit is located, and because of their low conservation coefficient (CC). The value in choosing indigenous plants is in the promotion of the natural heritage of the given region. The CC of a plant correlates to its degree of need for specific site characteristics. A low CC ensures the best possible rates of germination and success. The choice of corporate franchise and specific packaging are somewhat arbitrary, though anecdotal evidence (see fig. 1-3) suggests the possibility for litter is very good with the chosen vehicle.

1 A.A. Reznicek. Lecture. Michigan Botanical Club. University of Michigan Biostation, Pellston, Michigan. 25 May 2012.

2 Del Tredici. *Wild Urban Plants of the Northeast*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2010.



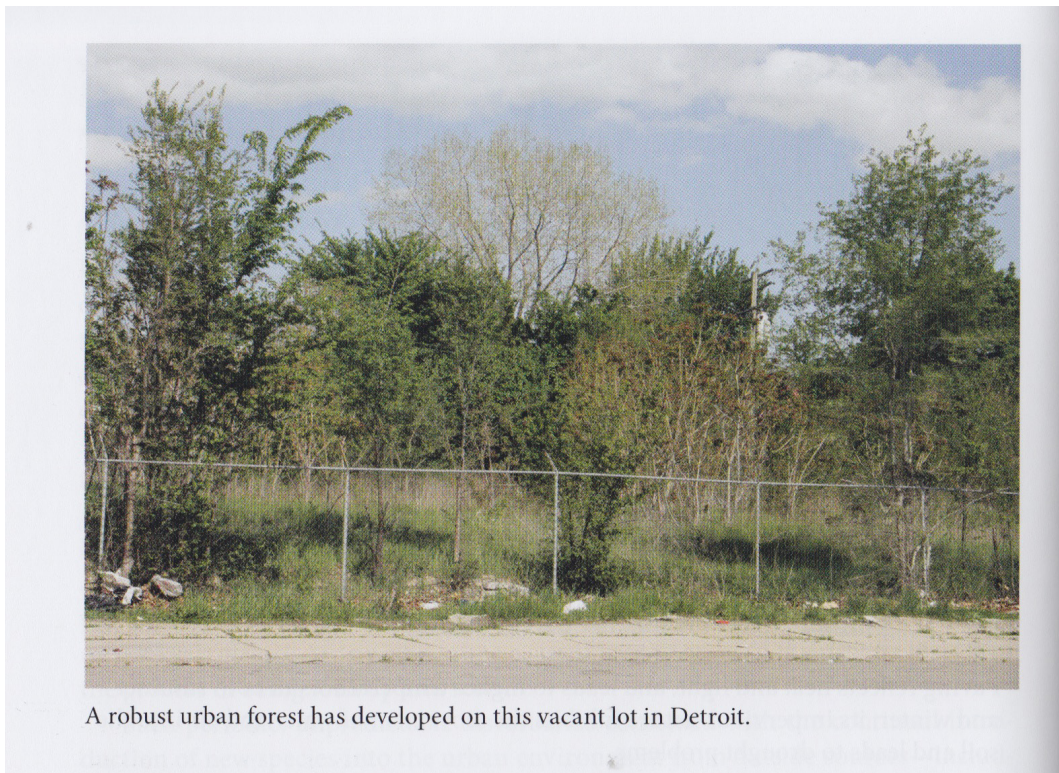
fig. 1



fig. 2



fig. 3



A robust urban forest has developed on this vacant lot in Detroit.

fig. 4

Quaking aspen
colonizing
the roof of the
abandoned
Central Train
Depot in Detroit.



fig.5

Native Plant Nursery
P.O. Box 7841
Ann Arbor, MI 48108-7841
ph. 734-677-3260 fx. 734-677-5860
www.nativeplant.com

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Kendall Babi

RE: Native Seed for project

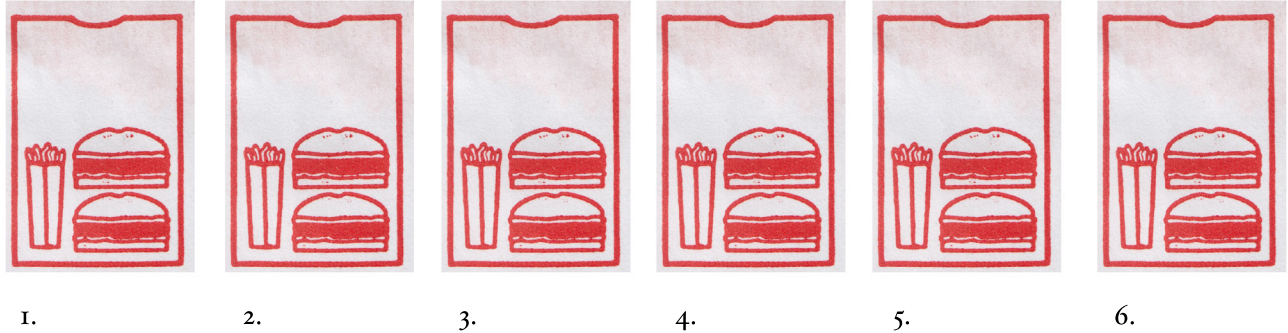
Site: full sun, poor soil.

Latin Name	Common Name	seed/ gram	Seed/ sqft	Amount (g)	bulk wt (g)	\$/g	cost
Eragrostis spectabilis	Purple Lovegrass	8000	4	0.3	0.3	\$4.00	\$1.00
Panicum capillare	Witch grass	1500	3	1.0	3.0	\$1.25	\$1.25
Carex cephalophora	Oval-leaf Sedge	1100	2	0.9	1.1	\$1.18	\$1.07
Juncus tenuis	Path Rush	6000	2	0.2	0.2	\$5.00	\$0.83
Achillea millefolium	Yarrow	7000	4	0.3	0.3	\$1.50	\$0.43
Gnaphalium obtusifolium	Sweet Everlasting	7000	2	0.1	0.1	\$7.20	\$1.03
Asclepias syriaca	Common Milkweed	150	0.5	1.7	1.8	\$0.23	\$0.38
Conyza canadensis	Horseweed	8000	4	0.3	0.3	\$2.00	\$0.50
Coreopsis lanceolata	Sand Coreopsis	400	1	1.3	1.3	\$0.57	\$0.71
Monarda punctata	Horsemint	3000	2	0.3	0.3	\$1.38	\$0.46
Oenothera biennis	Evening-primrose	3000	4	0.7	0.7	\$0.33	\$0.22
Rudbeckia hirta	Black-eyed Susan	3000	6	1.0	1.0	\$0.37	\$0.37
Solidago nemoralis	Grey Goldenrod	8500	4	0.2	0.2	\$3.20	\$0.75
Aster lateriflorus	Calico Aster	4000	3	0.4	0.4	\$2.75	\$1.03
	Subtotals:		47.5	9.0	12.9		\$10.04
	MI sales tax:						\$0.60
	Seed Mix dvt & handling:						\$12.00
	Total:						\$22.65

*All seed in this mix is Michigan native species from Michigan sources. The seed mix you receive is at least 99% weed-seed free but does contain a percentage of inert scrap material. You are only charged for the amount of seed.

fig.6

Pairings



1. *Rudbeckia hirta*/*Gnaphalium obtusifolium*
2. *Coreopsis lanceolata*/*Solidago nemoralis*
3. *Oenothera biennis*/*Aster lateriflorus*
4. *Eragrostis spectabilis*/*Panicum capillare*
5. *Achillea millefolium*/*Asclepias syriaca*
6. *Carex cephalophora*/*Monarda punctata*

fig. 7

List of Figures

- 1., 2., 3. Examples of litter, photos taken by the author
- 4., 5. Del Tredici. Wild Urban Plants of the Northeast. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2010.
6. Invoice from Native Plant Nursery, LLC for contextually indigenous graminoids and forbs with conservation coefficient of 0
7. Diagram of prototype “O” horizon litter, as displayed herewith