

Sakonnet Preservation

newsletter of the Sakonnet Preservation Association

A Lizard's Tail – what's that?

That was what I said to the biologist standing in front of me trying to explain that he had found an unusual plant along the brook that makes its way through my property. He told me what it looked like and walked with me to show me the Lizard's Tail plant he had found. Turns out it is very uncommon in New England and found in Rhode Island only in Newport County. He explained that the small patch of Lizard's Tail would not be too hard to manage and protect. "Just make sure to stay out of the area and don't walk on the plants," he advised. The whole time he was talking I was thinking, "Just what I need! An endangered plant on my property."

Curious, and with a quick web search I discovered its botanical name is *Saururus cernuus*, also known as dragon's tail, swamp root, and other regional names. They are perennial wetland plants that can grow up to 4 feet tall and form large clumps and colonies. The leaves are large and heart shaped and the flower structure is a spike with lots of small white flowers that form an arch. The flowers (and later seeds) form a structure that looks similar to a wrinkled lizard's tail and hence the source of its most common name.

I also learned that it is not endangered nationally but very rare in our state, and important to protect it where growing, usually



at the edge of a brook or stream. Keep an eye out; perhaps you might find you have some on your property too, or you might consider planting this native species. It is sold commercially.

Many years have passed since this discovery was made on my property, and a small group of plants has grown to an area that is 30 to 40 feet long and 20 feet wide. The takeaway I have from the experience is that you do not need to be afraid to be a steward of the land and environment, because it is just not that hard to do.

Herb Case



Sakonnet Preservation

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sound finances

ethical conduct

responsible governance

lasting stewardship

Robin Wall Kimmerer's book *Braiding Sweetgrass* eloquently describes tribal practices based on deeply held belief in the interdependence of all living things—that harm done to one affects all. A relationship of respect between nature and humans calls for integrated esteem for all forms of life and natural resources. This acknowledgement is at the heart of Indigenous land management practices, and has been gaining attention as the dramatic impacts of accelerating climate change are demanding a radical shift from the extractive and unsustainable abuse of resources practiced worldwide.

At this year's Land Trust Alliance Rally in Providence the effort to address the absence of diverse perspectives in land conservation was put forth. Rhode Island Narragansett and Wampanoag tribal members led some of the larger gatherings with ceremony, song and voice in their own language. They and other marginalized community members joined panel discussions to discuss the challenges of participating meaningfully in the land protection community. The environmental challenges we face have created an opportunity for these voices to be recognized and valued for what they have long offered.

Given SPA's priority of habitat protection on our holdings, this live exposure to honoring the interdependence of all living things was moving. Our Meehan Triangle project has been a deep dive into the resilient capability of a small, singular property to support so much life, given the chance. And it has ignited the possibility of motivating property owners to commit to creating even modest levels of habitat protection on their own land capable of becoming a harbor of safety and natural sustenance.



The north end of the Meehan Triangle

I believe it is essential that we accept the truth of this wisdom passed down through tribal generations-- the connection of all living things to place. I also believe it is the beating heart of the work we do. Indeed, the excitement and passion we see in the Meehan Triangle project is but one such example. I have much to learn and practice from the wisdom shared at this inspiring conference. It was extraordinary.

Abigail Brooks

Upcoming movies and presentations

Join us for an engaging series of documentaries and talks at the Little Compton Community Center. Doors open at 6pm; all events begin at 6:30pm and are free and open to the public.

February 14, 2025

Coyote Talk with Dr. Numi Mitchell of Narragansett Bay Coyote Study.



March 14, 2025

Native Plants & Seeds with Emily Dutra of Butterfly Effect Farm. Suitable for middle & high school students and adults.

April 11, 2025

Honoring Our Loved Ones, Honoring the Earth: Options Beyond the Conventional Funeral with Vienna Booth & Nan Haffenreffer.

Learn about family-led post-death care through personal stories and practical guidance. This discussion will cover logistics, networks, and legal considerations for family and community involvement in post-death care. Discover meaningful, environmentally conscious alternatives that empower families to care for loved ones at their time of death.

Look for updates and news closer to each event on our website sakonnetpreservation.org

Our work with your help

Among the various conservation groups working in Little Compton, **Sakonnet Preservation** is distinguished by its willingness to accept properties for conservation that may not be a priority for other groups. We are open to accepting small parcels which make up a high percentage of the remaining undeveloped land in our community. Such parcels are vital for protecting groundwater, habitat corridors, historic stone walls and scenic vistas that define our landscape.

An accredited 501c3 non-profit organization, **Sakonnet Preservation** relies almost exclusively on donor contributions for its work preserving open space and providing conservation education to all ages in the community with activities, volunteer opportunities and web-based as well as mailed newsletters. Donations supporting our work can be paid by check; credit card payment online at sakonnetpreservation.org; with contributions from donor-advised funds; with gifts of appreciated stock; or with Required Minimum Distribution funds from an IRA. Our correct mailing address is PO Box 945, Little Compton, RI 02837. For direct transfer of funds or financial instruments please contact us for instructions.

Propagating native plants

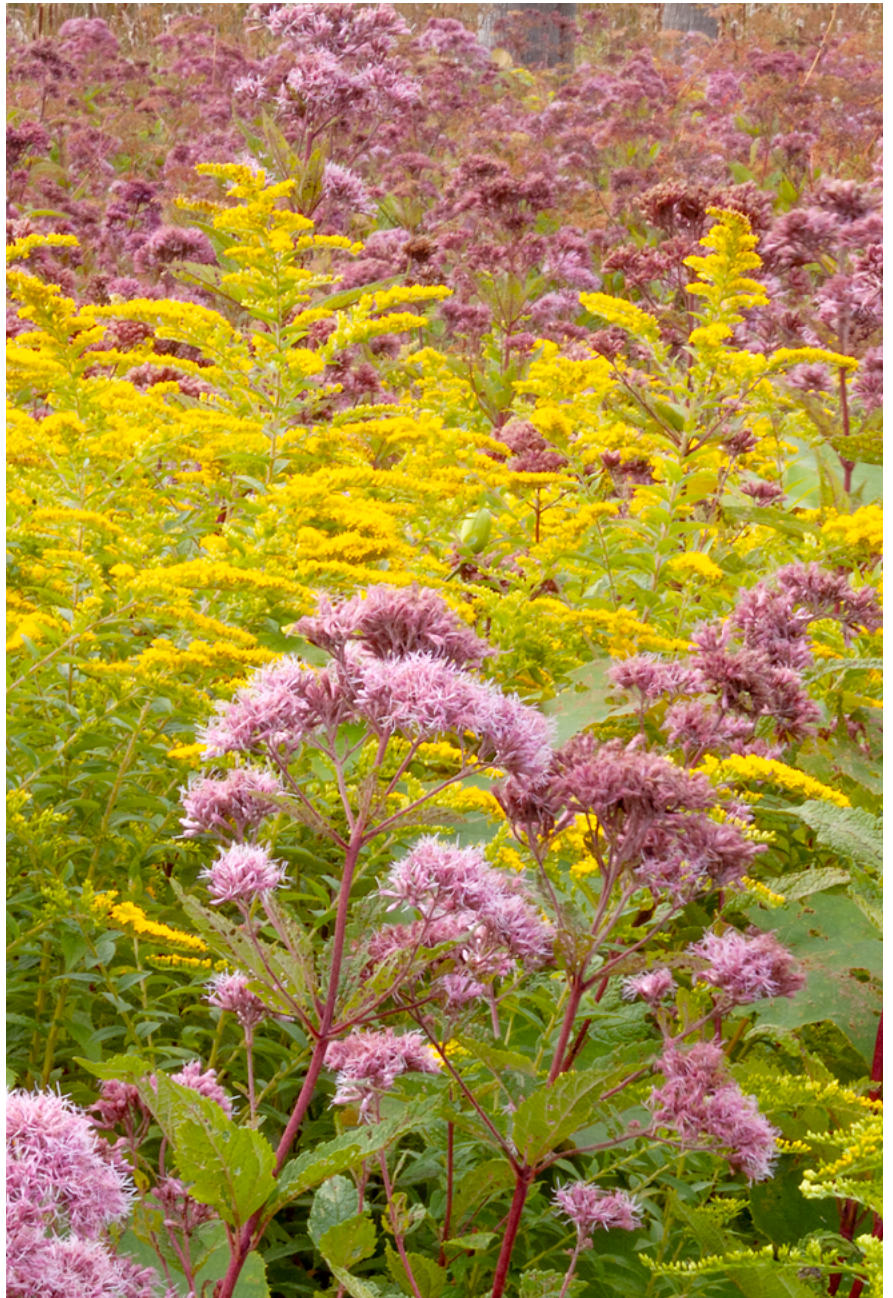
The inspiration that comes from attending a land trust conference like Rally has been palpable in the discussions we have had at our board and committee meetings since September. Many creative ways to promote conservation were articulated in the various Rally workshops that were offered, and it is exciting to incorporate some of those ideas into our work.

One example from a Rally workshop has inspired us to propagate our own native plants for SPA restoration projects. We plan to do it in a publicly accessible space as a way to share what we learn and to further inspire private landowners to consider the use of native plants.

We are not alone among conservation groups in removing non-native species and restoring native plants to preserve habitat on our properties. We have good company with other land trusts promoting and modelling examples of habitat creation that private landowners can mimic, experiment with, and learn from on their own land. And we have a collaborative relationship with the [RI Wild Plant Society](#) supporting the propagation of native plant seedlings thanks to community member Sue Theriault and that organization's "ReSeeding RI" effort.

If you are interested in seeing what other organizations have to say that are advocating for native plantings and habitat protection, search for [Wild Ones](#) and [Homegrown National Park](#).

Watch for our seedlings, we'll keep you posted!



Restoration planting

Working with the Rhode Island Wild Plant Society (RIWPS) to source local nursery stock, **Sakonnet Preservation** staff and volunteers planted a dense grove of trees and shrubs in an area being managed for persistent non-native species removal. The forest where the planting took place, along the south side of Cole Brook Road, was a dense tangle of invasive vines and dead trees until a forestry crew cleared the way for planting earlier this year.

We planted dozens of specimens, across ten different species grown from seed collected in the wildlands of Rhode Island. With the help of an exclusion fence to keep browsing animals like deer away from the tender buds, this dense planting will provide habitat and food for wildlife in the Adamsville area.

The shrub species gifted to us by RIWPS, include Rhododendron, Azalea, Laurel, and Chokeberry, all grown from seed collected from native Rhode Island plants. Also in the mix are some locally sourced Cedar, Oak, and Maple trees. This project is but one example among many of the collaborative stewardship support that has been given to us by a variety of organizations and local groups.

How can you carry out this type of work on your land? Start out with the golden rule of identifying what is already established and thriving at the site and cutting back only the plants you have identified as undesirable. Maybe there are some viburnums and elderberries that are just holding on underneath a non-native tangle! Most often you will need to manage non-native woody species like multiflora rose, bittersweet vine, porcelain berry, Japanese honeysuckle, Morrow's honeysuckle, Japanese barberry, and other species you can read more about on the [Rhode Island Natural History Survey](#) website.

Because of those persistent non-natives, there is always some maintenance to ensure the native plants thrive, but in the long run they are perfectly adapted to our landscape and crucial to our ecosystem's sustainability. You can learn more about how to establish and expand native plant communities on your property by checking out organizations such as [Rhode Island Wild Plant Society](#), [The Ecotype Project](#) in Connecticut, and the [Wild Seed Project](#) based in Maine.

Adam Yorks

A young volunteer with the young plants



Report from Rally 2024

The 37th Land Trust Alliance Rally, held from September 26-28, 2024 in our own capital city, Providence, brought together over 2,350 conservation professionals and advocates. As the largest gathering of land trust communities in the U.S., this year's Rally offered a remarkable opportunity for learning, collaboration, and inspiration. It was a first-time experience for six of the nine of us attending from SPA, and it proved to be both eye-opening and deeply impactful. By the end of Rally, we felt energized, and our dedication to conservation was reinforced by the innovative ideas and connections that came from the workshops, plenaries, and discussions.

Rally began with a powerful opening: the Indigenous Land Conservation Summit, where over 100 Indigenous leaders gathered to discuss land stewardship, access, and the return of lands to Indigenous care. SPA was represented in this important conversation by our Administrator, Vienna Booth. The emphasis on inclusivity and diverse perspectives set the tone for the entire conference and resonated with all of us. It sparked meaningful reflection on how our own work could benefit from deeper collaborations with marginalized communities.

We attended a variety of workshops that explored pressing environmental issues—from how climate change is reshaping ecosystems to strategies for safeguarding essential resources like groundwater. Every session offered insights and practical tools to bring home. And it challenged us to think beyond the day-to-day efforts of land conservation and consider the broader impact of our work in concert with so many others.

Rally not only exposed us to cutting-edge conservation strategies but also provided the space to reflect on the interconnectedness of land, people, and communities. Some of us were moved by the emotional and philosophical discussions on humanity's relationship with the natural world. All of us found inspiration in the sessions focused on ecosystem management, conservation policy and practice.

The idea that building stronger, more inclusive partnerships can deepen our work and lead to more effective, equitable outcomes became a central theme of our discussions during and following Rally. Each of us carried away a renewed sense of purpose as well as a reinforced commitment to advancing inclusive and resilient conservation. We look forward to applying the knowledge we gained to our ongoing work as we strive to create a lasting impact in our community and beyond.



SPA board members and staff at the Rally

Joy Elvin

The Indigenous Summit Group during their meetings at the Audubon Nature Center in Bristol, RI



Rethinking our final farewell

Historically, what we now call natural or “green” burial involved placing an unembalmed body in a shallow grave using biodegradable materials, often managed by family and community members. Modern practices have shifted toward industrialization, leading to the use of non-biodegradable caskets, cement vaults, and embalming fluids that disrupt local ecosystems.

Cremation has surged in popularity, with predictions suggesting that many more will choose this option. While cremation is often more affordable and space-efficient, it comes with significant environmental costs including huge electrical and gas consumption and release of carbon dioxide. Additionally, this transition has distanced families from the intimate process of caring for their loved ones, moving death behind closed doors.

As environmental awareness grows, many individuals are seeking eco-friendly alternatives in end-of-life planning. According to the National Funeral Directors Association’s 2024 Consumer Awareness and Preferences Report, 68% of respondents expressed interest in exploring ecologically-conscious funeral options.

One increasingly popular choice is a return to historic natural burial. Natural burial uses biodegradable containers, forgoes embalming fluid, and uses a burial depth that allows for natural decomposition, reduced waste, and the growth of local flora. Often situated in preserved natural settings, these burial sites enhance biodiversity and blend harmoniously with the environment.

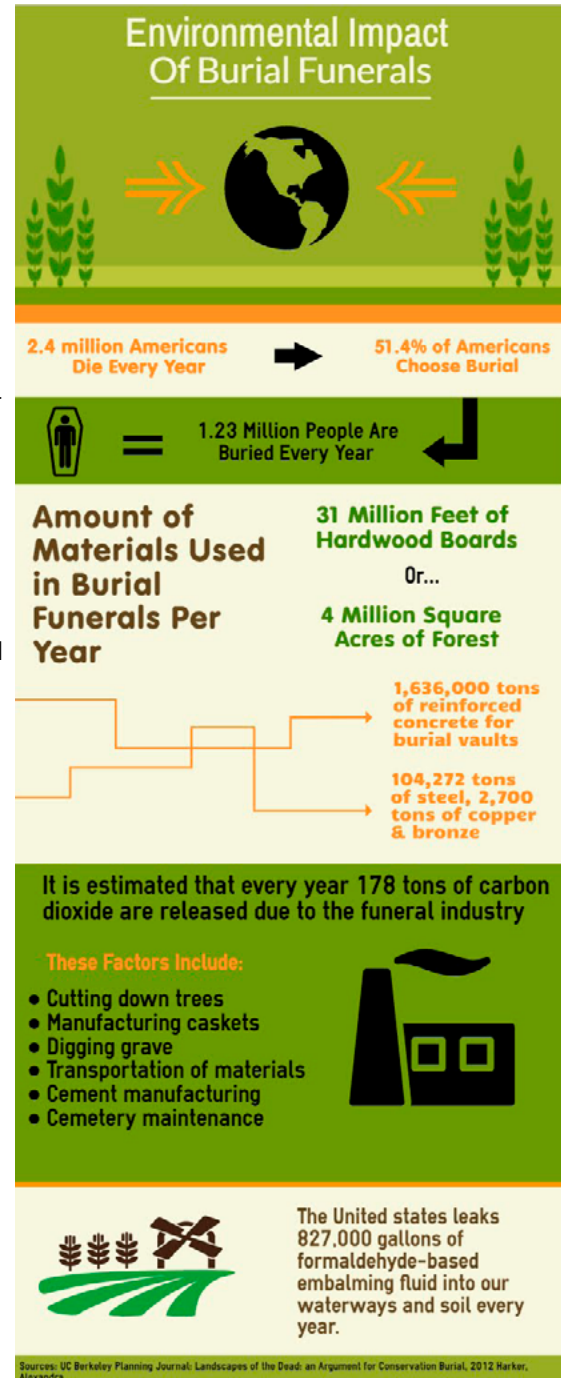
Choosing natural burial not only helps conserve landscapes but also provides a more engaged experience. Natural burial encourages and empowers family participation. For example, family members helping to shovel soil into the grave site or taking the lead in caring for the body of their beloveds can create a deeper sense of connection and closure.

As we consider more sustainable living choices, natural burial presents a compassionate alternative aligned with ecological stewardship. For those planning end-of-life options, natural burial offers a meaningful path toward regeneration that honors the circle of life.

Vienna Booth

SPA Administrator, Vienna Booth, will further discuss ecologically conscious alternatives to conventional death care that honor our loved ones and the earth in the spring of 2025.

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The Sakonnet Preservation Association, a non-profit land trust, is dedicated to preserving the rural character and natural resources of Little Compton for the lasting benefit of the community.

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