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# OEC NEWSLETTER

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Official publication of the Onondaga Earth Corps

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Bare root trees and stakes placed against a wall after a tree delivery arrives.

## New Leaves for the Spring Season

BY KATE LITTLEFIELD

This spring, OEC continued to push the Urban Forestry Master Plan goal of increasing canopy cover in Syracuse. We planted 220 trees this season, making adjustments for utility improvements taking place across the city.

Of the 220 trees planted this spring, three were ball & burlap (B&B) stock. The B&B trees were all conifers. Luckily the remaining 217 trees planted were light-weight, maneuverable, deciduous bare root stock, which our field crews greatly appreciated compared to the heavy B&B trees which makes for arduous work.

We had numerous corrections to make throughout the spring in order to improve the longevity of the trees planted. In total, we made 68 corrections, most of them minor adjustments like straightening trees and tightening tree ties. Other corrections tended to be a bit more aesthetic in nature, but still provided a good opportunity for our new staff and crew members to become familiar with the quality of work we strive for.

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### *Upcoming Events*

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REGISTER FOR EVENTS AT:  
[bit.ly/OEEvents](http://bit.ly/OEEvents)

**End of Summer  
Celebration/Graduation**  
August 11  
Time and location TBD

**Earth Corps Encore Fundraiser**  
Oct. 29, 5:30P-9:30P  
Rosamond Gifford Zoo  
1 Conservation Pl. Syracuse, NY  
13204

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### *Past Events*

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**Syracuse Grows Resource Drive**  
Apr. 23, 9:00A  
Southwest Community Learning  
Farm & Pioneer Homes

**Schiller Park Earth Day Clean Up**  
Apr. 23, 10:00A

**Ley Creek Tree Planting**  
Apr.30, 10:00A  
Feldmeier Company

**Kirk Park Tree Planting**  
May 7, 10:00A  
Seals Community Center

**Schiller Park Planting**  
May 21, 10:00A

**Elmwood Food Forest Event**  
May 21, 10:30A

**Leavenworth Park Community  
Gardening**  
June 29, 10:30A

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### *Thank you to our Sponsors*

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**Landscapes East**

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**Allyn Foundation**

**Syracuse University**

**Rare Earth Nursery**

**Sauve Brothers Body Shop**

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## New Leaves for the Spring Season (continued)

Throughout the spring planting season, we removed 16 trees in order to re-plant in their place. Of the 16 trees, 13 had died of environmental or human causes and three were vandalized to the point of significant reduction in survival rates.

In total, OEC's Spring season program improved and restored 1.23 acres of the urban forest in the city of Syracuse, using 5.8 cubic yards of mulch and 2.1 cubic yards of compost. While 1.23 acres may not seem like much to some, it's astounding to consider that this restoration of the urban forest was completed by just one tree at a time.



(Left) Crew Leader Jay Holmes-Porch uses a pick mattock to get through a tough patch in the ground. (Right) Crew Leader Eh Moemo Qui and Crewmembers Jason Melchior and James Walker check to ensure a tree was planted correctly at Kirk Park.

## Podcast-ologies

BY LOGAN REIDSMA

Brain food for all, Ologies with Alie Ward takes the listener into the depths of social and environmental sciences with her conversations with expert “-ologists” in their respective field. Topics are diverse, informal, and upbeat and typically last around 60 minutes. Alie is engaging and fills the conversations with positive energy that brings the best out of their interviewees.

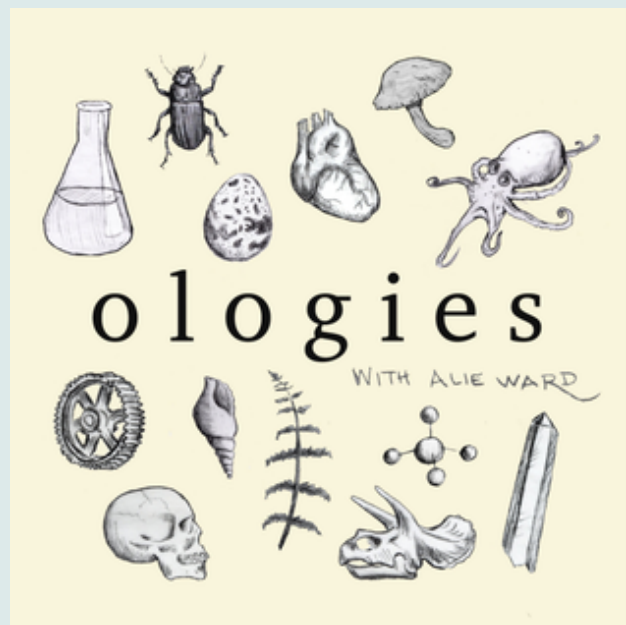
Even if the topic sounds dull, give it a chance as you might take something away from it! Next time you find yourself with an opportunity to listen, check out a few of our favorite episodes below.

Forensic Ecology with Tiara Moore  
<https://www.alieward.com/ologies/forensicecology>

Dendrology with Casey Clapp  
<https://www.alieward.com/ologies/dendrology2>

Traumatology with Nicholas Barr  
<https://www.alieward.com/ologies/traumatology>

Episode list and website:  
<https://www.alieward.com/ologies>



Logo for the "Ologies" podcast.

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## Introducing New Staff and Board Members



**LARENN DOWDELL**  
(YOUTH CREW LEADER)

My name is LaRenn Dowdell and I am a Summer Crew Leader at Onondaga Earth Corps. My reason for wanting to join OEC is because I enjoy landscaping and working with the youth. Being that I have experience in both, I feel like this is a job that I will enjoy and do well in. I will be working with OEC for the Summer, and possibly looking to be employed long term after this season is over.



**MIRANDA GREGORY**  
(CREW LEADER)

Hello! My name is Miranda Gregory and I recently began my position as a Crew Leader at OEC. Before joining OEC I spent two summers working with NYS Parks doing invasive species management. I graduated from ESF where I studied Conservation Biology and Environmental Health and I wanted to continue working in Syracuse. OEC has given me the opportunity to continue working on something I'm interested in while expanding my experiences and providing opportunities to engage with the community and get others involved.

My first few weeks with OEC have been full of new learning experiences including maintenance of rain gardens, site tours, plant identification, and handling new equipment. I'm excited for the upcoming season and getting to know all the different sites and new crew members. I'm looking forward to working in the natural areas and being able to connect people with nature.



**JAIR THOMAS**  
(YOUTH CREW LEADER)

I am 27 years old and I'm glad to be a part of OEC. One thing that brought me here is the fact that the youth need guidance and I want to be a part of the impact on their lives. I want to show them that they can strive for anything they desire.



**PATRONA JONES**  
(BOARD MEMBER)

A life long resident of Syracuse Patrona is a vested stakeholder within her Southside community and throughout the city. Patrona is the owner of StayMonet Opulent Events decorating company and is an avid spokesperson for community reinvestment. Patrona spends much of her time volunteering throughout the community as chair of the TNT Sector 3 Neighborhood Beautification task force, she strives to identify deteriorating, vacant and abandoned homes/spaces for revitalization and placemaking.



**EBONY FARROW**  
(BOARD MEMBER)

I am city of Syracuse native, a youth and community social justice advocate. Program Manager of Pathways to Apprenticeship. I am passionate about helping youth and adults gain access to livable wage employment as well as all other natural rights due.



**JAMES BURT**  
(BOARD MEMBER)

James graduated from West Genesee High School and has a degree in Landscape Architecture from SUNY ESF. He has 10 years of experience in golf course maintenance and construction and has worked at Landscapes East since 2015 and is the owner of Landscapes East since 2020. James is a resident of the City of Syracuse and lives with his partner Kristin and their dog Coda.



Crewmembers and Staff spend time at Thornden Park with yoga and meditation instructor Desiree Odom of Holistic Desires during a Personal Development Session.

## Yoga and Meditation

### **Jay Holmes-Porch (Crew Leader):**

OEC Young Adults and Staff had the opportunity to participate in a Meditation and Yoga exercise during a Friday PD session on May 13th. We met yogi Desiree Odom at Thornden Park, who led us through some gentle slow flow yoga and meditation. For me, this experience provided a designated space for reflection, and noticeable release of tension in my shoulders, back, and whole body. Breathing fresh air and feeling the grass underneath me keeps me grounded, and this was a good reminder to create space and time for myself.

### **Logan Reidsma (Foreman):**

I have done yoga once or twice before this session so I had some baseline of what I might expect. This session was made extremely approachable by Desiree who created a space that allowed me, and I assume other participants, to feel comfortable. Yoga can be presented in ways that might be written off as “not for me”, however this session challenged that assumption. It started out as a conversation that allowed me to connect with fellow participants and to the place we were at. From there we transitioned into various meditation and yoga poses while ending in a calm resting style. This class reminded me that yoga can be hard both mentally and physically, however I should continue to challenge myself to do it as I typically feel better afterward.

### **Tyrell Burke (Crew Leader):**

On May 13th, the OEC Staff were invited to participate in a personal development session that featured Meditation and Yoga exercise led by yogi Desiree Odom at Thornden Park. The space and atmosphere of the activity were wonderful and seemed very conducive to what the yogi was attempting to accomplish. It allowed everyone to open up and be a part of the group and challenge themselves. The physical activity of the session was challenging at parts but everyone was supportive and offered alternatives or solutions to help keep everyone moving forward positively. I definitely enjoyed this interactive session and would plead to have this and more activities similar to this included in every session of Youth and Young Adult programming going forward.

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# Invasive Plants

BY EH MOEMO QUI

Each season (mainly in Spring, Summer, and Fall) at the Onondaga Earth Corps (OEC), one of the many missions is to remove various invasive and troublesome plants. It is our duty to identify and properly remove them. The OEC normally complete such tasks at many of the rain gardens and Onondaga Creek in Syracuse. Every working site has at least four to ten different invasive species that, if not regularly maintained, would eventually take over a given area. As a result, our crew works diligently to ensure the growth of healthy ecological regions. Below, here are examples of common invasive plants that OEC removes:

Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*), Native to Eurasia. European Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), Native to Europe. Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*), Native to Asia. Black Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), Native to North America. Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), Native to china. Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*), Native to Europe. Thistle (*Carduus L.*), Native to Eurasia. Burdock (*Arctium L.*), Native to Northern Europe. Poison Ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*), native to North America)

We mainly pull the entire plant from the roots, or cut them down, leaving a stump. However, some species need extra care and caution when removing them. Plants such as the Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) need to be fully extracted and isolated inside a bag, since a leaf of knotweed can grow into a new plant. Also, part of OEC's goals are to educate young adults and the youth of invasive plants through field work. If you want to see the results of OEC's work, you can visit the Onondaga Creek Walk, near Kirk Park. Before OEC came along, most of the Creek Walk was covered up and no one could see through onto the other side of the creek, but now there are clear lines of sight.



Leaves of common invasive plants that can be found in Syracuse (left to right) Burdock, Tree of heaven, Black locust, Norway maple.

# Words from the crew

## Words from Young Adult Crewmember James Walker

"I learned a lot during this spring season. I gained a lot of skills in the field. This was my first time planting a tree. I also appreciate how we were offered opportunities to grow outside of work. One thing that will carry on me with me is the importance of safety. I feel like OEC is a great program for young adults like myself to develop skills and utilize resources to take the next step in our future. I also feel like OEC is a great program to help clean up our community."

"I had a great experience at the NYWEA conference. I learned a lot of interesting things. I think the water industry should have more exposure. I think most people just flush the toilet and never think about how it's all possible just like myself before the conference. I liked the competition between the different waste water teams the most. I learned a lot about the process of cleaning the dirty water and I also learned how many different aspects there are to the entire waste water system. The opportunity broke my preconceived notions that the field was about wading in poop."

## Words from Young Adult Crewmember Jason Melchior

"This year is different for me because I'm doing more things than last year as a Youth Crew member. I am learning how to prune trees, identify different plants and use different tools. Green Infrastructure taught me how to maintain Rain Gardens. For example we learned about what plants to keep and what plants to remove. This season was my first time planting trees, which requires a different pace than what I'm used to."

"We attended the NYWEA Conference and on Day #2, we were spectators at the annual 'Operators Challenge'. My favorite part was watching the operators simulate a Water Main Break, the operators used big hand saws to cut the pipe while their other teammate cut a cylinder hole into another pipe so they could "repair" the issue. I never realized how much body strength something like that takes. I also enjoyed the tour of the Wastewater Treatment facility, I found it cool that they use UV Lights as part of the sanitation process to purify the water."



Crewmembers Jason Melchior, James Walker, and Darren Jackson (left to right) visit a water treatment plant during a New York Water Environment Association Conference.

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# Spring Community Events

BY KATE ABEL

Onondaga Earth Corps (OEC) had been busy this past spring. Kicking off with community events in late April, we collaborated with community partners or hosted volunteer events in city parks, sometimes multiple in a single day. On Earth Day, April 23rd, OEC Staff, Youth, Young Adults and an AmeriCorps member helped to maintain community gardens throughout Syracuse during the Syracuse Grows resource drive. The Youth crew members joined with Syracuse Grows and Jubilee Homes at the Southwest Community Learning Farm to repair and fill planting beds, clean up litter, and load trucks with compost that was distributed to other Syracuse Grows gardens in the city. At the Pioneer Homes Community Garden, a Young Adult and AmeriCorps member worked with volunteers to cover the garden pathways with cardboard and wood chips in preparation for the spring's planting. In total, OEC helped to deliver 20 yards of compost, 6 yards of wood chips were laid down, and 1100 gallons of trash were removed.

On April 30th, Youth crew members, Young Adult crew members and OEC staff got together to host a volunteer planting event in partnership with Onondaga Environmental Institute at the Feldmeier Company on Brooklawn Parkway. With the help of 32 volunteers, close to 260 tree and shrub seedlings were planted, enclosed with combi-tubes, secured with stakes, and watered. This is part of a larger project installing riparian buffer zones along Ley Creek.



Crew and volunteers move a large pile of mulch to use at multiple Earth Day community events.



Tree tubes were staked alongside a water way by the Feldmeier Company.



Volunteers and crewmembers planted trees at a community event at Kirk Park.

# Spring Community Events (continued)

As we jumped into May, we continued to hold community tree planting events in collaboration with the Syracuse Department of Parks and Recreation. On May 7th, in honor of "I Love My Parks Day", with the help of 9 volunteers, OEC planted 15 bare root trees. Bare root trees are trees that have been dug and stored without any soil around their roots. Without the soil wrapped around these trees, it is much easier to plant them, however, they must be planted within a week, to ensure roots do not dry out.

Lastly, we wrapped up our tree planting for the spring season at Schiller Park. On May 21st, OEC held a volunteer event planting perennials and small trees on the southwest side slopes of the Roundtop. Thirty-one volunteers came to learn how to plant container trees on the slopes. These are different from our city and street tree plantings as we need to create a raised shelf on the downhill side to prevent water from running straight past tree roots. In total, 78 perennial plants, and 15 small trees were planted in the park.

Our community volunteer events are just one way that Onondaga Earth Corps engages with the public in a hands-on way. If you are looking for a way to get dirty, and help beautify your environment, check out our Events calendar or sign up for our Mailing list on our website. There will be tons of opportunities coming up (especially this Fall)!



Two young volunteers sit on a log at the Schiller Park Community Planting event while holding a Rosy sedge.

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# Common Milkweed- Native Plant

BY TYRELL BURKE

Common milkweed, scientifically known as *Asclepias syriaca*, is a perennial flowering plant commonly found in our area. It is also referred to as butterfly flower, silkweed, silky swallow-wort, and Virginia silkweed, is native to southern Canada and much of the U.S.



east of the Rocky Mountains. Known to produce a white latex when cut open, it's flowers are highly fragrant and vary in color from white through pinkish and purplish. Those flowers are very nectariferous and an important food source for the monarch butterfly caterpillars.

More than 450 insects species feed on the milkweed including beetles, butterflies, bees, ants, and wasps. The common milkweed's latex does contain large quantities of cardiac glycosides that make old, tall plants toxic to humans and large animals. However, the young shoots, young leaves, flower buds, and immature fruits are all edible raw. In both North America and Europe, the milkweed was used to treat respiratory infections such as pleurisy. Milkweed saw potential for commercial processing in the 1890s and 1940s because of its bast (inner bark) fiber that ultimately failed. Both the bast fiber and the floss were historically used by Native Americans for various textiles and cordage (making of ropes and cords, especially in ship rigging). The common milkweed was also cultivated commercially to be used for insulation in winter coats.

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Use [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) when making Amazon purchases & select Onondaga Earth Corps as your charity.

### Fund-A-Truck

Donate towards our fleet vehicles. Fund-A-Truck goal: \$50,000

### Bottle Bonanza

Redeem your returnables at one of our redemption center partners: Express Bottle Return, F-M Returnables, Papa Cans and Bottle Return. Bottle and Can Retrieval. Ask them to deposit the \$ to the Onondaga Earth Corps Account.



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## ABOUT THE ONONDAGA EARTH CORPS

When the Eli MacDonald Green Team was restructured in 2005 as the Onondaga Earth Corps (OEC) for local communities, OEC was formed to:

- Help youth understand the relationship between people and the urban ecosystem
- Engage youth in hands-on community and environmental service learning projects
- Train youth for future jobs and careers in environmental fields
- Empower youth by developing their leadership abilities that help them analyze situations, solve problems and implement strategies to improve their communities

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