

## Riverwood field guide a floral treat

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By: Joe Chin

**August 20, 2008 09:48 AM** - Nina Barabas has been fascinated with wild plants ever since walking the hillsides in her native Romania.

A couple decades later, she's still utterly fascinated, only this time with those growing in Mississauga.

Now, with a doctorate on the subject, Barabas is co-author, along with Eva Bruni, of *Wildflowers of Riverwood*, an authoritative plant field guide published by the Mississauga Garden Council.

The booklet evolved from a photographic database of the 150 acres of land, located on the east bank of the Credit River, the pair of volunteers was creating for MGC.

Some four years ago, Barabas and Bruni, then a Queen's University student working at MGC for the summer, were shooting the 400 or so plant species found in Riverwood, when they got the idea for the booklet.

"People we met on the trails were always asking about the plants, so we thought, 'Why not write a bit of information and make it available to the public?'" said Barabas.

The result is a 184-page guide that's a must-have resource for visitors to the preserve, which MGC is helping the City of Mississauga develop as a public garden.

One hundred and fifty species — chosen because they're the most interesting or showy — are documented in the booklet. Plants are grouped by flower colour for easy reference. The detailed, high-resolution photographs are combined with natural history, practical uses, reference to whether the plant is native or introduced or poisonous, all with an easy-to-use cross-indexing system.

The guide is chock-full of anecdotal information.

"We felt that people are more likely to remember the plants they see during a walk if they correlate it with a story or an interesting fact," said Barabas.

For example, the burs of the common Burdock, which clings tenaciously to clothing, inspired the invention of Velcro. And when the Monarch butterfly larvae eat Milkweed foliage, they ingest a chemical that's toxic to their predators, such as birds.

There are 10 distinct ecological areas in Riverwood, ranging from dry and moist old field to mature and young deciduous forest, mixed forest and marsh.

"With such a diversity of land and micro-climates, combined with the changing of seasons, it's easy to imagine the variety of plant species growing in this city park. All of it is easily seen along the inviting trails," said Barabas, who's a member of MGC's board of directors.

*Wildflowers of Riverwood* is available for sale (\$29.99 for MGC members, \$34.99 for the public) at the historic Chappell House, located in Riverwood.

All proceeds from the guide go into supporting the council's community programs and services.

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Staff photo by Nikki Wesley  
*Nina Barabas (left) and Eva Bruni are releasing a new book, Wildflowers of Riverwood.*