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### Invest in our Planet

Climate change is affecting us more than ever. The massive amount of carbon dioxide that has been released into the atmosphere is having severe consequences. More air pollution, volatile weather events, and warming of the oceans are changing our planet. Everybody wants to solve this problem, but many individuals feel as if they don't have the power to. Everyone looks to each other to make change, which makes accomplishment rare. We can and must take initiative through our household and community gardens. Many houses in Elk Rapids have flower or vegetable gardens that they take pride in. I spent hours transplanting daylilies and planting tulips with my dad in the spring warmth. Gardens not only make the landscape beautiful, but also benefit the environment. What makes gardening even more beneficial to the environment is planting only native plants. Planting native plants in household and community gardens reduces the amount of water and fertilizer used in gardens, and provides habitat for threatened species.

Choosing to plant native conserves resources as they do not need as many resources to flourish. Native plants are meant to thrive in Michigan's climate, therefore native plants do not need as many pesticides or fertilizers to stay healthy ("Gardening for the Environment"). This helps keep our lakes free of contaminated runoff, which harms plant and animal life in the Great Lakes. Native plants can provide a beautiful garden while protecting the environment.

Planting Native not only conserves resources but also creates habitat for native species. Exotic plants can become invasive, and invasive species often disrupt the food chain and destroy

natural habitat. Although these problems may seem too big to combat, planting native flowers and grasses can help protect animals that are threatened or endangered. Planting milkweed helps Monarchs grow from larva to a butterfly, as milkweed is a Monarch's host plant (*Michigan Conservation Summary // LandScope America*). A simple thing an individual can do to help protect our ecosystem. Michigan has around 665 endangered species, and it is important to do our best to protect Michigan's uniqueness and ecological diversity. Every effort to make change matters, even if it is something that seems as insignificant as planting milkweed or butterfly weed.

It is important to preserve our ecosystems for future generations. Not only to protect the environment, but so they can experience the wonder of nature. Part of what makes Michigan beautiful is the vast array of species. Would nature be as important to the next generation if they never saw a monarch? If they never saw a trillium? If they never saw a bat fly through the evening sky? We can take steps to ensure that they experience the wonder of nature. We can plant native species to help provide these unique animals with more habitat. We have a duty to protect our planet and preserve the magic for future generations.