

Erin Norsworthy, Outreach Assistant, recently met with Jann and Mike Van Massenhoven to talk about their approach to tree planting. Here's their inspirational story.

Plantings benefit landowners and the environment alike. In the case of Jann and Mike Van Massenhoven, planting has been a holistic experience. In 2009, they retired a portion of their land beside St. Augustine Creek due to drainage challenges. It is now a reforested wetland that helps to filter runoff and prevent soil erosion. Earlier this year they applied for more trees and shrubs to infill and diversify their initial planting and to start a journey of healing.

The Van Massenhovens enjoy their planting both personally and for its environmental benefits. “We do respect our land and we want to improve it as much as possible,” said Jann Van Massenhoven, explaining that they aspire to support the land and aquatic ecosystems on their property. Since the couple have planted from the west to east of their property, they have provided a natural corridor for wildlife to “gain access from one property to the next... without having to expose themselves out in the open field,” said Mike Van Massenhoven. The couple also benefits from the planting recreationally. They made trails within the area to enjoy its natural beauty and walk their dogs, and they aim to use it for hunting and making maple syrup when it is more established.



Their planting is truly impressive, because while Maitland Conservation does offer coordination assistance with a contractor, the Van Massenhovens decided to plant the trees themselves. Their intention was not only to continue naturalizing their property, but also to help their family heal from the passing from their son, Calvin. Jann explained that being in nature and improving their property is something their son would have supported. She described how, after suffering the traumatic loss, the planting project was a way for the family to occupy their hands and minds and immerse themselves in the therapeutic healing of the outdoors together.

Along with the healing process, the planting offered them a sense of accomplishment and togetherness. “We got our kids involved in it, which is even better... it just gives you that achievement of, ‘Wow, I did this myself,’... especially when they start growing and they get bigger,” expressed Jann.

In terms of the work that goes into a planting, Jann advises that, “it’s something you have to get yourself prepared for, because it [has] a lot of steps to it... but if you’re willing to see the outcome of it, then I think it’s for sure well worth it.”

The Van Massenhovens have gone above and beyond the required steps, from researching tree species, to staking the newly planted trees to monitor their health. The maintenance is a natural step since they spend much of their time outdoors. “When we go for walks, if we see a grapevine or something aggressive on the trees, we take it down,” Jann explained. Beyond that, they even placed duck boxes to add shelter and encourage more biodiversity in their wetland.

As for their experience with Maitland Conservation, while she admits the paperwork can seem daunting, Jann appreciated the advice and assistance that Maitland Conservation’s Forestry Technician offered once she submitted her applications.

If you would like to start a planting on your property, you can visit the Stewardship Programs tab on the Maitland Conservation website.

For more information or for planting project ideas, contact Maitland Conservation’s Forestry Technician, Greg Urquhart, at 519-335-3557 ext. 235 or trees@mvca.on.ca.