

RITA in Action!

### **The Soil and Water Conservation Districts Speak for the Trees!**

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Many years ago, Indiana was about 90% forested land; today's percentage is at 21%. Clay, Greene, Sullivan, and Vigo SWCDs are putting their best foot forward to help increase that number for their communities by hosting native tree giveaways to local households for free while also educating about the importance of planting native trees. Native trees are adapted to our local climate and soils, meaning they need less maintenance and water. These trees also support local wildlife and help contribute to biodiversity. Some non-native tree species planted can disrupt ecosystems. These trees are also known to be more susceptible to pests.

Each county had its twist on their native tree giveaway, handing out different trees and how they hosted their event differently. All 4 of these counties picked their trees up for the state nursery, Vallonia Tree Seedling Nursery in Jackson County. Vallonia allows tree orders to be placed in the month of October, with tree pickup in March/April. Clay County SWCD allows their community members to place an order for which trees they want.

This year, Clay County SWCD exceeded its goal of having 2025 native trees pre-ordered with a total of 2700 trees given away! Clay County gave away Persimmon, Ninebark, White Pine, White Oak, Elderberry, and Bald Cypress trees. These trees reached about 155 local landowners who came to the office! The Clay County Parks Dept. took about 175 trees to use around the county! They had help from a Northview High School class that separated the tree orders, making pickup a quick process. As community members came in to pick the tree up, we could just search for the name and grab their tree bundle.

Sullivan County SWCD hosted its tree giveaway at its very first Earth Day celebration, handing out 500 native trees! They handed out White Pine, Tulip, Persimmon, Button Bush, and White Oak. This event went from 3 to 6 p.m., and about 200 local landowners attended and picked up trees. This event also had other local organizations present, such as the master Gardeners group doing a plant sale, ISDA planted free strawberry plants, and so much more! The tree giveaway was first-come, first-served. As the community members lined up, they would tell me what trees they wanted, and they were bundled up right there! Each home was limited to 10 trees.

Greene County SWCD handed out their native trees at the Greene County Master Gardeners Home and Patio Show. While handing out 550 trees, Greene County also educated landowners in attendance about invasive species and why we should plant native. They handed out Chipikan Oak, Swamp White Oak, American Plum, Button Bush, Persimmon, and Pecan trees. They also had a first-come, first-served basis where they lined up and would tell us what tree(s) they wanted, and we bundled them up right there!

Vigo County SWCD handed out their native trees on May 10th at the Herb Faire in Terre Haute, IN. They had 500 trees to give away, with 4 different species: White Pine, American Plum, Bald Cypress, and Tulip Poplar. Vigo County also donates about 150 trees to the Vigo County Parks Dept, for planting around the county.

Planting Natives is always fun but imagine how much more fun it would be if those natives were in your county! If your district is looking for a fun new event to spend CWI money on, this might just be it. Contact one of these counties above to see how they got theirs started.