

## Get To Know What Your Lot Is Trying To Tell You

Jackie Chen graciously wrote the following article for our residents. She will be providing more information in future newsletters on how we can be more ecologically friendly.

Gully wash, standing water, cracked gardens, parched plants -- we all have at least one. Why? Kensington Downs is built on land reclaimed from the Great Black Swamp.

The swamp's complex ecosystem developed in clay-bottomed Lake Maumee whose ancient ice flows dug , then filled, with their melt water. Successive waves of sturdy plants rooted on its rocky shores and conditioned the clay soil. By the dawn of modern times, wet woodland had struck an ever-shifting balance among tree-capped hillocks, shrubby thickets, marshy hollows and seasonal pools. A wild, vast treasure grove of plant and animal life, the swamp presented both barrier and opportunity to the people who came to live here.

In the late 1600's and early 1700's Indians arrived, pushed by tribal warfare and European settlement further east. Simultaneously, old-world explorers traveled the area. Both took nourishment from the wild and moved lightly in its shelter. Then the Europeans spread west. Families settled. They felled trees to build cabins and tucked vegetables in beds to augment what they found in the thickets and bogs. Coming from an upland agricultural heritage, they viewed the wetlands as a hindrance to travel and their farming methods, a wasteland to be reformed by removing the water. In 1885 they developed a plan to drain the swamp. Thereafter, a new mosaic came to dot the land with pastures, woodlots and small fields.

During the 1970s Agriculture Secretary Earl Butz proclaimed a shift in policy: "Farm border to border and feed the world." Pasture, woodlot, fencerow, and fallow field – all fell victims to sod buster tactics, reshaped like plantations of corn and soybeans. Storm water attacked these fields, lifting rich soil and carrying it away through ditches to muddy streams and rivers and foul drinking water.

Over one such field, Kensington Downs was platted. Heavy equipment stripped what topsoil remained and dug deep trenches for concrete drains, covering them again with the clay subsoil. It shaped swales that would whisk water to those drains and keep the land dry. Deprived of swamp plants and their remains, our soil resists water and stores minute amounts compared to the system's climax; therefore, we alternate between too much and too little.

Under the veneer of lawn and garden, the shadow of the swamp remains. Can we reclaim the buffer it once offered? Do plants exist which condition soil, handle water and provide beauty? How can we catch, tame and store water without getting soggy soil or mosquitoes?

Come hear a panel of experts from City Utilities, Allen County Soil and Water Conservation Service, and the Indiana Native Plant and Wildflower Society. They will address these questions and present an arsenal of solutions designed for homeowner needs at our Annual Association Meeting.