A Forest the Size of a Tennis Court?

Why call it a Guild Forest?

In nature, native tree species don't grow randomly or in isolation. They tend to occur in communities, or guilds, of species that share similar requirements for sunlight, terrain and soil conditions. These plants are adapted to grow together, and their relationships help support a healthy, functioning forest. The **Guild Forest** draws on this idea, bringing compatible species together to recreate the relationships and layers found in a natural forest.

The idea is to accelerate what nature does over time. As the plants grow, they compete for sunlight and nutrients while becoming interdependent through the soil fungal network. The resulting layers of vegetation create a more complex ecosystem, with the potential to become largely self-sustaining within three years of its initial planting.

With this **Guild Forest** planting, the clearing was carefully prepared, with many problem plants and introduced invasive species removed – plants that threaten the health and regeneration of our native forests. They were replaced with a diverse community of locally appropriate native species.

This work is part of a growing movement to bring native forests into small urban and suburban spaces. These projects do more than add trees. They create habitat, support biodiversity, improve local environmental conditions and give communities a hands-on role in ecological restoration.

At Greenwich Audubon, the hope is to see the **Guild Forest** grow well above head height in a few short years, beginning to provide nesting habitat for birds and shelter and food for other wildlife. Over time, it will become a small but increasingly complex forest ecosystem.

The Guild Forest is also an experiment in how we think about planting trees: not simply as individual trees, but as communities of species that grow together. The lessons learned through the **Guild Forest** will help inform future restoration and tree-planting projects throughout town.