

Rain Gardens - Let the thought Soak In!

by Sandy Hart

Now that it's spring and our family has been in the house for weeks, I find myself walking out to the very edge of our backyard every day to see all the new plants coming up. I've become a little obsessed with our new native rain garden and every year it gets better and better. What was once a muddy area with some pretty ferns and day lilies has become a gorgeous attraction for native birds, bees, and butterflies.



About three years ago we noticed that, with increased rainfall, the area along our fenceline in the backyard was staying wet for much longer than it used to. While we loved the plants back there, we had learned a lot through LBOLA about how a rain garden can help with stormwater runoff while providing critical habitat for our native species.

We had read about the massive population decline of monarch butterflies and how homeowners can help by planting milkweed. With their deep roots, milkweed is a great choice for rain gardens. We wanted to make a difference in our own backyard, so we did some research and decided to put in a native rain garden.

We cleared out the non-native plants along the fence line and, working with Native Restoration Services, planted native species that do well in wet areas: wild quinine, prairie blazingstar, coneflowers, milkweed, cup plants and black-eyed Susans, to name a few. We put tall flowers that grow over 8' along the fence line and worked our way to the front, planting coneflowers and butterfly weed closer to the lawn. We quickly realized that we were going to have to keep the dogs out, so we put up some inexpensive fencing just to give our new plants a chance!

Now, three years later, it is one of our favorite spots. The

flowers are spectacular-purple, white, yellow, orange, and red against the rich green of the tall grasses is, to me, breathtaking. Every day I walk out and see birds and butterflies that I haven't seen in a very long time. Somehow they've found our small garden island in an ocean of turf, and every year we get more and more of them. We've seen Baltimore orioles, bluebirds, indigo buntings, thrushes, cardinals, and a house wren is nesting again in our yard for the third year. We had over twelve monarch butterflies emerge from their chrysalis, and to see them dry their wings and fly off was amazing. Monarchs that become butterflies in the fall are the ones that make that long migration to Mexico, and we loved seeing them transition from egg to butterfly on our milkweed. Even the fall has added beauty;



the flowers die back and more birds visit, eating the seeds while perched precariously on the swaying stalks. This spring, the native plants are starting to

seed themselves, and the garden is filling in over time. We've turned the remaining backyard beds to native plants too, bringing in new flowers and grasses that do well in full sun for the north side or part shade for the south. The added benefit to going with native prairie plants are their deep roots; our cup plants have roots that can go fifteen feet deep, so the area is muddy no longer and our neighbors aren't impacted by stormwater runoff from our yard. We were a little nervous about changing our beds from plants that had been there for years, but now I wish we had done it sooner. In this frightening time, when there is so much uncertainty in the world, this little garden project has brought me a lot of peace and joy. As this stay at home order gets extended, I know that we'll be spending a lot of time in the garden.

Sandy is a mother, a wife, and President of the Lake County Board, but is proudest of her membership on the board of Lake Bluff Open Lands!

Green Minds Recycling App



Green Minds Lake Forest Lake Bluff created a free, downloadable app- **Recycle LFLB**. This app provides answers to the commonly asked question, "What do I do with this now that I am no longer using it?" Plastic clothes hangers, unused paint, musical instruments, Espresso Coffee Capsules, a National Geographic Magazine collection, old

blue jeans, you name it; the app has a searchable data base of over 500 items. Where applicable, it provides the "most sustainable solution," places nearby where an item is accepted for donation/reuse. It provides the best way to recycle items that are not donated for reuse. And, of course, it covers what items are accepted in single-stream, curbside recycling bins. **Recycle LFLB** is designed specifically for Lake Bluff and Lake Forest residents and directs users to locations nearby.

For more information, visit green-minds.org