

Yard by Yard Community Resiliency Project

Flutter Flyer



Introduction

Welcome to the Flutter Flyer, the quarterly newsletter for the Yard by Yard Community Resiliency Project! For new participants (and anyone who could use a refresher), we start things off with an overview of the Yard by Yard program, followed by program updates and helpful articles from our staff. Thank you all for taking the pledge to do your part to make a difference... Yard by Yard!



In This Issue...

- News and Announcements
- Yard by Yard: A Short History
- Sam Says!
- In my Yard
- Practice Spotlight: Fruit producing Tree or Shrub
- Garden Note Taking
- and more!

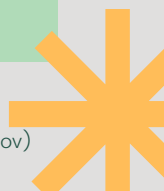
What is Yard by Yard?

The Yard by Yard Project encourages residents in cities and towns to add strength, health, and resiliency to our communities! This happens when yards are managed to improve soil health and contribute to clean water. Yard by Yard recognizes and supports citizens who take action to make their yards resilient and nature-friendly. The Yard by Yard program aims to provide three things: 1) recognition for having property that is nature friendly, 2) resources to help citizens create healthy and functional landscapes, and 3) food for our very important pollinators!

The Yard by Yard Project is sponsored by the Friends of Blue Thumb, the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission's Soil Health and Blue Thumb Programs, and by the conservation district in which you live.

EDITORS

Marcus Long (marcus.long@conservation.ok.gov)
Cheryl Cheadle (cheryl.cheadle@conservation.ok.gov)



NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

LOCAL AG SUMMIT

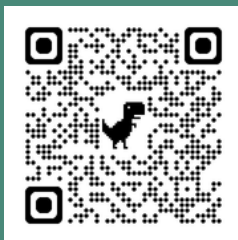
A GATHERING PLACE FOR AGRITOURISM PRODUCERS,
FARMERS MARKET MANAGERS, AND GROWERS.

January 28, 2026

9AM - 5PM

200 W Albany St, Broken Arrow OK 74012

[Learn more and
register!](#)



Native Farming Solutions - Winter Solstice Market

December 20th 2025

4:00PM - 8:00PM

Culture Hub

228 SW 25th St, OKC, OK 73109

This event is to celebrate the Winter Solstice by bringing our community together through locally sourced food and cultural activities and artisan vendors

For more information contact Native Farming
Solutions a nfsokc.info@gmail.com

Blue Thumb Volunteer Conference

December 6th 2025

8:30AM - 2:30PM

Lake Arcadia

7201 East 33rd Street

Join us for fun, fellowship and learning at Lake Arcadia on Saturday, December 6!

We hope you take the time this season to join us in celebrating all of your monitoring and education efforts throughout the year. We have a great slate of speakers who will deliver engaging and informative talks on subjects ranging from the fish of Oklahoma to freshwater sponges and even a look back in time at the history of rivers in Oklahoma!

Register now at WWW.BLUETHUMBOK.COM

Project WET "Earth Systems" Workshop

December 5th, 2025

Arcadia Conservation Education Area

7201 East 33rd Street, Edmond OK

You are cordially invited to join us for a Project WET: Water in Earth Systems workshop on Friday, December 5, from 1:00–4:00 p.m., at beautiful Lake Arcadia during the Blue Thumb Volunteer Conference. Get ready to make a splash in your teaching practice—and ripple inspiration through your students' understanding of water, systems, and conservation.

Project Learning Tree: Explore your Environment

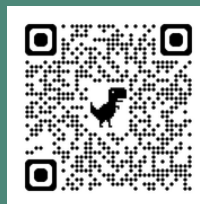
December 15th, 2025

Tulsa County Extension Center

4116 E 15th St, Tulsa, Oklahoma

Calling all educators, volunteers, and nature enthusiasts! This in-service will introduce you to the Explore Your Environment: K–8 Activity Guide, a comprehensive resource offering 50 multidisciplinary activities designed to connect youth with nature, enhance critical thinking skills, and foster environmental awareness

**[For more information about either of these
workshop click here!](#)**



Yard by Yard

A Short History

By: Morgan Sommer, Oklahoma County Conservation District



In the beginning of 2020, a small project began as a simple invitation for neighbors to connect with the land around them. Yard by Yard, A Community Resiliency Project was born from a partnership between Friends of Blue Thumb, the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission's Soil Health Team, and the Blue Thumb Programs. The project began with a simple idea: to help Oklahomans discover the power of their own backyards.

The first year, the project took root in Oklahoma and Tulsa County, where eighteen people dedicated their yards to conservation efforts. They planted native flowers, committed to not using pesticides, and learned how even the smallest patch of soil can make a difference. By the end of the second year ('21), their numbers doubled - then doubled again in 2022. What began with a small group of committed yards had multiplied into 114 examples of conservation in action and proud environmental stewardship.

As word spread, neighbors talked, and people shared photos of their pollinator gardens, home grown produce, and more. What grew was more than the plants, but a community effort where everyone feels and understands the important part we all play. In 2023, the movement reached new heights with 106 new certifications, followed by more than 90 in 2024, along with the introduction of the Grounds by Grounds sister program.



In 2025, expanded promotion, the Wildlife Habitat Grant Program, and support from so many partner organizations significantly increased the program's reach. Workshops, public events, and community partnerships helped residents understand how native plants, soil health practices, and responsible water use can strengthen their landscapes. As a result, more than 275 yards were certified in the program's most successful year yet.



Today, nearly 600 certified locations dot the Oklahoma landscape across 30 participating counties. Each one represents a household that chose to learn, to care, and to help heal the land. And the story isn't finished—with every person who joins, Yard by Yard becomes not just a project, but a growing, statewide effort—working together, one yard at a time to build a healthier, more resilient future for all.

After a year of working with Yard by Yard, I have seen a wide variety of yards and gardens, each supporting incredible habitat diversity for birds, insects, and other living things. Working within the conservation community has taught me about the wide range of native plants and their benefits—not only for wildlife but also for building stronger community connections.

Every time we certify a new yard, I see how we help reconnect habitat that has been disrupted and fragmented by land development or habitat loss. While I deeply value the conservation of natural resources, I also appreciate the power of community to create large-scale impact. It is inspiring to witness firsthand how Yard by Yard brings people closer to their neighbors and strengthens their connection to the environment.

It has been an honor to engage with a larger community that shares these goals and values. Together, we are conserving natural resources and promoting stewardship that benefits both current and future generations, showing how individual efforts can grow into lasting positive change for our landscapes and communities.



Share Your Flutter Flyer



The Flutter Flyer is the seasonal enewsletter for participants of the Yard by Yard Community Resiliency Project. Even though the enewsletter is for a specific audience, the information is of a general enough nature to be helpful to lots of people. It is okay to go ahead and spread your Flutter Flyer to a larger group!

This is how information moves into new places – by our sharing. Think about the friends you have who perhaps mow their yard really short. Think about a teacher at the local school who is known to do science projects. Think of a small business with a small green area or even just a planter who could qualify for a mini space sign. Just forward your Flutter Flyer their direction!



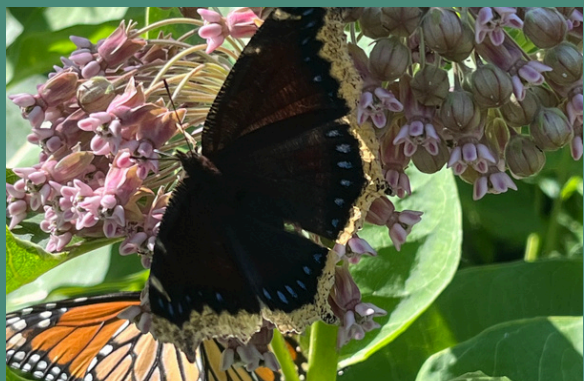
Sam Says!



I take my job with the Yard by Yard Community Resiliency Project quite seriously. I was actually not much more than a kit (a very young raccoon) when Cheryl recruited me to be the mascot. My sidekick is Flutter, the monarch. She has left for her wintering site in Mexico by now. I admit that I miss her. She is not only my sidekick, but my best friend.

Yard by Yard has taken off pretty nicely in Oklahoma! Cheryl, Marcus, and Jack get lots of invitations to talk about Yard by Yard. Especially Marcus and Jack are out in counties all over Oklahoma taking a look at people's yards and giving them advice about how to make yards "nature friendly."

Now that autumn is here my work for Yard by Yard will slow down a little, and in the winter I will really be more of a part-time mascot. If it gets pretty cold I tend to be less active. In case you wonder what my duties are with Yard by Yard, the rest of this article is devoted to sharing just that.



SO...as the official mascot for Yard by Yard...

- I write articles for the Flutter Flyer! Yes, it is only four per year, but I think these things through and then work with Cheryl to get them in print for human eyes. Cheryl doesn't appreciate last minute ideas, so we work together on these well before the deadline Marcus (the editor) provides.
- I do quite a bit of posing for social media, documents, signs, etc. This means I try to stay "lean and mean" and have bright eyes, a bushy tail, and a soft and healthy coat.
- I am an unofficial mascot for urban wildlife. My buddies and me suffer from a bad reputation. We are more than dumpster divers and thieves of cat food left outside!
- I am proud also to be a sounding board when Cheryl becomes discouraged about the biodiversity crisis. Raccoons have a high tolerance for living close to humans, but that is not the case with a lot of wild animals.
- Lastly, I also work to come up with ideas that will help people see the value of nature friendly yards. Remember that your "Yard by Yard" sign should be prominently displayed so that people will get the idea and jump on their own journey toward an Earth that feeds Flutter, filters water, slows runoff, produces fresh fruit and vegetables, and creates homes for small creatures who are trying to get by in populated areas.

In My Yard:

By: Dana Mussatto - Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

I always delight in seeing monarchs, those orange-and-black beauties dipping and swooping through the year. But this year, I got to observe their magic up close. A few weeks ago, I noticed a small black-yellow-and-white caterpillar munching on milkweed in a sunny patch of our yard. Then, another, and another. At one point, my husband and I counted nine of these little critters on a handful of milkweed plants in our garden. Soon, we spotted a few chrysalises — and since we have obsessively documented them, inviting our friends and family to come marvel at them, too. (To do his part, our little nephew proudly plucked some feathery seeds from a nearly spent milkweed plant and scattered them around our backyard.) I was lucky enough to see one monarch shortly after she emerged from the chrysalis. For a few minutes, I watched as she stretched her wings in the sun. Then she took flight, joining others on a path south for the winter.



A monarch just after she emerged from a chrysalis formed on our little milkweed patch in the backyard

I feel immensely grateful to see these little wonders up close in my own yard. At a time when our monarch population has dwindled — and many other insect populations are at risk — I'm all the more awed by their magic. And for as much beauty and wonder these creatures can bring into our world, they need our help, too. Most insects — Monarchs included — are specialists, which means they can only eat and mature on a specific type of plant. The adaptations that let insects specialize on a particular plant have developed over eons, which means they often specialize on the plants they evolved with. For gardeners, that means to support our native pollinators and other native insects that our ecosystem relies on, we must plant the native plants they've evolved with over millennia. Monarch butterflies, for example, only lay their eggs on milkweed, and milkweed is all monarch caterpillars can eat. Without milkweed, Monarchs won't survive. Pollinators like Monarchs are critical to our ecosystems and food supply. They need us, and we need them.

Aromatic asters just after blooming in October 2025



We're fortunate in Oklahoma City to have a wealth of resources for people who want to learn to use their own yards to protect native wildlife and conserve our precious natural resources — Okies for Monarchs, the Yard by Yard Program and the Oklahoma Native Plant Network are a few favorites of mine. And the Homegrown National Park initiative is a way for Oklahomans to connect with thousands across the U.S. doing the same type of work in their gardens.

Blanketflowers and blue grama in the morning sun -- this garden area funded by Wildlife Habitat grant project



So, as we head into cooler months and have time to dream up spring garden plans, I hope you dream about the magic you can invite into your own yard by planting native plants. If you love Monarchs (or Queen butterflies), plant milkweed. Black swallowtails, our state butterfly, use plants like carrots, dill, parsley and fennel. Gulf fritillaries need passionvine. Asters, which welcome fall with brilliant purple blooms, are hosts to Pearl Crescent butterflies and feed a variety of pollinators especially in the waning months of the year, when flowering plants are scarcer. So get your hands dirty!. Start small – but find a way to invite some wonder into your garden in a way that works for you. Because, to echo the words of a native plant grower I admire: If you plant it, they will come.

Pearl crescent on a blanketflower -- this garden area funded by Wildlife Habitat grant project



Practice Spotlight:

Fruit Producing Trees and Shrubs

By Brandon Crockett, Oklahoma County Conservation District



Overview

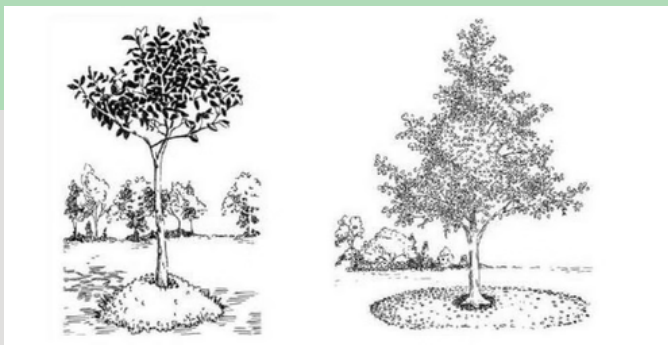
Fruit trees can seem like a challenging step for homeowners, but for those in neighborhoods, one or two trees is really all a family would need for their own consumption, so it wouldn't be too much to add to your normal garden routine! The main concerns for maintaining a healthy fruit tree are making sure the soil has proper drainage and watching out for pests and disease, but at the home level this should be easily manageable with little input and I'll go over what we can do to help deter them. For differentiation purposes, there are two types of fruit trees, pome fruit and stone fruit. Pome fruit includes apples, pears, quince, and even crabapples. Stone fruits include peaches, plums, apricots, cherries, also olives and almonds. In general, pome fruits can have fewer pest and disease problems and also usually bloom later than stone fruits so they are less likely to suffer from late spring frost damage.

Soil and Planting Area

When choosing an area to plant, soil drainage, air flow, and temperature are vital for the success of fruit trees. Making sure the soil surrounding your planting area has good drainage is super important for any type of fruit tree to insure their roots can breathe and aren't getting drowned from rains or watering. Pome fruits can do well in heavy clay soil as long as drainage is improved, but for stone fruits well drained soil is a necessity! Hilly, sloped, or elevated areas provide even better drainage. Picking an area that isn't going to box in their growth is really important to ensure ample airflow around them to reduce the likelihood or spread of disease. Planting near houses or in denser urban areas keeps temperatures generally warmer than the surrounding rural areas so you can take that into consideration when choosing varieties. Most importantly, fruit trees do best in full sun for maximizing fruit production.

Planting

Generally young trees come in plastic pots, bare root, or balled and burlapped, and each can have their own challenges! If you're getting bare root trees, it's best to plant them as soon as possible to prevent the roots from drying out. If planting is delayed for bare root, you can place them in a mound of loose soil and mulch to insulate them but be sure to keep it moist. Plastic potted and balled and burlapped trees often suffer from problems like girdling roots and root ball degradation. When going to plant them, planting depth should be about the same depth that they grew in the nursery or pot. Ensure the roots are in a natural position with any problem areas trimmed off, put soil over them and firm it up to squeeze out any air. When mulching lay out a ring mound of mulch better with a small basin layer on the inside to help with water drainage. Be sure to mulch lightly—too much mulch piled against the trunk can trap moisture and lead to rot.



Pollination

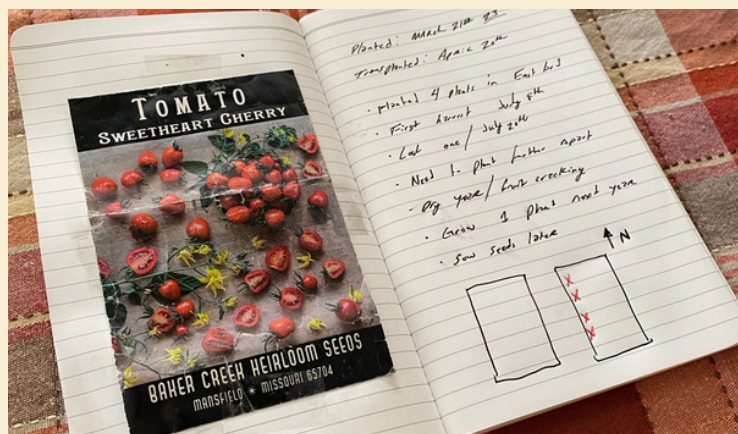
When picking varieties for your home it's important to note the pollination requirements of the species you're picking. Both pome and stone fruit have varieties that are self pollinating and there are varieties that are suited to our climate of both. If you're planting multiple trees of the same fruit, it's best to get a variety of different cultivars to avoid any pollination issues. Even for self pollinating trees, they can benefit from having compatible trees nearby for a better harvest.

End of The Year Garden Reflections

Garden Note Taking

By Jack Titchener, Oklahoma Conservation Commission

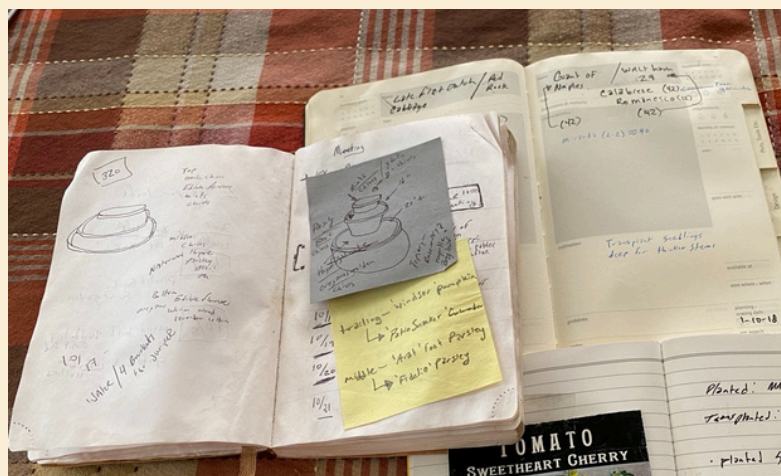
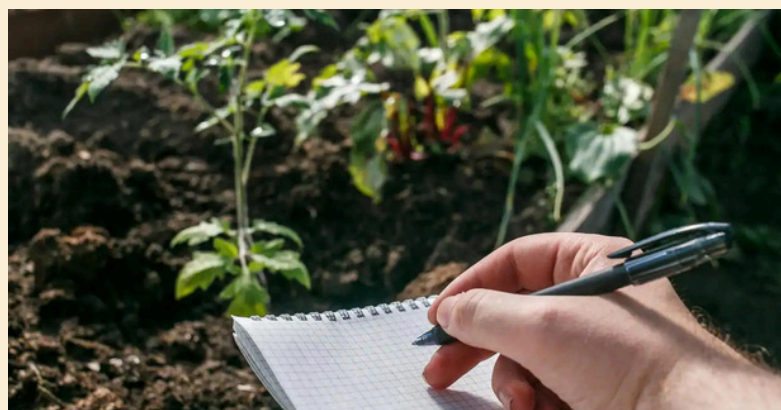
Sometimes as growers, we manage the garden from day to day without thinking about recording what is happening around us. If you were like me, starting out I was eager to move to the next growing season without giving much thought about the previous one, ready for a new beginning. One thing I realized once I had grown for many years was the importance of taking garden notes or having a garden diary.



Why is note taking

- ✱ Evaluates plant performance: Notes on specific varieties, including planting dates and harvest yields. This allows you to evaluate which plants are best suited for your garden or choose other varieties that are more suited.
- ✱ Reduces guesswork: Instead of relying on memory, which can let us down sometimes, notes provide concrete data that provides the information to make subtle changes that make a big impact. Did we plant tomatoes in that bed three years ago?
- ✱ Improves future planning: You can use past notes to make decisions for the next season, such as was it planted too late or too early? Which plants did well this year?
- ✱ Tracks success and failure: Recording what worked and what didn't helps you repeat successes and avoid repeating mistakes. We learn the most from our mistakes.

- ✱ Helps manage issues: Was there a disease or pest problem? When did it appear, and what treatments were used? It helps you address them more quickly in the future or again, manages pitfalls of the last growing season.
- ✱ Monitors environmental conditions: Keeping track of weather, rainfall, and soil conditions. This helps you understand how these factors influence your plants and can guide your watering and soil management strategies. Also, can help you predict future disease outbreaks or windows of watch.



Conclusion

I advise the casual gardener to take general notes once a week, but include specific dates with crops sown, disease outbreak, or first harvest. I promise if you take the extra time, it will pay dividends on chasing down problems and make you a better grower.



Oklahoma County's Growing Herbarium

By Brandon Crockett, Oklahoma County Conservation District

This year, the Oklahoma County Conservation District launched a new herbarium project to highlight the native and invasive plants growing throughout our county. Using a simple plant press and archival mounting process, our team collected and preserved 18 different species in just a few months. Now we're excited to share how easy it is to collect and press plants yourself—and even invite Oklahoma County residents to bring specimens to our office to be added to the collection.

1

Picking a specimen - Just have some curiosity about what's growing in your yard, on the side of the road, or near your creek and pick out what you want to identify! Many of our plants were found in our own gardens or on nearby roadsides.

2

Collecting - Once you've chosen your species, you'll want to collect as much of the plant as possible, this can include everything from the root tip to the flower or seed heads! Anything to show the specific characteristics of the species that helps identify it.



3



Preserving the collection - This may be necessary if you don't have your press at the time of collection, you'll need to take precautionary measures to ensure the specimen stays fresh. This can be as simple as using a small cooler or bag with a damp paper towel in order to keep the plant fresh for a short period of time.



4



Pressing and Drying the Plant - You'll take your specimen and arrange it to your liking on some old newspaper or parchment paper. You take that and assemble it between blotter paper with cardboard pieces on the outside of that to help absorb excess moisture. Then you'll need a way to press plants and paper together using straps or weights to speed the drying process and press the plant.



5



5th Mounting and Labeling - This is the fun part. Once your specimen is done drying, you'll arrange and glue it on the mounting paper and add a label to give details about it. The label is an important step as it gives important details about the plant like its botanical name, when and where you collected it, and notes about it.

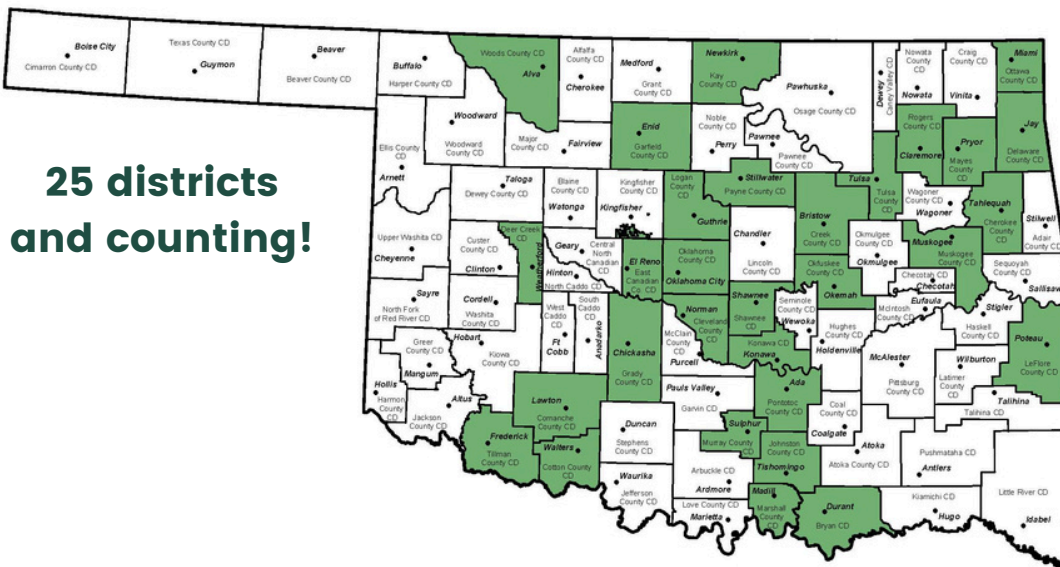
Participating Conservation Districts



Do you know your conservation district?

Conservation districts offer a variety of services to farmers and homeowners, including Yard by Yard. Learn more about your district here:

[conservation.ok.gov/
district-services-
division](http://conservation.ok.gov/district-services-division)



Questions? Comments?



yardbyyardproject@gmail.com



okconservation.org/yardbyyard



facebook.com/yardbyyardoklahoma

