

Yard by Yard Community Resiliency Project

Flutter Flyer

Special Editon: Grounds by Grounds



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!



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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.

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NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

What Programming do you want to See?

As the Yard by Yard community flourishes, so does the wealth of knowledge among our members! In our efforts to shape enriching programming for 2024, your input is invaluable. We invite you to share your thoughts:

- What programming would you find most beneficial?
- Are there specific areas of knowledge lacking in your community?

Your insights guide our mission to cultivate a thriving community. Reach out to us at yardbyyardproject@gmail.com and let your voice be heard!

Butterflies, Birds & Bees OH MY!

Walk through a series of stations that will teach you about creating a "nature friendly yard." Make your own native plant garden starter kit, explore your creative side, and play games!

Two Event Coming up in the Tulsa Area!

Saturday, 2/10/24

Rudisill Regional Library

1520 N Hartford Ave. 10AM to 2PM

Saturday 2/24/24

Brookside Public Library

1207 E 47th Pl. 11:30AM to 2:30PM

How's your sign doing?

With high winds, tornadoes, blazing heat, and cold winters, some of our Yard by Yard participants are finding that their Yard by Yard signs are looking pretty weathered. A few people's signs have been run over. If your sign is in bad shape, or even missing (yes, a few people have suffered the theft of their signs) contact your local conservation district for a replacement

Upcoming Blue thumb Trainings

Are you wondering what to do with all your spare time? Blue Thumb has three new volunteer trainings coming up. Blue Thumb volunteers monitor local streams, submit data, and help to educate the public about stream and river protection.

Stillwater Training: January 26 and 27, 2024

Ada Training: February 21 and 22, 2024

Oklahoma City Training: March 2 and 3, 2024

Contact cheryl.cheadle@conservation.ok.gov to learn more.

Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts 86th Annual State Meeting

The Yard by Yard team will be tabling at the OACD State Meeting this year. We hope that you will join us and stop by our table on February 25, 26, and 27th 2024 for our Annual OACD State Meeting. We're bringing in experts from across the United States to visit with you about creating drought free operations, climate & justice, and working with the microbes in your soil. The meeting will be held at the Embassy Suites located at 3233 Northwest Expressway, Oklahoma City, OK. For more information and registration visit

<https://www.okconservation.org/statemeeting24>

Norman Yard by Yard Workshop!

Saturday, February 24th, 2024

11:00AM to 1:00PM

Cleveland County is hosting a Yard by Yard workshop! If you've been interested in getting your yard certified but not sure how to get started than this is the event for you! Hear from experts on topics like soil health, water conservation, native plants and attracting pollinators. Follow Cleveland County Conservation District and Yard by Yard on Facebook for more details



Grounds by Grounds is Here!

About Grounds by Grounds

As the sister program to the Yard by Yard initiative, Grounds by Grounds zeroes in on public spaces, recognizing the unique environmental footprint and community influence of businesses, schools, churches, and parks.



Why Grounds by Grounds Matters:

Businesses, schools, churches, and parks are influential hubs within our communities, making their commitment to sustainable landscaping pivotal. Grounds by Grounds champions the transformation of these spaces into eco-conscious landscapes that foster biodiversity and environmental well-being.

Key Features

Community Impact:

- Aligning with Yard by Yard's mission, Grounds by Grounds aims to make a positive impact on the environment, fostering biodiversity, and enhancing the aesthetics and ecological function of shared spaces.

Support and Recognition:

- Participants gain support from the Yard by Yard team and community, but also recognition for their efforts and an opportunity to encourage others. Creating resilience and bringing our communities together.

Mini Grounds Option:

- Even smaller spaces can flourish with the Mini Grounds option, ensuring that every corner, regardless of size, can be apart of the Grounds by Grounds.



OKC Beautiful School Garden



Join the Movement

Businesses, schools, churches, parks, and passionate individuals are invited to be part of the Grounds by Grounds project. Connect with us on <https://www.okconservation.org/groundsbygrounds> to start a journey towards cultivating sustainable, vibrant outdoor spaces.

A (Bug) Walk in the Park

By: Stephanie Jordan

In late 2021 several pollinator enthusiasts were contacted by a local non-profit about a property near the Paseo District of central OKC. The area consisted of two city lots (their houses having long-since burned down) bordered on one side by Shartel Avenue. The city had allowed the non-profit to utilize and manage it as public greenspace. For years, the space had been a thriving community garden, but over time, community interest waned and grass was overtaking the gardens, creating a maintenance burden.

Several who were contacted agreed to form a committee to manage it. After some brainstorming and input from the neighbors, we decided to redirect the focus from veggie gardens to habitat, and thus, in early 2022, the Central Park Community Garden began its transformation into a pollinator park.

The going was slow at first – mostly enthusiastic committee members and a handful of volunteers, trying to figure out which overgrown patch was on the cusp of drawing a citation from the city and figuring out how to keep the established pollinator plants from succumbing to drought. There wasn't much bandwidth left for building on what was already there. But over time, our volunteer teams grew, and we started making inroads on the grass.



In late 2022, the park received a donation of a fiberglass bison, which had been beautifully painted to resemble the real thing. In large-scale prairie restoration, real bison play a key role in improving the health of the prairie ecosystem. Our guy (Beau) stands majestically on the open corner of the lot, as if to offer an invitation to rethink urban spaces. As his recently installed native grasses fill in and further contextualize his presence, it is easy to reimagine what grass can also look like in our own landscapes.

2022 also saw the reshaping of half of the west lot into a prairie restoration project. A generous donor brought in heavy equipment to scrape the bermuda which had reclaimed much of the lot, and to lay down a walk path. We hated to lose the very rich topsoil that the garden plots had contributed to through the years, but that much bermuda is a lot to grapple with. In January of 2023, a busload of local highschoolers came out to prep the soil and seed the space. They had just completed a unit on Prairie Ecology and were able to participate in the physical restoration of what they had been studying.

Last year we added an amazing Little Bity Library, complete with giant monarch wings. It's stocked with nature and gardening themed books, as well as packets of wildflower seed mix. Along with Beau, this beautiful library piques the curiosity of people passing by, and draws them in to explore.

Over time we were able to build on the pollinator plants that were in the park, and insect activity continues to increase through the growing season and beyond. In May, we hosted a Yard by Yard education workshop and proudly earned our Yard by Yard certification. (Woohoo!) We are hoping to offer space for a YxY demonstration garden to be installed in the near future.

Other projects on the horizon for 2024 include: a border fence consisting of insect nesting habitat and art, a cut-and-come-back herb garden to share with the community, and the addition of multipurpose plants that offer: food to people and pollinators; enrich the soil; and are visually interesting enough to belong in any front flowerbed. We encourage you to visit the park, and to sign up for one of our volunteer days by following us on Facebook and Instagram, or by visiting our website (<http://centralparkcommunitygarden.org/>).



Marcus Long and Katie Hawk

Recruiting for Grounds by Grounds: Yard By Yard is Thinking Bigger!

Thank you for having a Yard by Yard Community Resiliency Project Yard! Much of this newsletter is about introducing a new aspect of Yard by Yard for Grounds! Now, businesses, churches, schools, and parks can proudly display Yard by Yard signs, and we've introduced another fun feature for "mini grounds." Even a business with just planters or small gardens can qualify and help contribute to the conservation movement! Let's make this happen!!!

You might be thinking "I don't own a business." You patronize a business, probably many businesses! Maybe you go to church, or you frequently drive by a church that looks like it has a nature friendly lawn. Maybe you have just been waiting for a good reason to go to your City's Park Department to encourage them to use some Yard by Yard conservation practices. Perhaps your children or grandchildren go to a school that needs to hear about Yard by Yard.

The way we end the biodiversity crisis we are living through is to offer habitat and food, clean water and healthy soil. The Yard by Yard Community Resiliency Project is the vehicle to deliver this. Let's get serious about making life easier for our butterflies, birds, and bees. When they prosper, the rest of us will prosper. Your voice matters.



Jesse Hale, Jack Titchener, Jeffrey Jenkins and Cheryl Cheadle

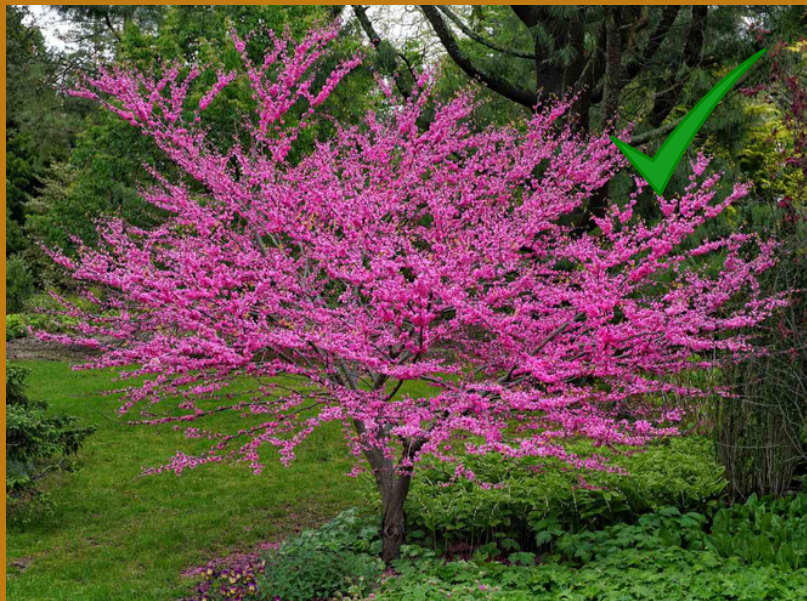


Practice Spotlight: _____

Aesthetic Native Plants for Your Business

When envisioning native plants in landscaping, the image of a wildflower patch often takes center stage. While these vibrant patches thrive in certain spaces, there's an art to integrating native plants seamlessly into more structured environments, such as the front of a business. This edition brings you expert recommendations for replacing common landscaping plants with alluring native alternatives, that offer some of the same aesthetics of classical landscaping. Native plants aren't just low maintenance, they provide benefit to the native pollinators and improves soil conditions!

Not Bradford Pear - Plant Eastern Red Bud



Not Mums - Plant Aromatic Aster



Not Pampas Grass - Plant Switch Grass



Not Lilies - Plant Butterfly Milkweed



Not Nandina - Plant Golden Currant



In My Yard: Why it Matters: A Yard by Yard Love Letter

By: Tracy Bidwell, Norman, OK

Greetings! When I first discovered that the Yard by Yard project was live in Norman, I was overjoyed. The Yard by Yard Project's inception and growth signaled to me that this thing that I really believed in (CONSERVATION) was gaining momentum in our state, which was and continues to be such a huge cause for celebration. I have so much appreciation for the Cleveland County Conservation District and the work that its incredible team are doing to increase awareness and advance conservation practices, Yard by Yard, in the state of Oklahoma. Just thinking about it all makes my eyes sweat.

We live on the edge of Norman, a town that is growing at the speed of light. Our property features a small native forest with two creek fed ponds. The sound of the tree frogs singing in the summer is almost deafening and the diversity of waterfowl who visit our ponds throughout the year is surprising and impressive to me. Sadly, housing additions with manufactured lawns are creeping in all around us and it is just a matter of time before we are no longer on the edge of town. The pre-emergent runoff that will make its way into waterways from these neighborhoods will have a tragic impact on our ponds, affecting quality of life for all the creatures that the water serves. This impending loss of/impact to wildlife is so sad to me. It's sad because I know that the impact/loss will come eventually, and I understand what it will represent when it does. This is why the education that the Yard by Yard Project provides is so, so important. Conservation education and implementation helps to ensure that impact to and loss of wildlife, both within our urban communities and on the fringes, is not a foregone conclusion. We just need to get everyone on board!

Chickens foraging in the leaves



A few things about our yard - We don't use herbicide or pesticide of any kind anywhere; we have a flock of chickens who forage in the yard; we have our mower blades raised up high and mulch mow to help water retention and prevent erosion; with the exception of some fruiting trees and shrubs, we only introduce native plants; we maintain solitary bee houses to encourage our super-pollinators to stick around; we maintain large brush piles and one hundred feet of dead hedge to provide habitats for small mammals and birds; we use a grey water system for our clothes washing machine; we compost; we mulch with our fallen leaves; and we are introducing bioswales that we will use for flowering plants (for the pollinators) around the house.

I hesitated to contribute this writing because we no longer live in the urban environment that the Yard by Yard Project was tailored for. But then I got to thinking about this thing that my family is trying to do out here on the edge of town and how the Yard by Yard Project directly relates to this. When we first got involved in Yard by Yard, it was because we wanted to be part of a solution. Now it feels as though we are on the other side of things and, for the first time, in a position to witness the benefit of urban conservation practices being put into place. I feel more intimately connected to the full scope of what each and every one of us who are committed to conservation is trying to do and for this I am so grateful.

Thanks so much for reading.



Solitary bee house



About the Author:



Tracy Bidwell



Tracy enjoys living in Norman, Oklahoma. Her interests include Orthodoxy, conservation and sustainability, and homesteading. She loves just about anything that takes her outside, making good food, and spending time with her family and animals.

The "In My Yard" series will be written by a different Yard by Yard participant for every edition of the Flutter Flyer. Would you like to let us know about your yard? We need a few photographs, a couple of sentences about yourself, and a brief article about what you want to say about your yard this winter or early spring. Contact cheryl.cheadle@conservation.ok.gov to submit information or learn



Dormancy

By: Cheryl Cheadle

Often people view the winter landscape as being dead. This is no more true than if you consider yourself dead when you stretch at 10:00 p.m., climb under the covers, and fall asleep. This is your time of rest and recharge. Perennial plants cope with winter by entering a time of rest and recharge called dormancy.

Deciduous trees in particular look very different when their leaves have fallen, but things are still happening in the depths of winter! When plants do not have to focus on growing leaves, stems, fruits, and nuts, this time of dormancy allows roots to continue developing. If you are experiencing a particularly dry winter, do some occasional watering.

Just as shorter daylength and cooler temperatures signal perennials to move into dormancy, more hours of sunlight and warmer temperatures send plants their wakeup call. As you observe your yard this winter, keep in mind that there are probably some toads and lizards burrowed in your soil, worms are still active (but not AS active), and birds are likely to be enjoying the seeds still available on the dry stalks of native wildflowers. Dormancy is a moment in time – a lot is happening, it is simply not as obvious in our yards right now.



The dominance of brown and gray colors in the winter can be misleading.

Winter Plant Care Tips

By: Jack Titchner

As the winter chill settles in, and our gardens enter a season of rest and rejuvenation, the landscape may seem quieter, but there are still opportunities for nurturing our plants through the colder months. Lets delve into essential winter plant care tips, ensuring that your garden remains a haven of vitality even in the midst of winter.

Clean up diseased or infested plants: If any of your plants had a serious problem this year, dispose of them outside your yard and do not compost so it can reduce the risk of infection/infestation next year.



Cover the Soil: Bare soil is unnatural. The temperature swings in winter can damage sensitive plant roots. A layer of mulch insulates the roots from frost-thaw cycles and helps retain valuable soil moisture.

Water Some: Even in dormancy, plants still require water for root growth and freeze protection. Winter is usually our driest period so plan on watering periodically to maintain plant health.



Spread Mulch Appropriately: When spreading mulch, make sure to keep it away from the crown of the plant. Also, plan on spreading an even layer about 2 inches deep in your garden beds and 3-4 inches around trees.

Plant Native pollinators: Winter and early Spring is a great time to sow native plants. The early sowing mimics nature and the cold weather breaks the seeds dormancy, stimulating it to germinate at the right time.



Wait to prune: Trees and shrubs are best pruned in winter when they are completely dormant. Wait until the leaves drop because pruning too soon can stimulate new growth that could be killed by the cold temperatures.

Leave native plants until spring: Avoid cutting back native plants. Native insects, including those we depend on as pollinators, often overwinter or lay eggs in plant stalks. Let ornamental grasses stand until spring then cut back.



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



Questions? Comments?



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