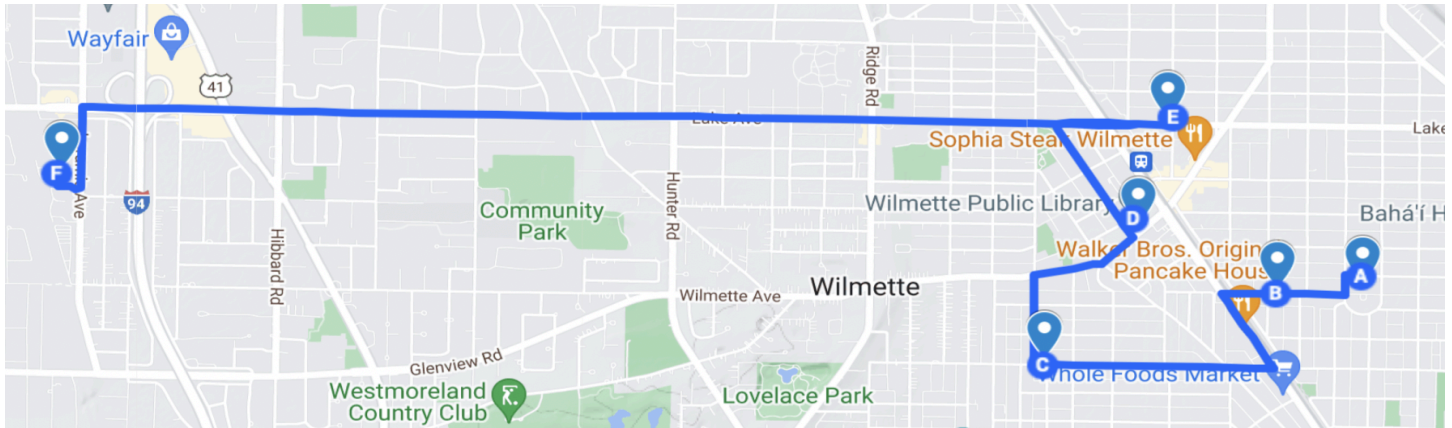




# 2024 Go Green Wilmette Sustainable Yard Tour



July 21, 2024 - - 9:00 am to 12:00 pm



## TOUR DETAILS

*This event will occur RAIN or SHINE.*

Use this map to visit the gardens in any order. There is no set starting point. Please enjoy the gardens at your own pace but only during the tour hours. Go Green Wilmette encourages you to bike the tour.

The following yards and village installations are on the tour this year. The descriptions were provided by the owners. All addresses are in Wilmette, Illinois.

- A. 719 Laurel Ave.
- B. 930 Oakwood Ave.
- C. 1428 Isabella St.
- D. Wilmette Public Library - 1242 Wilmette Ave.
- E. 1202 Lake Ave.
- F. West Park Community Gardens - 3555 Lake Ave (*Turn south onto West Park Ave. and park near the paddle tennis courts. Parking is also available on Laramie St. Head south from Lake Ave., park across from the "No Outlet" sign on the right and follow the pedestrian path into West Park.*)

### A. 719 Laurel Ave.

The front yard rain garden was installed 12 years ago, and the prairie surrounding it has continued to change and evolve as I tinker with it. Both have served their intended purposes beautifully. Every time it rains, half of our roof drains through the gutters into the pebbled creek and basin, which holds water and slowly releases it into the ground. We recently also had our sump pump connected with a pop up into the creek.

The prairie contains more than 100 species of native wildflowers, grasses, and sedges, and it is a-buzz and a-flutter with insects and butterflies all through the growing season. I created it in order to provide habitat for



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insects and birds, as well as something beautiful for me and my neighbors to enjoy, and I'd say it's been a success.

The biggest challenge with the front yard is the considerable amount of weeding required to keep it looking tended and intentional. But front yard gardening is a great way to meet people and talk to the neighbors, and certainly one could have a much smaller front yard garden that would require less time.

There is more leeway in the backyard for letting things look a little "wild and weedy," as they do along the east fence, where we have native plants and shrubs that like some shade. We also have many fruit trees -- apple, cherry, nectarine, blueberry, and raspberry. The raspberries are the lowest maintenance of the fruits. I share a lot of apples with the squirrels and chipmunks, as I've tried many kinds of barriers with little success. Our blueberries are fully encased in a cage in order to keep them from the critters -- it was a lot of work to build it, but it does the job.

Finally, we have a backyard vegetable garden, with raised beds and a rabbit fence built by my husband and me (but mostly by Brian). Again, we grow enough to share with the squirrels, as this seems the only strategy that works! We have a compost bin that provides rich, black compost for the vegetable garden every fall when I put the garden to bed.

### **B. 930 Oakwood Ave.**

Only a few years ago, this heavily shaded front yard had a traditional lawn surrounded by non-native shrubs. After volunteering at the Central School Garden and learning about how native plants are critical to the survival of birds and pollinators stressed by climate change, we decided to hire Red Stem Native Landscapes to remove the lawn and install a rain garden and a framework of native plants to build upon.

Because climate change comes with temperature extremes, we requested that Red Stem use only plants hardy from zones 4 to 8 (North Dakota to Alabama). In addition to giving birds, butterflies and bees a place to shelter, eat, overwinter and lay eggs, the native yard also sequesters more carbon with the plants' deep roots than a traditional lawn can.

This is an informal garden, since the plants know best where they want to grow. In the time since it's been planted, two large trees came down on neighboring properties, changing the amount of sunlight. After taking a free seminar on soil from the University of Illinois Extension, we avoid stepping on the soil and "hop" through the garden on reused brick pavers hidden among the plants. This allows the soil to develop healthier structure and a biome beneficial to the plants and environment. The garden blooms throughout the year. We hope you'll come see it next month and next spring.

We keep a small watering can and bucket in the bathroom to catch water as tub and sink faucets warm up. We used to use water from the goldfish tank and the plants *loved* it. We try to help birds, butterflies, bees and small animals by providing fresh water in multiple bird baths. We plant moisture-loving plants near the birdbaths which get dumped and refilled regularly so that they do not produce mosquitoes.



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During extreme rain events (which are becoming more common), the home's sump pump drains to the bed of rocks out front. The berm around it, planted with moisture-loving species, allows a small pond to form. In a few hours, the water drains slowly into the ground. Compared to lawns, rain gardens allow up to 30% more water to soak into the ground, which lessens the strain on the Wilmette's sewer system during overwhelming downpours. Rain gardens also filter pollutants out of the water before it reaches the water table.

With all the oak trees, we get a ton of leaves. We rake the parkway and groundcover areas of the backyard. The rest of the leaves stay put once they get rained or snowed on. Insects lay eggs on them that last through the winter. Small animals can shelter under them. If there's a late frost, the plants survive because they have the extra insulation. Come spring, the plants push through the leaves, the insects eat them, returning birds and small animals forage through them and they get flattened out or broken up. They keep the top of the soil under them insulated from temperature extremes and lock in some moisture to help withstand dry spells. Leaves are a natural mulch. And unlike wood mulch, they soon break down into soil, returning nutrients to the ecosystem that the oak trees need.

## **C. 1428 Isabella St.**

As new home owners several years ago, we felt strongly about adding to our outdoor space. Having it contain more native plants was an important part of our plan. As the current stewards of our outdoor space, we felt it was important to do what we could for our local habitat. Former city dwellers, we were excited to expand into a full-sized yard and the possibilities it held. We decided we wanted help thinking about the options in our now larger space, which would specifically prioritize creating the native habitat we hoped to do our part to expand.

Amanda Nugent of Sweetgrass Gardens was an amazing part of our experience and an invaluable guide. She assessed our priorities and asked about the ways we hoped to use the space, our aesthetic, the size and composition of our family and any pets. We shared that we loved big, bold colors, and a full, slightly wild, "secret garden" feel... somewhat like a big wild-flower garden. We also wanted to grow some herbs and other edibles. Finally, we wanted to create a space for friends to gather, expanding on the solid bones and structure we inherited with this home and yard.

This is our third summer working on the garden. Over time, the size of our lawn has shrunk, as we've made room for more planting. Many of the non-native plants and shrubs have been replaced. We're excited this season to have added berry bushes (a positive association for both of us from childhood), and we can't wait to see the gooseberry and black currant mature over time. There are also more herbs and zinnias, and we have added more free-standing pots. The abundance of color makes our hearts sing.

Amanda's enthusiasm for her work is infectious. She has taught us a great deal about native gardening and its immense benefits to the ecosystem. We feel proud and honored to be contributing in a small way to strengthening our local habitat. At the same time, the garden is a pleasure to see, smell and harvest. We enjoy it and learn from it every day.



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## **D. Wilmette Public Library - 1242 Wilmette Ave.**

In 2019, as part of Wilmette Public Library's outdoor remodel and to align with its sustainability goals, the library expanded its existing butterfly garden with a major emphasis on native plants. The original garden had been started by a librarian using a grant from the library and was 525 square feet in size. The library wanted to expand on this pollinator garden during its remodel and received input from the public—especially the Little Garden Club of Wilmette—in favor of adding even more native plants.

The outdoor renovation project started in 2017 with a combined committee of WLP staff and board members and finished with a grand lawn reopening on August 1st, 2019. The library took this opportunity to add interpretive signage and a walking path to improve community accessibility to this beautiful outdoor space and add many native plants, as labeled. The current garden is 865 square feet in size. See this [link](#) for a description of the plants in the library's landscaping.

## **E. 1202 Lake Ave.**

We've lived in this house since 1985, and the yard has become progressively more sustainable. When we moved in, there were three wonderful mature oak trees, a hedge on one side, and not much else. We added perennial gardens that include native plants such as prairie smoke, mountain mint, coneflowers, milkweed, and one of my favorites, shrubby St. Johnswort, which has wonderful yellow flowers in midsummer and is a big favorite with pollinators. We always plant salvia, too, as a nectar source for hummingbirds and butterflies. In the front yard we removed almost all the grass, which wasn't doing that well anyway, and added pachysandra plus some shrubs and native plants. It needs much less water and stays looking nice twelve months of the year.

Several years ago the house next door was flipped and then sold to our current neighbors (who also do sustainable gardening). Unfortunately, the "flippers" regraded the back yard so that rainwater that used to drain to the alley went directly into our yard, causing flooding. To resolve this issue we worked with Red Stem Native Landscapes to create rain gardens along the western edge of the property. This has worked very well, and now that the plants have matured a bit, it's full of interesting foliage and flowers most of the spring and summer. The small tree is a Blue Beech, which is native throughout Illinois and is now big enough that it is a favorite perch for birds.

The big oak trees on the property are wonderful, but they leave almost all of the yard in partial shade. The one sunny area is along the driveway, and that's where we have an edible garden - as many tomatoes as possible, plus zucchini, pole beans, Swiss chard and a few peppers. We dig in chopped leaves, coffee grounds and vegetable trimmings in the fall, to let them decompose over the winter and enrich the soil. We also have a few tomatoes and peppers in pots. They do very well there, too.



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### **F. West Park Community Gardens**

I joined the community gardens in West Park in the spring of 2008. I started gardening out of the pure joy of getting edible food from what I planted. While I was growing up I had a few relatives who had small gardens, and I was always intrigued by what they could grow. I am a community gardener, as I have a lot of shade in my backyard at home, compared with the complete sun that West Park receives. I have a Midwest gardening certificate from the Chicago Botanical Gardens, where I completed 9 courses.

I have learned that soil provides good nutrition for the plants I grow, so I have become a very good outdoor composter along with the vermicular (worm) composting that I do in my basement all year long. I add the compost to my garden beds and seem to have many live creatures that are happy living and aerating my garden! I have two compost heaps at home and one in West Park in my plot. I bring grass and leaves from my yard and add non-invasive weeds as well.

I grow daisies, two species of Milkweed, many colors of zinnias, coxcomb, sunflowers, and this year I added eucalyptus that I purchased at a farmers market. I have perennial horseradish, garlic, potatoes, beans, a type of jalapeno, and pepperoncini peppers, lettuces, basil, tomatoes, curly parsley, thyme, celery, zucchini, kale, leeks, and hoping that the cauliflower and broccoli make it before they get eaten!

I love that I have a common interest with others that surround me in the garden. It is always fun to see the strategies and methods others use to grow what they plant. Most people are here to grow edible foods, but some like to grow flowers and even perennial plants like blackberries, and raspberries. Gardening in a community plot has its advantages and disadvantages. Being able to communicate with others about how to garden is rewarding. You can also leave your garden with people who know what they are doing when you need to be absent. We do some veggie and seed swapping too! Some of the negatives include the presence of pests, which are more common in a big community plot, and can be hard to get rid of! Limited water or water pressure when the soil is dry can be time consuming, as gardeners must share the water. There are six hoses total, with two in each row. Overall, it is a positive environment at West Park!

I use raised beds because they retain water and keep weeds at a minimum, giving plants a better opportunity to root. Most of all I try not to step in the raised beds, which reduces soil compaction and allows more opportunity for plant roots to travel. There are a lot of weeds that grow here in West Park, but the raised beds and mulch help with that issue, along with the homemade leaf mulch that I make from my leaves in the fall. All of the wood used for the raised beds in this garden has been found in alleys or streets of the north shore. I reuse a lot of materials that other people throw out!

My garden is 95% from seeds that I sowed either directly into the soil or in containers under lights and with a heat mat in my basement. Most of the seeds were planted in March/April and then I planted them here and in my yard where I have some sunshine. It saves money to grow plants from seed, but it is also so rewarding to see them pop from the soil! It is a lot of work but I am passionate about it!