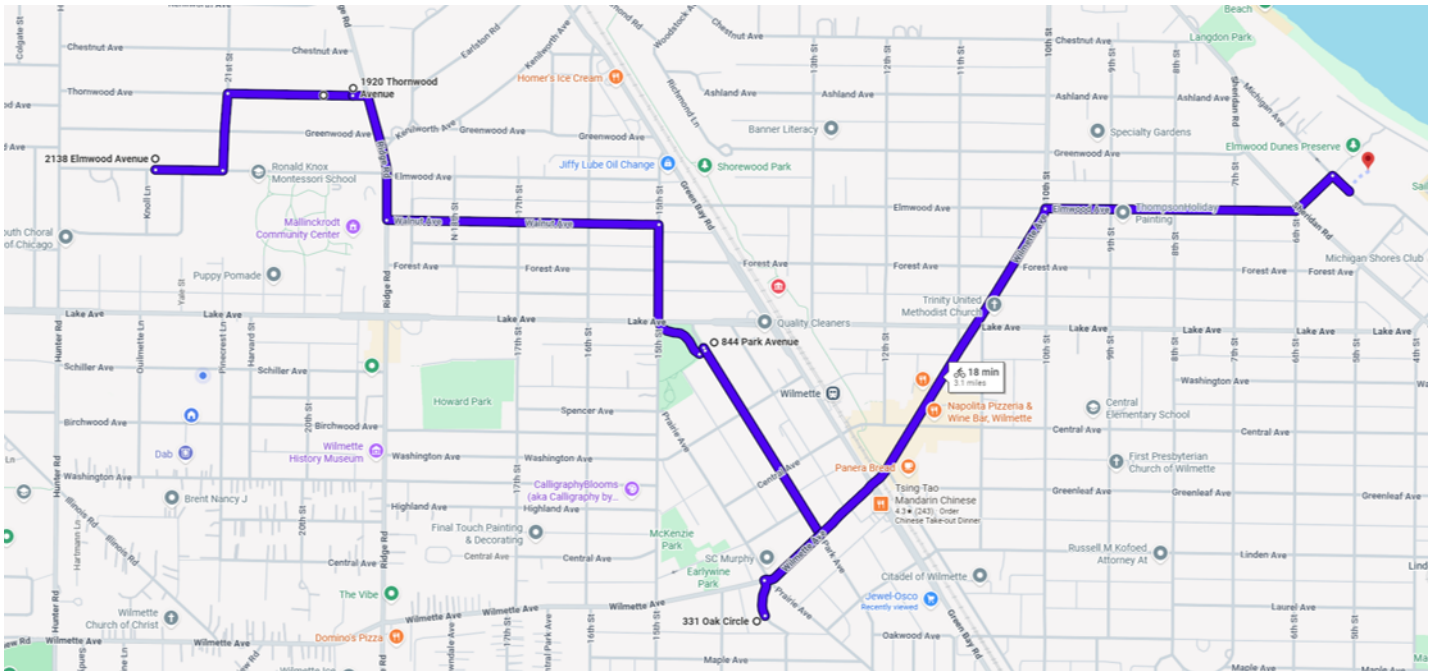


2026 Go Green Wilmette Sustainable Yard Tour

July 19, 2026 9:00 am to 12:00 pm



Please help us save paper by configuring your printer to print double-sided.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE TOUR

Go Green Wilmette encourages you to bike or walk the tour. 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.

This event will occur RAIN or SHINE.

The following 5 yards are on the tour this year. The following descriptions were written by the owners. All addresses are in Wilmette, Illinois, 60091.

- **2138 Elmwood Ave**
- **1921 Thornwood Ave**
- **844 Park Ave**
- **331 Oak Circle**
- **1020 Michigan Ave***

**Note for 1020 Michigan Ave: Seasonal parking restrictions are in effect near Gilsen Beach. From Memorial Day through Labor Day, parking is strictly prohibited at all times on Michigan Ave between Forest St and Elmwood Ave. Visitors are kindly asked to park north of Elmwood Ave, or choose to carpool or bike.*

2138 Elmwood Ave.

When we moved into this home in late 2021, we had no experience with maintaining a yard. This is our first house, and our first yard, so we watched what popped up that first growing season: mostly daylilies, hostas, hydrangeas and burning bushes. Though these looked nice and seemed hardy, we learned that some were invasive and all were non-native to the area. We also noticed that rain would puddle near our foundation, and that the sump pump belched water straight onto our front yard's grass. A stop by the GGW's native plant sale in 2022 began my journey of curiosity and appreciation for native plants.

Not only do native plants provide crucial food and habitat for birds and bugs—but once established, they need little to no maintenance. This point was critical to me, a mom of young kids. If I didn't water the garden every day, the native plants would be fine. A ton of kids live on our block, and I found that a garden full of plants that evolved to be here isn't too fussy when children (or soccer balls) poke around in it. We use a push mower to cut the grass that we keep for the kids (and their soccer balls).

For water management, we added rain barrels to (greatly) reduce our hose usage. We also dug up the lawn area where the sump pump spits out water, and replaced the sodden turf grass with a rain garden. Now, the sump pump is significantly less active, even during heavy storms. Our rain garden plants have established deep roots to slow down and hold the water in the soil.

Our garden now has dozens of native plant species and is fairly self-sustaining, so I just try to give it a good look every day or so. I'll note if there's a need for a little watering or weeding and can usually take care of it on the spot.

A native garden is a great match for a busy parent. With just a little maintenance, my family can enjoy a patch of beauty right at home. My kids love to spot the butterflies, bees, birds and bunnies that frequent our yard. Together, we witness hummingbirds gathering spiderwebs for their nests, the goldfinches eating echinacea seeds, the monarch caterpillars munching through swamp milkweed leaves, and bees napping in rudbeckias. They're learning that nature isn't some separate place you go out and visit. We are part of nature. We appreciate—and help to create—the beauty around us.

Unique Features to note:

- Native plants – the key elements of a joyful garden that requires little maintenance.
- Rain barrels – prevent water pooling on the ground and reduce hose water usage.
- Rain garden – utilizes excess water to nourish a thriving habitat.
- Marigolds and herbs – my kids planted them this spring and would love to show them to you.

1921 Thornwood Ave.

When we bought this house in the fall of 2024, we inherited a property that was a bit overgrown with plants that didn't offer much to the local ecosystem. We knew we wanted to change that, but we also had to face reality: we have two young kids, incredibly busy lives, and very little spare time. Instead of trying to pull off a massive, 100% native restoration instantly, we decided to take a step-by-step approach. We carved out small windows to garden ourselves, let Chalet handle the heavy lifting and maintenance, and focused on building an outdoor space where our family simply loves to spend time.

Fast forward to 2026, and we've just completed our biggest chunk of plantings yet – including Butterfly Weed, Purple Coneflower, Milkweed, Smooth Ironweed, Bee Balm, Agastache and native ferns. The evening of the planting, about 6 or 7 fireflies lit up my back yard for hours. Coincidence or is it working that quickly? Most days Monarch butterflies and a few other butterfly species pay us a visit. Plenty of bees and wasps love our Calamintha and other pollinators. We are also amateur birders. A couple cardinals grace our yard each morning. They will love the new bird bath we plan to put into the side yard. The ecosystem has been assisted by a robust insect population through our “leaving the leaves” experiments and our Subpod composting unit where worms consume our food scraps to produce rich compost. Those are both tucked away in the SW corner of the backyard. Our most recent plantings in the front and side yard (Solomon's Seal, Diervilla Kodiak Black, Bottlebrush Buckeye) took space previously occupied by invasive honeysuckle and pachysandra. Some pachysandra remains as the border of the front bed as we plan a future phase of trialing native groundcover varieties.

This yard is designed to be a real-world, achievable model for new homeowners. It's a purposeful blend of straight native species, selected natives, and familiar ornamental landscape plants. As one of the owners of Chalet, this property serves as a testing ground for our new Sustainable Landscape Maintenance Program. Chalet has long been known as a traditional, high-end landscape company on the North Shore, and we believe that gives us a unique opportunity to help move the broader landscape industry in a better direction. Led by Will Gardner - who brings extensive experience in public and private sustainable land management and prairie restoration—this program is designed to disrupt the status quo. We are in the beginning of our journey here to actively innovate and experiment, bridging aesthetic quality with sustainability. This garden is not meant to be a perfect native restoration or a rejection of traditional landscape design. It is meant to show a practical and beautiful path forward.

Chalet's approach is about meeting people where they are. Not every homeowner is ready to replace an entire lawn or install a fully native prairie in their front yard. But many are ready to choose better plants, reduce chemical inputs, support pollinators, improve soil health, leave more habitat, and maintain their properties in a more thoughtful way.

Unique Features to note:

- **Subpod Composting Unit:** Located in the southwest corner of the backyard, this below-ground vermiculture system uses active worm populations to consume our kitchen food waste. It diverts organic material from landfills, cuts down on greenhouse gases, creates nutrient-rich compost for the beds, and fuels an incredibly active, visible local food web.
- **Developing Dead Hedge:** Also running along the southwest back fence line, this structure is built entirely from our own woody trimmings and tree limbs. It creates a natural, structured boundary that serves as an excellent wildlife habitat while helping to neatly contain loose organic material. In recent years, we piled our leaves high in the corner of our yard. This fall, we'll tuck them neatly within the dead hedge along the fence.

844 Park Ave

Five years ago I moved into this house with no gardening experience and a yard full of hostas. I started small: before touching a single plant bed, I replaced as much lawn as I could with clover. Clover is pollinator-friendly, drought-resistant, fixes nitrogen in the soil, and doesn't need mowing the way grass does. But it was really the beginning of a habit: asking what each plant does, and for whom. That question has driven everything since.

I've made plenty of decisions I wouldn't make now. There's landscape fabric under parts of the yard I wish weren't there. I planted non-native lilies. I'm still living with plenty of hostas, too, which is fine. They earn their place in deep shade under the oak canopy, and where I've kept them I've been favoring varieties that flower, since blooms are blooms when a bee is looking for something in June. The front corner near the sidewalk has a Chinese beautyberry shrub that came with the house. It's not native, but it puts out berries the birds work through in fall, so it stays for now. The garden near the house has a Japanese maple I kept for similar reasons. This is a garden of gradual decisions: adding natives where there's room and building around what's already working rather than starting over.

The goal from early on was to turn this yard into a pollinator and bird haven using only Illinois natives where possible. That meant paying attention to what the yard was already telling me: where it was sunny, where it was shaded, where water collected after a storm. Noticing where water pooled and drained eventually led to the three-basin rain garden we installed in fall 2025. Water from our roof now flows through a downspout into a rock buffer, fills Basin 1 under the shade of a 175-year-old swamp white oak, and cascades through Basins 2 and 3 as the water rises, each basin planted to match its own light and moisture conditions. I built an arbor at the Basin 1 edge specifically to support native vines. Woodbine (*Clematis virginiana*) is already climbing it this spring and will gradually displace a non-native wisteria that I planted there first without knowing it wasn't native. The rain

garden is in its first full growing season and won't look finished on tour day, but that's part of the story.

The parkway garden along the sidewalk was planted in June 2024 with help from local organizations like Sag Moraine and the North Shore Plant Club: 16 species of Illinois natives, taller toward the street and lower toward the sidewalk, so it reads as a garden rather than an overgrown strip. It's in its second season now and filling in beautifully, with bees, swallowtails, and hummingbirds cycling through on any given summer afternoon. Leaning on local expertise has been one of the most valuable parts of this whole project. There's a lot of knowledge out there from people who are further along in the work, and I've tried to learn from as much of it as I can.

One of the unexpected rewards has been watching that approach spread. A few neighbors have started adding natives of their own and we've been comparing notes across yards, sharing what works and what doesn't, and getting excited about the cumulative effect of small changes across a block. My dad has even transformed his front yard into a pollinator habitat. It turns out small changes have a way of getting people excited, and they add up faster than you'd think.

There's a vegetable garden and compost setup in the backyard. Out front, the focus has been on one thing: learning to support the birds, bees, and insects that were here long before this yard looked the way it does in a neat and visually appealing way. I'm still learning. Giving yourself permission to work with what you have and move toward a vision without needing to arrive all at once turns out to be exactly how you get somewhere worth going.

331 Oak Circle

Welcome to our Garden! Spring 2026 is the first season where this rain garden has significantly “bloomed” literally and figuratively. It’s taken a solid 4 years of our blood sweat & tears, and every gardener knows it’s never finished.

In 2021 we moved to Oak Circle and this 1921 Craftsman Bungalow from our large garden in west Wilmette where we lived since 1980, and most importantly we sold our lawnmower, and decided to not buy another, Ever Again!

Fittingly, our Oak Circle property includes 5 large mature OAKS, corner stones of this ecosystem. We immediately began transforming our small shady small front yard lawn into a natural habitat, beginning by removing a tree centered in the front yard(not oak) and so many overgrown ornamental conifer shrubs. We “solarized” the lawn in stages w/black plastic to kill the grass lawn without disturbing the top soil, and most importantly without herbicides and pesticides.

Thankfully the previous owners did not use pesticides/herbicides on this piece of land for the decades they lived here. This became evident in May 2024 when the dual periodic cicada broods emerged and our yard had many hundreds (at least) emerge from every piece of ground to climb the trees and house to complete their life cycle proving the vitality of this little piece of land.

We created our “donut” shaped rain garden basin by hand digging down around that cut down tree and the remaining root ball creating a 5 foot diameter “island” centered in the front yard with a surrounding circular water basin roughly 20 inches wide 10 inches deep that fills with rain and sump pump water. (see red ribbon on metal stake marking island center)

We trenched a 4 inch PVC drain pipe from the NE corner downspout to flow into the rain garden basin. We connected a roof gutter-downspout collecting 40% of rain landing on our house. Additionally, we connected the existing basement sump pump into the same PVC drain pipe so subsurface ground water also is directed into our Rain Garden. Note: In this part of Wilmette there is a high water table so the sump pumps operate very often.

We have always done our own gardening and planning. Proudly we’ve sourced many of our native rain garden plants at Go Green’s annual Spring plant sales. Additionally we transplanted many of the native plants from our old property when we moved in 2022. However, every plant in our garden is not native, we do enjoy mixing in other flowering perennials and annuals for beauty.

One of the recent plantings we are excited about are the Cattails now at over 5 feet tall growing very well in the rain garden basin. We dug up and brought them from Michigan in fall 2025, however after being transplanted they will not flower with the classic “cattail” until 2027. Interestingly when we transplanted the cattails, we also placed some 2025 “cattails on the stalks” next to the transplants, and this June we observed Hummingbirds picking the “fluff” off the cattails for their nesting lining, and so it all comes together wonderfully.

The plantings include Milkweed, Swamp Milkweed, and Butterfly weed (*asclepias tuberosa*), and notably the swamp milkweed appears to be particularly happy with the rain garden and is multiplying. Additionally we’ve planted Red Clovers in the parkway and as a general cover throughout our yard. Red Clover is widely considered as a very supportive flowering planting because it produces a general nectar that’s usable by a wide range of insects and birds. Additionally it does not over-compete other plantings.

1020 Michigan Ave

Introduction to Property/Front Woodland Gardens

There are four types of habitat here: woodland in the front; and in the back there is a rain garden, prairie areas and a dune. The only impervious surfaces are the driveway and the footprint of the house. Leaves are left to overwinter and act as mulch and habitat for insects.

The house was finished in 2019 and most of the garden was installed by then. We worked with an arborist and the contractor to protect trees during construction, especially the two large oaks in front. The one next to the courtyard was in the path of heavy equipment traffic so we moved the footprint of the house to minimize the traffic, installed a geoweb to spread the weight over a larger area to minimize compaction, trimmed roots and fed the tree to help it survive the construction. We cut down a number of trees that were in fair or poor shape but we added many trees as well. We added to the already existing woodland area in front by planting many new trees including serviceberries, alternate leaf dogwood, a maple, a red oak, 3 shingle oaks, several redbuds, and added white pines to what was already there. The bald cypress was there already, knees and all, we just took out the grass around it.

We minimized the lawn area in front, limited mainly to the parkway. We used liriopse, a non-native no mow grass, as a transition from the grass to the woodland. The front's mainly woodland plants include ferns, columbine, solomon's seal, big leaf and new England aster, Pennsylvania and rosea sedges, hardy Geraniums, early meadow rue, sedum, wild ginger and hellebores in the courtyard to the north of the front door.

In the boxes near the front door are spikenard to the south and witch hazel to the north. The white flower is an annual, mandevilla, and the vine is Virginia creeper. In the front part of the courtyard is a Japanese stewartia and several Japanese andromeda.

Bushes include Itea, Rhododendron, viburnums, bottlebrush buckeye, chokeberry, dogwood and false spirea. Spikenard was used in several challenging areas since it seems to survive anywhere. This year several yews died and were replaced with witch hazel and maple leaf viburnum. Climbing hydrangea is on the fence behind the shingle oaks and also on the railings to the terraces in the back of the house.

Originally there was ivy in the area in front of the hellebores, but penn sedge and early meadow rue naturalized into this area so the ivy was removed and sedum was added. Eventually all the ivy may be removed if natives will grow in this very shady spot.

Back Gardens:

Downspouts are tied together into a pipe that goes under the dune out to the beach.

Rain Garden

Notice the drain, part of the system that brings water out to the beach. The pipe to the beach has small holes on the bottom to allow the water to percolate into the ground as it goes through the dune. Since the rain garden is the lowest area, it is wetter and perfect for deep rooted plants that like lots of water. Lobelia, Queen of the Prairie, Iris, and Hibiscus are some of the flowering plants here. Also *Carex vulpinoides* is along the stone path.

Grass

The amount of grass was minimized but there is still quite a bit in the back.

The owner chose Greenwise to mow the grass because they mow high, use mostly electric equipment, have a bi-weekly mowing option and their maintenance program is non-chemical.

Prairie Gardens

The prairie gardens frame the back area on the two sides and along the back fence. There is a smaller woodland area along the north fence under the cottonwoods and elm. We didn't plant them but we see spring ephemerals like mayapples here.

You will see *Rudbeckia*, Mountain Mint, *Baptisia*, echinacea, *Monarda*, coreopsis, Joe Pye Weed, milkweed and *Penstemon*.

Bushes include junipers, *diervilla*, dogwood, viburnums. Trees include birch, serviceberries, hazelnut, ninebark, and sumac.

Pool Area and Rock Gardens on the slope

Vines include clematis and trumpet vine, and more climbing hydrangea on the stairs to the first floor.

Bushes include *fothergilla* and viburnums plus low growing sumac along the north fence.

3 serviceberries and an apple tree are planted around the generator enclosure. Sweetgum is near the north fence; 2 hawthorns on the south side and a white fringe tree, hornbeams in a border row on the north side.

Prairie smoke, native petunia, salvia, *pulsatilla*, sedum, *sisyrinchium*, prairie dropseed, and caesia or blue stem goldenrod are on either side of the pool and along the slopes. Originally there was gaia in the gardens around the pool to soften the edges but it didn't do well.

There is also a water garden in front of the pool containing iris and ?

Dune

The dune was overrun by Virginia creeper, oriental bittersweet and other weeds when we started restoring the dune. We removed the weeds and added to the Maram grass, a primary stabilizer of dunes which are by nature unstable. We added Little bluestem and have been trying different plants in the shadier areas near the cottonwoods. The understory trees are mostly sumac.