



NEBRASKA STATEWIDE  
**Arboretum**

# THE SEED

2025

CHANGE  
STARTS  
WITH **YOU**

ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY

# A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



**Happy New Year, gardeners, tree huggers and plant lovers! I don't know if I've ever been in need of a new year more than I am this year. I will not miss the drama of 2024.**

Last year in this very magazine, we asked you (and ourselves) the question, "What Is a Climate-Resilient Landscape?" Do you know the answer? Yeah, neither do we—and that's at least in part because we are constantly learning new things! From new research about how to support monarch butterfly populations to figuring out proper tree watering in a wet spring and a dry autumn, the learning never stops.

One thing we know for sure is that we need to hold on to hope. All is not lost, and there is still a lot that's positive in the world, even in the midst of climate change. I recently reread the 2024 edition of *The Seed*, and I love the quote from John Moss about why he chose to turn his lawn into a garden: "So many people think there is nothing they can do in the face of climate change and the environmental problems, but this is something I can change. This is an avenue for me to do something." We're here to repeat John's point: There is something you can do.



What that something looks like will be unique to you. Are you in a neighborhood that's losing tree canopy in the face of disease and storms (once again, good riddance 2024)? Or do you or someone you love live where there is no access to safe greenspaces? Most canopy loss and lack of greenspace access in the U.S. are in areas of high poverty and/or racially diverse areas. Those fortunate enough to live near trees experience a better quality of life, including a boost to mental health and longer life expectancy. This inequality is startling, and the gap continues to widen.

This issue of *The Seed* focuses on environmental advocacy. I remember the first time I attended a green jobs advocacy day on The Hill in D.C. Running around senate buildings in the humid summer, often being shrugged off and handed to interns (c'mon reps). It was hard, but it spurred me to do more. The first step is the hardest. But I believe in you.

In her new book, *What If We Get It Right?*, author and climate expert Ayana Elizabeth Johnson writes that we have everything we need to fix the problem of climate change. It will be hard, but we can do it if we advocate for climate smart solutions. That sounds worthy of hard work.

**I hope this issue helps you identify real steps you can take throughout the next year and far into the future to advocate for our environment. From planting a garden to joining your local tree board or starting a community nursery, there is something you can do both on your own and in community with others. Of course, we'll be right there with you, just as we have been for nearly 50 years. Many hands make light work, so let's dive in together. We can do this.**

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Hanna Pinneo".

Hanna Pinneo  
Executive Director  
Nebraska Statewide Arboretum

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# OUR MISSION

WE PLANT NEBRASKA FOR HEALTHY PEOPLE, VIBRANT COMMUNITIES AND A RESILIENT ENVIRONMENT.

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# SEEDLINGS

## BITS OF GARDENING WISDOM



A monarch butterfly feeds on nectar from a meadow blazing star (*Liatris ligulistylis*).

### HELP MIGRATING MONARCHS

Brand-new research into monarch butterflies has revealed some surprising insights into one of the biggest mysteries: the question of why monarch wintering populations are declining while breeding populations are stable. A new study suggests that monarchs are dying off during their fall migration to Mexico...but why?

Turns out, a parasite and captive breeding may be to blame. The prevalence of the parasite—which has increased tenfold since the early 2000s—corresponds to increased plantings of non-native milkweeds throughout the migration route. Researchers hypothesize that the longer growing season of the non-native milkweeds allows for more opportunity for infectious parasite spores to build up on the leaves, which in turn leads to more monarchs becoming infected.

Second, research indicates that captive-reared monarchs aren't as resilient or as skilled at migrating as those born and reared in nature. Studies show that captive-born monarchs are typically only half as strong as wild monarchs and often have shorter, paler wings.

You can help monarchs by planting more native flowering plants—but NOT tropical, non-native milkweed—along the migration route (which goes right through Nebraska), by planting native milkweed (such as *Asclepias tuberosa*, *Asclepias syriaca* and *Asclepias incarnata*) for larval sustenance, and by not raising monarchs and releasing them in the wild. In other words, according to scientists: stick to what nature already does best!

“ YOU CANNOT GET THROUGH A SINGLE DAY WITHOUT HAVING AN IMPACT ON THE WORLD AROUND YOU. WHAT YOU DO MAKES A DIFFERENCE, AND YOU HAVE TO DECIDE WHAT KIND OF A DIFFERENCE YOU WANT TO MAKE.

Jane Goodall



Western Nebraska Assistant Community Forester Kaden Vowers plants a tree with volunteers in Alliance.

### TREE CARE KITS

Planning to plant a tree this spring? We have some free resources to help you get started, including a list of our Top 10 Recommended Trees & 5 Recommended Shrubs for both eastern and western Nebraska, Tree Planting Instructions and Tree Watering Guidelines for Newly Planted Trees.

These resources and literally hundreds more are available for free downloading on our website. Visit [plantnebraska.org](http://plantnebraska.org), click the “Resources and Events” button on the top menu, and then click the “Tips, Help & How-To” from the drop-down menu. You'll see resources for plants and flowers, trees, gardening, landscape and design, planting for birds, insects and wildlife and lots more.

# BEGIN IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD

With so many issues at hand and so many ways to get involved with environmental advocacy, sometimes we end up with decision paralysis and don't do anything at all.

If this sounds familiar, here's a piece of advice: start small, right in your own backyard. Maybe that means transitioning some of your turf grass to more sustainable landscaping. Or introducing more native plants into your garden. Or intentionally being more waterwise in your yard. As you'll read below, environmental advocacy can begin with one small step and grow from there.

## IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Suzanne Gates' interest in native plants began as a college student, when she enrolled in a class about the native flora of the Great Plains. After she graduated, she signed up for an evening master gardener program so she could continue to pursue her passion while she worked full-time.

Over the past 20 years, Suzanne has transitioned more than half the lawn in her Omaha yard to sustainable landscaping featuring native pollinator plants like goldenrod, milkweed and bee balm and a small water feature that attracts chorus and leopard frogs.

"I'm amazed at the number of pollinators these plants bring to the yard—tons of bees, monarch butterflies, hundreds of small pollinating insects," said Suzanne. "Plus, less lawn means less my husband has to mow, which makes him happy, too."

After visiting the monarch's winter breeding grounds in Mexico a few years ago, an experience she described as "magical," Suzanne committed to doing everything she can to support the insects on their migratory journey.

"Monarchs are really struggling, so if I can do something to help, I'm going to do it," said Suzanne. "I have the resources and the space to help them."

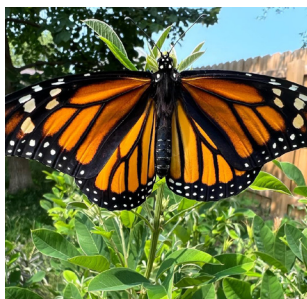
Suzanne has also become an educator and environmental advocate in her neighborhood. On Halloween, she hands out milkweed seeds to the parents of the Trick-or-Treaters who come to her door. She also gifts transplants from her garden to neighbors and is always eager to engage them in a conversation about what's growing in her yard.



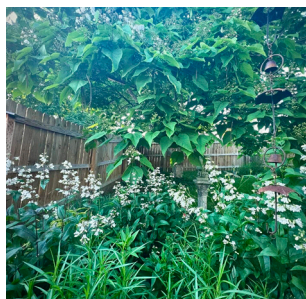
A swallowtail caterpillar feeds on dill in Ryan Haney's backyard.



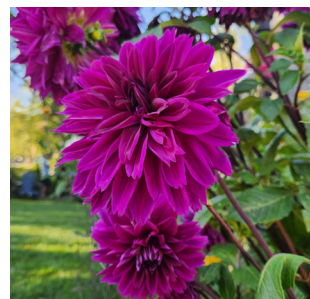
Northern catalpa (*Catalpa speciosa*) blossoms in Suzanne Gates' backyard.



A monarch butterfly in Suzanne Gates' backyard.



Husker Red penstemon (*Penstemon digitalis* 'Husker Red') in the foreground of Suzanne Gates' catalpa tree.



'Thomas Edison' dahlias bloom in Ryan Haney's front yard.

"It takes a village, all of us working together to make a difference," said Suzanne. "My advice is to take whatever small steps you can. Every little bit helps."

## BACKYARD ADVOCACY AND BEYOND

Ryan Haney, of Omaha, originally wanted a formal garden—"something British with squares and sharp angles," he said. Over the last 10 years, however, his vision has shifted to a slightly wilder look with a focus almost entirely on native species.

"I decided that I wanted to see more life and activity in my yard," he said. "Now I see all kinds of insects flying around—different kinds of butterflies and bees, swallowtail caterpillars on the dill. It's amazing."

Ryan's gateway into gardening with natives began with a single Joe Pye plant. "It was a showstopper as far as the number of insects it attracted," he said. He paired Joe Pye with goldenrod, and the rest is history; it's been all native plants (with a few annuals sprinkled in) since.

Ryan's passion for native plants has grown to encompass his neighborhood as well. He recently partnered with his neighbors to plant ten trees acquired through the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum's 10 Free Trees grant.

"I walked up and down the street, asking the neighbors, 'Are you interested in planting a tree?' We gave away all ten trees that way," said Ryan. "People were excited to have them."

The new trees are helping to offset the loss of dozens of trees in his neighborhood that were damaged during a July windstorm, as well as those that are aging out. A homeowner in an adjacent neighborhood heard about the tree-planting project and talked to Ryan about the possibility of investing in more trees to plant in his neighborhood as well.

"The idea of planting more native trees and plants is catching on," said Ryan. "It's like a pollinator plant. It's spreading."

*Michelle DeRusha is the Communications & Events Coordinator for the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum.*

# THE SEED OF A DREAM SPROUTS INTO A MOVEMENT

LINCOLN'S HAWLEY HAMLET IS A HAVEN  
OF HOME-GROWN FOOD AND COMMUNITY.



Residents of Hawley Hamlet frequently catch up with one another as they tend to their garden plots.

Native plant enthusiasts have an intimate understanding of the role food plays in a healthy ecosystem. Aware that every living thing needs to eat (and needs access to a steady food supply to sustain itself), we're forever out there planting native trees, forbs and grasses to provide the food and habitat for the native wildlife. Plant by plant, we're doing our part to extend that life-giving food web and keep it robust.

Like every other member of this broader biological community, we humans also require regular, reliable sources of sustenance to live. And yet, though we eat almost constantly—not just breakfast, lunch and dinner, but coffee and a donut, some peanuts, a cookie, a soft drink, popcorn, a piece of fruit and a bedtime snack—we almost never think about where all that food comes from.

## SO WHERE DOES OUR FOOD COME FROM?

If we live in the urban environment, most of our food is not grown in our yards or patio pots. In Lincoln, over 1.5 million pounds of food (90 percent of which is shipped in from out of state) is needed each day to meet the dietary needs of our nearly 300,000 inhabitants. Even in an agricultural powerhouse like Nebraska, that prides itself on being a "breadbasket" of the world, the average bite of food we eat travels 1,500 miles to get to our mouths.

Of course, we haven't always been this dependent. Through the end of World War II, the U.S. had a local food system, replete with "Victory Gardens" in nearly every home with a yard. The advent of refrigeration and the industrial food system, however, completely revamped both production and consumption. City residents began to see their role in the food system strictly as consumers—as "eaters." Someone else, somewhere in the "countryside," grew our food for us. Our job at the end of the food chain was to eat.

But as the supply bottlenecks and food shortages during the Covid pandemic illustrated, outsourcing our food production half a continent away is risky—especially for cities which, in terms of production, are effectively just one giant "food desert."

## WE CAN DO MORE THAN EAT

The Hawley Hamlet Neighborhood Garden is our attempt to demonstrate that people in the city can do more than just eat. We can grow some of our own food.

Located just 12 blocks from downtown Lincoln, our neighborhood garden has become the premier urban agriculture project within the city limits. From the single,

10-foot-by-10-foot garden we started with 15 years ago, we've grown into a two-acre block and converted four-fifths of an acre from grass lawn to edible landscapes. Every year, 20 families from within the block and across the street garden with us, with every family getting their own plot. Last year we were officially designated a "farm" by the U.S. Department of Agriculture—something that we think would have made our agricultural ancestors smile.

Since 2009, we've planted over 50 fruit and nut trees, ten berry patches and nine grape arbors. And where we can't grow food crops (because of poor soil or too much tree shade), we've planted more than a dozen native pollinator gardens, some of which are the size of an entire yard. We've also built four permanent, solar-heated greenhouses for season-extension and even year-round food production.

After 15 growing seasons, we're aware of the fact that we'll never be able to produce enough food to feed ourselves. But what we can grow in the urban environment, we can grow better than anyone else. We can grow the perishable foods—the fresh produce that provides the vitamins and minerals so essential for our health, and yet is the costliest at the store because of its short shelf life.

### **GROWING COMMUNITY**

We're growing more than just food for our tables in the Hamlet; we're also growing community. We've lived in our historic home since 1986. Busy as we were with our careers and lives, the first 23 years we lived in the block we only knew the names of three of our neighbors. Within the first two years of creating our neighborhood garden, we knew everybody's name. Food, it turns out, brings people together. And that familiarity leads to a safer, stronger neighborhood.

Over the past decade, one of our fellow "Hamleteers," Patrick, lived in three different apartments in the block, gardening with us each season, before finally buying his own home this past summer. He caught the essence of the Hamlet when he said, "This is where I want to be the rest of my life. All of the people who garden with us are just so happy to be here."

Half-jokingly, we call the Hamlet "utopia." We're growing some food in our yards. We're getting to know the people we live among. And we feel safe. Our wish is that residents of every block in America will create Hamlets right where they live and can enjoy the good fortune we have.

***Tim Rinne and Kay Walter are the founders of Hawley Hamlet. They started their first garden plot in the Hamlet 15 years ago.***



Bijendra Karki harvests okra and a South Asian squash variety from his family's garden in Hawley Hamlet.



Kay Walter and Tim Rinne founded Hawley Hamlet in Lincoln 15 years ago.



A tomato harvest from one of the resident's garden plots.

# YOUR BUSINESS CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

**A LINCOLN INSURANCE COMPANY'S SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPING IS AN INVESTMENT IN THE ENVIRONMENT, ITS EMPLOYEES AND THE COMMUNITY.**

Walk down Q Street in downtown Lincoln on a summer day, and you might be surprised to come upon what looks a lot like a native prairie. Tall grasses and wildflowers sway in the breeze. Insects hum, buzz and flutter from bloom to bloom. Birds chatter from the shrubbery, and visitors stroll along the winding paths. You might assume it's a public park, but in fact, this ecological oasis in the middle of the city is actually the landscaped grounds of Assurity, an insurance company that opened its doors in 2011.

"From the beginning, Assurity had environmental stewardship and sustainability as key goals for our corporate campus, from its design and construction to its ongoing usage," explained President and CEO Susie Keisler-Munro. "We knew we wanted grounds that also reflected those goals and our corporate value of sustainability, where we strive to align business practices for social, environmental and the greater good."

Among the sustainability features of Assurity's buildings and grounds are three green roofs that provide energy-saving insulation, increase the life of the rooftop and reduce reflective heat; two acres of drought-tolerant, native and naturalized plant communities which minimize irrigation, mulch and maintenance costs; bioswales and permeable paving to reduce stormwater run-off and allow absorption

of rainwater into the subsoil, minimizing irrigation needs; and the repurposed use of an abandoned underground cistern to store stormwater run-off for use in grounds irrigation.

Assurity hired Kinghorn Gardens to manage the grounds in 2012. "The landscape is an asset to the company," said Dan Moore, Kinghorn Gardens director of operations. "There are beautiful views of the landscape from the cafeteria and from offices and cubicle areas. For a lot of people, the walk from their car to the front door is probably the most interaction they'll have with any landscape."

## **NATURE'S POSITIVE IMPACT ON HEALTH**

Studies over the last ten years have consistently linked exposure to nature with a positive impact on physical, cognitive and psychological health. Time spent outdoors has been shown to reduce diastolic blood pressure, heart rate and levels of cortisol, the hormone responsible for stress. Exposure to natural surroundings can also trigger the release of endorphins, the "feel-good" chemicals in the brain.

A 2023 report in the Harvard Business Review also concluded that experiencing even small doses of nature during the workday could improve performance and productivity by enhancing creativity and increasing mental focus.



Nebraska Statewide Arboretum members enjoyed a tour of Assurity's gardens as part of Member Appreciation Week in 2023.



Husker Red penstemon (*Penstemon digitalis* 'Husker Red') and ornamental onion (*Allium* 'Millenium') are among the many native perennials in Assurity's gardens.



## MORE PLANTS, LESS MULCH

Moore also notes that there is a financial benefit to this kind of sustainable landscaping as well. Kinghorn typically puts down 10-12 yards of mulch around the plantings at Assurity, but a traditionally landscaped site of the same size would require around 200 yards of mulch.

They also maintain the gardens on 15 hours of labor a week—much less than would be required to maintain a more traditional landscape. And they save on the water bill by using reclaimed water captured from the rooftops and permeable paved areas.

“Plants make the best mulch,” Moore said. “When you plant heavy, and let the plants kind of crash into one another, you don’t have to mulch nearly as much. Year after year of not having to do that will save thousands of dollars.”

Granted, there is an upfront investment, which Moore admitted can be intimidating for a business. “But once it gets going, there’s a lot less input,” he said.

## CELEBRATING A SENSE OF PLACE

Beyond the financial, social and ecological benefits, there is an intrinsic value to this kind of sustainable landscaping as well.

“There is something special about being willing to celebrate our own sense of place in Nebraska,” said Moore. “This kind of landscape is celebrated worldwide, and here it is, right in our own backyard in Lincoln, Nebraska. People don’t even know how special this is. Assurity has done something worth talking about.”

**Michelle DeRusha is the Communications & Events Coordinator for the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum.**



A bumble bee on betony (*Stachys monieri* 'Betony').

# SUCCESSFUL SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPING IN THE CORPORATE SETTING

Here are some tips from Kinghorn Gardens' Dan Moore on how to make your business's landscaping more sustainable.

1. Have a clear vision and an advocate. You need someone who is going to champion the vision from within the organization.
2. Start small. You don't need to take on the entire landscape at once. Begin by adding some trees to provide shade in your parking lot or transitioning the lawn along the street into a native pollinator garden.
3. Analyze your plant palette and use plants that are tried and true and native or well-adapted to Nebraska's climate and growing conditions.
4. Let plants serve as your mulch. Plants are the best form of weed control.
5. Get employee buy-in. Promote the benefits of nature and an environmentally friendly landscape.
6. Teach your employees about the plants in the landscape. Give them a tour and talk about the plants and why they are a good fit for a Nebraska garden. Let your garden teach your employees about the benefits of sustainable landscaping.



Lanceleaf coreopsis (*Coreopsis lanceolata*) and Husker Red penstemon (*Penstemon digitalis* 'Husker Red') add visual interest to Assurity's parking area.

# A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

GET INVOLVED WITH YOUR HOMEOWNERS' ASSOCIATION TO MAKE POSITIVE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES IN YOUR COMMUNITY.



A quiet place to rest and reflect in Lincoln's Vintage Heights neighborhood.



Pitcher sage (*Salvia azurea*) and sunflowers (*Helianthus spp.*) are some of the late-blooming perennials in the Vintage Heights pollinator garden.

Dan Wheeler and his Lincoln neighbor Wayne Gill discovered that sometimes the best way to make a difference in your local environment is to initiate change from within. Both retirees served for many years on the Vintage Heights Homeowners' Association board—Wheeler as president and Gill as a member of the landscape committee.

"One person really can make a big difference, but you have to be at the table," said Wheeler. "You have to be willing to be the change that you want to see in your neighborhood. And you have to put in the time."

During their tenure (Wheeler recently relocated to Elkhorn after 11 years on the Vintage Heights Homeowners' Association board; Gill is still a member of the landscape committee), they and other committee members spearheaded several major sustainable landscaping projects in Vintage Heights, including installing a large pollinator garden to help alleviate soil erosion on a hillside that was previously all turf grass.

In partnership with the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, the University of Nebraska Extension, the Nebraska Environmental Trust, the local Natural Resources District

(NRD) and area businesses, Vintage Heights also incorporated a rain garden, bioswale and bioretention area to mitigate flooding and planted more than 225 trees within its 40 acres of common greenspace.

## KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORS

Wheeler and Gill emphasize relationship-building and collaboration as key factors in initiating positive environmental changes in a neighborhood or community.

"A big part of neighborhood environmental work is just getting to know your neighbors and being in community with them," said Gill. "You're always on the lookout for new potential people who can get involved. But it begins with knowing your neighbors."

Wheeler initially invited Gill to help him water some newly planted trees in the neighborhood's common greenspace and then later recruited Gill to serve on the board.

They also reached out to the principal of the elementary school in the neighborhood and to nearby businesses to partner on some of the larger landscaping projects. A restaurant, bank branch, car wash and medical facility all

provided support to help create the rain garden and bioretention basin alongside the bike trail that runs through the neighborhood, and elementary school students participated in clean-up days.

Prior to the installation of the rain garden and bioretention basin, rainwater and snowmelt regularly flooded the path, making it hazardous for pedestrians and cyclists, especially during the winter when the water froze.

Vintage Heights Homeowners' Association also applied for and was awarded Ten Free Trees, Trees for Nebraska Towns and Waterwise grants from NSA, and the neighborhood became an accredited NSA arboretum in 2016.

### COMMUNICATE AND EDUCATE

Both Wheeler and Gill stress that communication and education are important when initiating environmental changes in a neighborhood. Before the pollinator garden was installed, Gill went door-to-door to explain the purpose of the garden, the erosion problems that would be addressed and the benefits the plants would bring to pollinating insects and to the environment overall. He also petitioned neighbors who lived across the street from the garden to help with watering.

It's also important to bring in expert knowledge to guide community efforts and communicate effectively with residents about sustainability initiatives. NSA Green Infrastructure Coordinator Justin Evertson attended Vintage Heights' neighborhood annual meeting to present about the benefits of sustainable landscaping and provide an overview of the plans. Vintage Heights also partnered with UNL Horticulture Professor Kim Todd, who guided their plant selections and taught them how to manage the new landscapes.

In addition to aesthetic and environmental benefits for the neighborhood, there were some unexpected personal benefits to the work as well, acknowledged Wheeler.

"You get involved initially because you care about the environment, climate, nature, wildlife, the birds and bees and all that," said Wheeler. "You don't think about the positive impact of connecting with others. But these [fellow board members] are now lifelong friends. They would do anything for me, and I'd do anything for them."

**Michelle DeRusha is the Communications & Events Coordinator for the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum.**



A soldier beetle is one of many pollinators attracted to the sunflowers (*Helianthus spp.*) in the Vintage Heights pollinator garden.

## 10 TIPS FOR WORKING WITH YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD OR HOMEOWNERS' ASSOCIATION

1. Get to know your neighbors. Relationship-building comes first.
2. Communicate your vision and plans and educate your neighbors on the benefits of sustainable landscaping.
3. Consult with outside experts.
4. Apply for grants to help offset the financial costs.
5. Be willing to be a leader and take a seat at the decision-making table.
6. Partner with local businesses who are invested in the neighborhood.
7. Reach out to organizations and city departments—like Parks and Rec or your local NRD—that might be able to help.
8. Link your plans for sustainable landscaping with a problem that needs to be solved, like flooding or erosion.
9. Provide research and evidence of the impact to support your proposed landscaping plans.
10. Expect some potential disagreement or difference of opinions, but always make being a good neighbor your first priority.

A sign at the entrance to the Vintage Heights pollinator garden explains the ecological benefits to visitors.



# GROW WHERE YOU'RE PLANTED

## LOOK WITHIN YOUR OWN CIRCLES TO UNCOVER OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVOCACY AND ACTION.

Five years ago, a chance meeting offered Omaha resident Annette Langan the opportunity to grow a garden beyond her own backyard.

"I ran into a member of my church on a local garden walk," recalled Langan. "He mentioned that St. Leo wanted to integrate more color into the prayer garden, and I said, 'I can help with that!'"

Today, the pollinating garden at St. Leo the Great Catholic Church in Omaha not only displays thousands of blooms in nearly every color of the rainbow, it has also become a treasured sanctuary for church members and visitors alike.

Initially, with no funds in the church budget for the garden, Langan applied to the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum for a Greener Towns grant, which enabled her and a team of volunteers to plant 270 perennials and connect the new pollinator garden with an older preexisting garden via a concrete path. A second Greener Towns grant last year enabled Langan and the other volunteers to add 24 trees and five additional planting beds, update signage and install seating areas and a pergola.

### MANY HANDS CREATE A BEAUTIFUL SPACE

Designated as a teaching and demonstration garden in partnership with the Nebraska Extension, the St. Leo Pollinating Garden has become a hub of collaboration. With a team of six to eight master gardeners—including Langan—and enthusiastic parish volunteers, the garden has blossomed through shared knowledge and hands-on experience.

"Never in my wildest dreams would I have envisioned this," said Langan. "It happened as the result of many hands sharing in its creation."

Langan suggested that those who are interested in gardening beyond their own backyard should consider where they already have connections with people.

"Think about where you are in the world and who your people are," she advised. "Maybe there is an



The garden path at St. Leo features hand-painted artwork.



Dense blazing star (*Liatris spicata*) is one of the many native perennials featured in the St. Leo Pollinating Garden.

### ANNETTE'S ADVICE FOR COLLABORATIVE GARDENING

1. Ask for help and ask people what they like to do. Align people's skills and gifts with your needs and goals.
2. Communicate and promote your project. The more people understand what you're doing, the more likely they will support it.
3. Collaborate and listen to others' suggestions. A staff member at Mulhalls who was visiting St. Leo suggested they connect the new garden with the older one.
4. Get buy-in and remember that when you are working in a collaborative space, it's not your personal garden. If you're working with an organization like a church or a school, you have to work within the system, communicate your goals clearly, play by the rules and respect their processes.
5. Allow people to feel like they are a part of the garden's progress and have their own stamp on it. When people feel a sense of ownership, they take pride in their work.

environmental project that needs some help at your church, at your kids' school or at your local library."

After retiring from a 20-plus-year career at Omaha Public Schools, Langan's lifelong love for flowers led her to become a master gardener and ultimately grew her passion for backyard gardening into a larger community initiative.

"I started in my own yard, and my interest grew from there," she said. "It just evolved. It's not something that happened overnight."

Langan's story is an inspiring example of how to grow where you're planted, and the St. Leo Pollinating Garden is a powerful testament to how green spaces can transform communities.

"Over the last several years, I've witnessed so many people coming down to the garden to enjoy nature, reflect and pray—both people from the church and from beyond the church walls," said Langan. "This is a place for everyone."

**Michelle DeRusha is the Communications & Events Coordinator for the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum.**

# FROM A VISION TO REALITY: HOW TO BRING YOUR COMMUNITY LANDSCAPE IDEA TO LIFE

Advocates for greener landscapes often have a vision for what they want their community to look like. However, people sometimes ask us, "How do I go from an idea to an actual garden?" The answer requires dedicated communication and planning over multiple months. Here are some tips to help you bring your community garden vision to reality.

## DEFINE THE PROJECT GOALS

The first point of discussion for a successful landscape project will be for you to define the goals of your project. These goals will inform all aspects of the design process moving forward and provide a filter for ideas to pass through. Clearly defined goals also help everyone get on the same page early, which in turn helps people to focus on what they can individually do to support those goals. Some may focus on funding, while others can seek out additional partners or expertise.

## ENGAGE IN DISCUSSION

After gathering site observations, it is important to talk through what we have learned and how this information squares with the goals and budget of the project. If changes need to be made, given what we have learned, it is good to get consensus on these changes from the larger group so that we are all on the same page. Good communication about any changes in goals or budgets, site changes or plant selection makes for a successful community project.

## REVISE YOUR PLAN IF NECESSARY

Design is an iterative process, meaning that it can and will change based on feedback or inspiration. Change is also often necessary considering budget limitations, plant availability and site conditions. As such, during a garden design process it is important to maintain an attitude of flexibility and compromise, as this will help to move a project along. However, design revisions should always help support the stated goals of the project.



Heritage Park in Battle Creek before the pollinator gardens were installed.

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## DO A SITE ANALYSIS

There are multiple physical variables that can influence the success of a garden. Notable examples include soil type, soil compaction, sun exposure, drainage, existing vegetation, slope, aspect— which direction the garden faces—and microclimates. It is important to observe and record these physical characteristics of your site, as they ultimately help us to select appropriate plant species, or, if we need to, intervene and adjust the physical characteristics of the site. Soil amendment, tillage, adjusting slope, creating retaining walls and pruning adjacent trees for increased sun exposure are common interventions prior to planting.

4

## DESIGN THE GARDEN

A garden design process can be performed as a group or by an individual. When performed as a group, some facilitation is required to tease apart how garden design and species selection support the larger goals of the project so that it doesn't just become a collection of everyone's favorite plants. However, favorite plants are encouraged in the process, and if they are the right plant for the right place, let's plant multiples of them!

Early in a design process it is also critical to discuss circulation, or how people will move through a site. Upon placing paths and seating, a garden reorients into multiple spaces, which can then be turned into planting beds or focal points of interest for the user.

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## PLANT YOUR GARDEN!

They say that "many hands make light work," and certainly during a community landscape project, the more volunteers to help plant the better. However, Nebraska Statewide Arboretum has learned several valuable lessons over the years on how to facilitate a productive and effective planting day. Good site preparation, having the right tools on hand, good communication with all in attendance, an immediate watering schedule and a promise by community advocates to continue caring for the area in subsequent seasons are all critical for a successful garden installation.

*Brad Kindler is a Sustainable Landscape Specialist for the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum.*



Heritage Park in Battle Creek after the garden was planted.

# TREE BOARD 101

## ONE WAY TO GET INVOLVED IN LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY IS TO BECOME A MEMBER OF YOUR COMMUNITY'S TREE BOARD.

"So what's a tree board?" you might ask. Typically, it's a designated group of people—ideally a combination of municipal staff and volunteer citizens—who work together to improve the health of the community forest through tree planting, advocacy, education, management and maintenance.

A tree board is also an important part of the Tree City USA designation. Launched in 1976 by the Arbor Day Foundation, Tree City USA is a national program that provides communities with a framework to help them maintain and grow their tree canopy. In order for a city or town to be recognized as a Tree City USA community, it must meet four standards, one of which is to maintain a tree board or department (for more information about Tree City USA, visit [arborday.org/programs/treecityusa](http://arborday.org/programs/treecityusa)).

### WHO ARE THE MEMBERS OF AN EFFECTIVE TREE BOARD?

The most effective tree board includes both volunteer citizens and an assigned municipal liaison—typically a staff member who is directly responsible for the community's parks and tree care budget. This creates a ladder effect that allows information to be translated and communicated from the citizens' perspective to the staff perspective to the community government perspective.

It is the citizens' responsibility to focus on issues that matter to them and share ideas and concerns at tree board meetings with their assigned liaison. The liaison then conveys this information to the town manager or administrator, who then communicates to the mayor or city council. It is important to have ordinances that clearly identify the responsibilities of each party in this trifecta.

Typically, the council or mayor is responsible for appointing tree board members and assigning the liaison. It is the liaison's responsibility to help citizens understand the inner workings of the municipal systems, the budget and work priorities. The responsibilities of the citizen tree board members can include anything from hosting an annual Arbor Day celebration and reviewing the tree



Forest health expert Laurie Stepanek of the Nebraska Forest Service leads a group in Gilbert Baker Wildlife Management Area near Harrison.

care ordinances to reporting or making recommendations when a violation is cited in the community.

### WHAT DOES A TREE BOARD DO?

A tree board can be a great asset to a community, with members serving as advocates for trees; assisting the city's arborist, forester or administrator; and connecting with the public to help residents better understand and appreciate the value trees bring to the community.

Responsibilities can vary from community to community. In Gering, for example, the tree board meets monthly and is comprised of six citizen members and the parks director. Tree board members advise the city administrator and city council on issues related to the proper care, maintenance and removal of the city's trees in parks and along streets. They also help to identify hazardous trees and those that are in violation of the city's ordinances, ensure that the city's tree inventory is maintained and up to date and create an annual work plan that is shared with the city council at the start of the year.

Tree board members can also play an important role in public relations by hosting or participating in community educational programs and events and by producing informational materials like planting and pruning guides. For instance, the Gering tree board organizes the annual Arbor Day

celebration and produces an annual report on the state of the community forest each year. Tree board members can also participate in city tree plantings, collaborate with city administrators on grant applications and help to care for trees in the community nursery.

In short, tree boards do a lot! From ensuring the health of a community's tree canopy to keeping the public informed, the tree board is a key component in a community's successful green infrastructure.

### HOW TO GET INVOLVED WITH YOUR COMMUNITY'S TREE BOARD

Technical tree expertise is not a requirement for participation on your local tree board, but time, energy and a passion for your environment and the health of your local trees are key! Reach out to your town or city office to find out who the tree board contact is. There are often voting and non-voting members that help carry out the board's responsibilities.

If there is not an existing tree board in your community, or it's inactive, consider starting one. Contact your Community Forester with the Nebraska Forest Service for guidance on how to start or revitalize a tree board in your town.

*Chrissy Land is the Western Nebraska Community Forester for the Nebraska Forest Service and the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum.*

# GROWING YOUR OWN

## HOW TO START A TREE NURSERY IN YOUR COMMUNITY

While local commercial nurseries are a fantastic place to buy trees (and we should support them with our business), some towns don't have a source for trees close by or have a limited budget. Here in the Tree Planter's State, some communities are creating local tree nurseries to grow the trees they need, improve species diversity in their towns and engage the public in the planting process.

Starting a small tree nursery in your community would be a great environmental advocacy project for a group of dedicated volunteers. Here are some tips for how to get started:

### LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

One of the most important components of a successful community tree nursery is a good location. It's important to be able to check on your trees frequently, so you should choose a site that will be convenient to access; a place you will drive by often is ideal. The site should also have an available water supply.

### KEEP THE TREES IN AND THE ANIMALS OUT

To prevent deer, rabbits and other critters from chewing on your trees, install a fence around the nursery that is four to eight feet tall. This step requires some knowledge about the animals that are in the area and which materials will be best for keeping them out. The best material for restricting deer is sturdy hog panel fencing. However its spacing will still allow rabbits through, so if bunnies are a problem, chicken wire might be a better option. Chicken wire will keep the rabbits out if it's tall enough and there aren't places where they can sneak underneath the fence. Remember, if it's a snowy winter, small animals can walk on top of snow drifts, so be sure your fence will be tall enough when heavy snowfall occurs.

### MAKE SURE YOU HAVE VOLUNTEERS TO HELP

Get a group of people together that can share the work of watering the trees during the hot months, pulling weeds occasionally, and, of course, bringing trees in and out of the nursery as needed. Set up a calendar for volunteers to sign up for these tasks and assign a couple of people to oversee nursery operations to ensure that everything gets done.

### CHOOSE THE RIGHT TREES AND CONTAINERS

Seedlings can be purchased from your local NRD, a nursery or the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum and then grown in your nursery space until they reach landscape size (typically 1-inch caliper).

Trees should be grown in a plastic or fabric container so that they are easy to take out of the nursery when the time is right. The container you use will dictate when the tree can be harvested and replanted in its permanent location. Each container should be dug halfway into the ground and then surrounded by a deep layer of woodchips. The wood mulch will keep the root ball from getting too cold in the winter, reduce weeds, and provide a cool moist environment for the trees during the summer.

### DON'T FORGET TO WATER

Watering can be done by sprinklers, but they may not give every tree the same amount of water, and a small nursery shouldn't take a long time to water by hand. For hand watering, a 25x25 foot space can hold 20-40 trees and should be watered one to three times a week when temperatures are high. You can also set up a soaker hose on a timer or turn it on while you work.

Once you've got trees in your nursery that are large enough to plant, the fun really begins! Your nursery crops can be used for Arbor Day celebrations, park and street plantings or even made available to the community through a rebate program. However you choose to use your locally grown trees, everyone involved in growing, planting and caring for them can be proud of the role they have played in growing a sustainable urban forest in their town.

If you'd like to learn more about local tree nurseries or would like to share pictures of your own micro-nursery, feel free to reach out to us by emailing [arboretum@unl.edu](mailto:arboretum@unl.edu).

**Graham Herbst is the Eastern Nebraska Community Forester for the Nebraska Forest Service and the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum.**



Nebraska Statewide Arboretum Horticulture Coordinator Bob Henrikson demonstrates how to plant a tree in a fabric container.



A community tree nursery in West Point.

Oak seedlings in the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum's greenhouse.



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More information at [PLANTNEBRASKA.ORG/SPRING-AFFAIR](https://PLANTNEBRASKA.ORG/SPRING-AFFAIR)

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