



## A Greener Today For a Brighter Tomorrow

The Brightside St. Louis Demonstration Garden, located at Kingshighway and Shenandoah in South City, educates the public about the best environmentally sustainable practices to implement in yards and neighborhood gardens throughout the region. Using plants that are native to Missouri wetland, glade, prairie and woodland habitats, visitors learn about the site conditions where certain plants thrive.

Although the soils in suburban and urban landscapes have been dramatically altered due to development, homeowners can find areas of their yard that have conditions similar to these habitats. When a gardener understands how to match plant species to the habitat where that plant is naturally found, they create a functional and sustainable landscape. Plants that are matched to their natural growing conditions reduce the need for supplemental watering, fertilizers and pesticides. Traditional landscapes include exotic plants and turf grass lawns which require a great deal of resources to maintain.

While some may like the artificial appearance of a green lawn, it provides little, if any, benefit to wildlife. On the other hand, native plants are important food and shelter sources for beneficial wildlife species such as birds, bees, and butterflies along with offering four seasons of interest. Thus, the presence of native plants in urban landscaping is essential to maintaining the natural biodiversity of our region.



Photo by Noppadol Paothong



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Beyond the wildlife and aesthetics, the garden's design addresses stormwater issues. For years, the prevailing stormwater management strategy has been to capture, pipe, and send runoff out-of-sight and downstream. Unfortunately, this approach has led to erosion, flash flooding, water pollution and lost aquatic habitats in many of our communities. To combat this problem, sustainable stormwater management practices were installed at the garden so that not one drop of rainwater leaves the site to enter the city's sewer system. This type of design is called Low-Impact Development (LID) and it uses natural processes to manage stormwater as close to the source as possible. LID practices at the garden include a cistern and rain barrels to capture rainwater from the onsite building's roof. The demonstration garden is also one of the few places in the region that has three different types of permeable surfaces (asphalt, concrete, and pavers) located throughout the site in addition to a rain garden and bioswale to collect and store stormwater. These onsite practices enhance water quality by filtering out sediment and pollutants from stormwater and allowing it to soak into the ground to replenish groundwater flow to urban streams.

The next time you're out and about in St. Louis, be sure to stop by the Brightside Demonstration Garden to see how it is connecting residents and visitors to the natural environment, cultivating environmental stewardship, and educating the public about sustainable landscaping practices.

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