



2006 Wild Ones Landscape Challenge Detailed Process

By Betty Struckhoff, Wild Ones St. Louis Chapter

Since 2006, [Grow Native!](#), [Shaw Nature Reserve](#) and Wild Ones have collaborated on the Landscape Challenge, which encourages homeowners to landscape with native plants.

One lucky homeowner is chosen each year for a native landscape makeover. The sponsors provide the services of a professional native landscape designer and volunteers install the landscape. The sponsors also provide up to \$1,500 worth of native plants and other landscape materials. The homeowner prepares the site and agrees to maintain the new plantings.

Applications are typically advertised in the selected area between April and June, and the planting is done in September.

2006 Grow Native! Landscape Challenge

St. Louis Wild Ones chapter sponsored a Grow Native! Landscape Challenge contest in 2006.

As natural landscapers, Wild Ones love to dig in the dirt and create a new habitat. Most of us, however, have limited space to do this on the property we own. What do you do when you run out of space? Why, find another yard owned by like-minded people and make it over. The St. Louis Wild Ones chapter recently sponsored a Grow Native! Landscape Challenge contest to promote native landscaping to our broader community and to have tons of fun.

Here is a step-by-step process of what we did:

Partnerships

Our landscape makeover contest was inspired by a pilot project in 2005 designed by the [Missouri Department of Conservation](#)'s Grow Native! program and the Mid-Missouri chapter of Wild Ones Natural Landscapers. They laid the organizational groundwork and coached us through the 2006 St. Louis contest. In St. Louis, the partnership consisted of [Grow Native!](#), Wild Ones – St. Louis chapter, and [Shaw Nature Reserve](#). Other chapters might consider partnering with a wildflower nursery, the local Sierra Club, nature study groups or similar organizations.

Define objectives and a geographic area

Our objective was to educate the general public about the beauty, practicality and eco-friendliness of native landscaping. We accomplished this by selecting a home with great visibility and homeowners who had potential for being ambassadors of our objective. We also gave free passes to each applicant for Native Plant School classes at Shaw Nature Reserve (other possible freebies might include discount coupons for a native plant nursery). Defining a geographic area put a limit on how much driving was involved in choosing the winner.

Develop a promotion plan

Our geographic area included a population of over one million, with both inner city and suburban neighborhoods. We delivered fliers and small posters to nurseries in the area and we distributed a press release to newspapers and to organizations interested in native plants. We received 73 applications and a feature article in the St. Louis paper.

Get professionals involved

A professional design can mean the difference between a landscape that elicits "WOWS!" and one that looks like a weedy patch. This is where experience counts. [Simon Barker](#), a local landscape designer, stepped forward and helped design the garden. He received help from Scott Woodbury and Matt Broderick, horticulturists from Shaw Nature Reserve who are native landscaping experts. The team led 15 volunteers the day of the planting event.

Narrowing down the Applicants

The first step was to narrow the playing field. We selected 13 finalists before doing a “drive-by” evaluation. We sought homeowners with some experience in gardening and an appreciation of the biodiversity a native landscape creates. We excluded back yards because front yards were more visible. Also, we considered children in the household to be a plus – how wonderful for a child to grow up with an interesting yard. When it came time for the “drive-by”, we looked for houses with good public visibility, evidence of caretaking, and a property that was within our ability and budget to successfully complete. Our winner was a relatively small, south-facing front yard directly across the street from a city park. The family was new to the area, had two children, and both parents turned out to be nature enthusiasts already.

Make the installation a fun and educational experience

The September Saturday of our installation was overcast and cool; perfect planting weather. In addition, the spirit of the Wild Ones volunteers and homeowners was infectious. Even the public stopped to ask what we were doing. Here is a synopsis of the conversion...

- Weeks before the planting, the homeowners prepared the yard by removing non-native boxwood and monkey grass. They also killed turf-grass with herbicide and broke apart a short concrete sidewalk to the front door.
- Just before the planting date, the planning team and homeowners, removed the old concrete, laid a new flagstone entry walk, dug the rain garden basin, and delivered the potted plants.
- The day of the volunteer planting, 11 volunteers and the two homeowners worked to the sound of bluegrass music. Here is what they did: dug the channel from the roof gutter to the rain garden and installed plastic pipe, installed a split rail fence to frame a small front yard island planting, planted hundreds of native flowers, grasses, trees and shrubs, spread a layer of leaf compost over the new plantings, and sowed new grass seed and straw on the remaining grass walkways.
- Throughout the morning, neighbors dropped by to watch the progress. The homeowners' two small children served us lemonade and then helped dig.

Scott paused several times to explain elements of the design to the whole group. Our newspaper writer and photographer spent over two hours with us and never ran out of questions. The children's grandmother served up water, coffee, sweet rolls and, after we finished, a hearty lunch. A neighbor brought dessert for all.

Get lucky

We could not have imagined a better winning family for our contest. Their enthusiasm and support for native landscaping is summed up in the following email from the homeowner a few days after the makeover:

I want to thank everyone once again for your help with this fabulous transformation of our front yard. We had so much fun working with you — what a lovely group of people! And the yard is just gorgeous. Give me a few weeks and I'll know all the plants. The kids are working on it too — their favorite is the rattlesnake master.

Every single time that we're out in the yard, a neighbor stops to talk to us about it. People are amazed when we tell them that all of the plants are native. Most of them have never considered why that might be important. It's fun to give people something new to think about.

Please come visit, and bring along some friends for a tour. We're used to people staring by now.



The planting crew celebrates a successful Landscape Challenge

We hope our story inspires other chapters to sponsor a landscape makeover. It is one of the most rewarding projects our group has ever done. I am happy to share more details about our experience with anyone who is interested. Please call 314-966-8404 or email etstruckhoff@att.net.

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