



Platinum-Certified Native Plant and Permaculture Project

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The main factor in our rapid rise to platinum status is the removal of turf grass throughout most of the property—the entire backyard and a good portion of the side yard. Since the front yard is much smaller by comparison, this means about 80 percent of the garden is turf-free.

Lisa instigates—or “masterminds,” as Anthony describes it—their work, as well as manages a website chronicling their progress, [Brunette Gardens: Tips and Tales From Our Homestead Habitat](#).

I guess this is scary for a lot of Midwesterners, but going without a lawn is pretty common in the Pacific Northwest, where Anthony and I met. I’m originally from St. Louis but lived out there for nearly 20 years, and it forged my gardening persona. Anthony’s father is a landscaper whose own (largely lawnless) garden was once featured in *Sunset Magazine*.

Native plant gardening is a mainstream activity in the Northwest, so as soon as we decided to take on this project yard in Maplewood, the plan included natives. But I knew precious little about what worked here, since the climate is radically different than Seattle’s. Mitch Leachman and the Bring Conservation Home program came to our rescue with a list of great recommendations, the first of which was to [remove the honeysuckle](#), wintercreeper, and other invasives choking the property.

That was an arduous process, as was sheet-mulching over the turf grass, which took two years. We’re definitely in the cardboard-and-mulch camp instead of black plastic. Why, you ask? Lots of reasons... check out [this write-up](#) to learn more!

With the invasives and lawn out of the way, we planted about 150 [native trees, shrubs, flowers, and grasses](#) between fall 2018 and spring 2021. Since we were ever budget-minded, most of these came to us free (from Wild Ones and other non-profit giveaways and seed swaps) or very inexpensively, such as the \$1-per-seedling cost when you purchase in bulk with other Wild Ones members through the Missouri Department of Conservation. We simply could not have progressed so far in the BCH program (especially so quickly) without those resources.

The results have been immediate and dramatic, with an incredible variety of pollinators, insects, and animals drawn to the garden, from monarch, swallowtail, and sphinx moth [larvae](#) to hanging robber flies and giant praying mantises to opossums, raccoons, and (harmless and welcome) snakes. We don’t at all mind the rabbits, which nest and rear their young in our habitat. I hit upon a modular fencing solution that enables me to keep rabbits away from sensitive plants according to the seasons, and it’s worth it for the joy of watching them frolic.

I volunteer with the [Shutterbee](#) program, taking photo surveys of the native bees in our garden over the summers. Since beginning the program in 2020, I’ve logged 434 observations of 22 different

species. These include the endangered American bumblebee, an uncommon blood bee, and a pure green sweat bee. I rank 13 out of 228 observers.

Anthony and I are full-time small business owners and Gen Xers who might *never* get to retire, actually, so all of this we do on the margins of busy lives. So now you know you have no excuse! For us, gardening this way is exercise, therapy, and nature bathing all rolled into one. For me in particular, it's a great passion, the second love of my life after Anthony and our family.

Highlights:

- Awarded [Platinum certification](#) in the St. Louis Audubon Society's [Bring Conservation Home](#) program in June 2021 after less than 3 years in the program.
- Platinum status achieved by less than 2% of all gardens in the program.
- Also a designated Monarch Way Station and a Wild Ones Pollinator Habitat.
- Also a Shutterbee volunteer participating garden, with 434 observations of 22 bee species made over the summers, 2020-21.
- Close to 150 native trees, shrubs, flowers, and grasses were planted between fall 2018 and spring 2022.

Invasive plants removed:

- *Ailanthus altissima* - Tree of heaven
- *Clematis terniflora* - Sweet autumn clematis
- *Euonymus fortunei* - Wintercreeper
- *Lonicera japonica* - Honeysuckle vine
- *Lonicera maackii* - Bush honeysuckle
- *Ornithogalum umbellatum* - Star of Bethlehem

'Statue' plants removed:

- Knockout rose (3)
- Hosta circle
- Monkey grass circle

Turf removal:

- 50% of the rear property as of 7/7/2019
- 80% of the rear property as of 11/3/2019
- 95% of the rear property as of 5/9/2020
- 100% of the rear property as of 2/1/21

Existing/volunteer native plants saved/encouraged:

- *Acalypha virginica* - Virginia copperleaf
- *Chamaesyce nutans* - Nodding spurge
- *Erigeron annuus* - Daisy fleabane
- *Eupatorium perfoliatum* - Boneset
- *Geranium carolinianum* - Carolina crane's bill (proliferating ground cover)
- *Matelea gonacarpa* - Milkweed vine
- *Onoclea sensibilis* - Sensitive fern
- *Parthenocissus quinquefolia* - Virginia creeper
- *Phytolacca americana* - Pokeweed
- *Symphotrichum pilosum* - Old field aster

- Rudbeckia triloba - Brown-eyed susan
- Viola sororia - Wild violets (proliferating ground cover)
- Vitis spp. - Wild grape vines

Existing beneficial plants kept:

- Gallium aparine - Cleavers
- Hylotelephium 'Herbsfraude' Autumn Joy - Sedum
- Oleaceae spp. - Lilac
- Stachys byzantina - Woolly hedge nettle/Lamb's ear

Existing other plants kept:

- Azaleas - to be removed during front yard phase
- Crocus, bearded iris, tulips, daffodils, ditch lilies, hostas, lily of the valley - reducing/replacing some over time

Native trees and shrubs added as seedlings/starts:

- Amelanchier arborea - Serviceberry (2)
- Amorpha fruticosa - False indigo bush (4)
- Andrachne phyllanthoides - Maidenbush (1)
- Aruncus dioicus - Goat's beard (1)
- Asimina triloba - Pawpaw (4)
- Asimina triloba 'Mango'- Pawpaw (1 grafted)
- Ceanothus americanus - New Jersey tea (1)
- Cephalanthus occidentalis - Buttonbush (3)
- Chionanthus virginicus - White fringe tree (1)
- Corylus americana - American filbert/hazelnut (3)
- Diospyros virginiana - Persimmon (2)
- Diospyros virginiana - Persimmon (1 grafted)
- Hamamelis vernalis - Witch hazel (3)
- Hibiscus lasiocarpus - Rose mallow (3)
- Hydrangea arborescens - Wild hydrangea (1)
- Hypericum prolificum - Shrubby St. John's Wort (2)
- Juniperus virginiana - Eastern red cedars (2)
- Juniperus virginiana 'Taylor' - 'Taylor' junipers (9)
- Liriodendron tulipifera - Tulip tree (1)
- Nyssa silvatica - Black gum (1)
- Prunus americana - Wild plum (3)
- Prunus virginiana - Chokecherry (1)
- Quercus shumardii - Shumard oak (1)
- Rubus allegheniensis - Blackberry (3)
- Rubus idaeus 'Heritage' - Raspberry (1)
- Sambucus canadensis 'Adams' - Adams Elderberry EZ start (2)
- Vaccinium corymbosum 'Spartan' - Blueberry (1)
- Vaccinium corymbosum 'Duke' - Blueberry (4)
- Vaccinium corymbosum 'Northcountry blue' - Blueberry (2)
- Vaccinium corymbosum 'Northblue' - Blueberry (1)
- Vaccinium corymbosum 'Misty' - Blueberry (2)

Native flowers/plants/grasses/vines added as seedlings/starts:

- Achillea millefolium - Yarrow (1)
- Achillea millefolium 'Balvinrose' - Rose yarrow (1)
- Agastache foeniculum - Anise hyssop (1 + seeds)

- *Amorpha canescens* - Lead plant (1)
- *Andropogon gerardi* - Big bluestem (1)
- *Anemone canadensis* - Meadow anemone (1)
- *Asarum canadense* - Wild ginger (2)
- *Asclepias incarnata* - Swamp milkweed (1)
- *Asclepias incarnata* 'Ice Ballet' - Swamp milkweed (1)
- *Asclepias tuberosa* - Milkweed, butterfly weed (1)
- *Baptisia australis* - Blue false indigo (1)
- *Callirhoe involucrata* - Purple poppy mallow (1)
- *Chasmanthium latifolium* - River oats (1)
- *Coreopsis* spp. - Tickseed coreopsis (1)
- *Echinacea pallida* - Pale purple coneflower (1)
- *Echinacea purpurea* - Coneflower (4)
- *Echinacea purpurea* 'Double decker' - Double-decker coneflower (1)
- *Eryngium yuccifolium* - Rattlesnake master (3)
- *Euphorbia marginata* - Snow on the mountain (1)
- *Fragaria virginica* - Wild strawberry (1)
- *Heliopsis helianthoides* - Ox-eye sunflower (1)
- *Iodanthus pinnatifidus* - Purple rocket (1)
- *Iris fulva* - Copper iris (1)
- *Lobelia cardinalis* - Cardinal flower (1)
- *Lobelia siphilitica* - Blue lobelia (1)
- *Mimulus ringens* - Allegheny monkey flower (1)
- *Monarda didyma* - Bee balm (1)
- *Monarda punctata* 'Fantasy' - Fantasy bee balm (1)
- *Opuntia humifusa* - Prickly pear cactus (3)
- *Packera obovata* - Golden groundsel (1)
- *Palafoxia callosa* - Small palafoxia, "Spanish needles" (1) - note endangered species
- *Passiflora incarnata* - Purple passionflower (1)
- *Passiflora caerulea* - Blue passionflower (1)
- *Penstemon digitalis* - Foxglove beardtongue (1)
- *Phytostegia virginiana* - Obedient plant (1)
- *Pycnanthemum pilosum* - Hairy mountain mint (3)
- *Pycnanthemum tenuifolium* - Slender mountain mint (3)
- *Sedum ternatum* - Sedum (3)
- *Solidago nemoralis* - Field goldenrod (1)
- *Spigelia marilandica* - Indian pink (1)
- *Stylophorum diphyllum* - Celandine poppy (1)
- *Symphotrichum novae-angliae* - New England aster (1)
- *Tradescentia ohioensis* - Ohio spiderwort (1)
- *Verbena hastata* - Blue vervain (1)
- *Vernonia augustifolia* - Tall ironweed (1)
- *Veronicastrum virginicum* - Culver's root (1)

Natives germinated from seed sown direct:

- *Amsonia illustris* - Shining blue star (10+)
- *Asclepius syriaca* - Common milkweed (5)
- *Bouteloua curtipendula* - Sideoats gramma (2)
- *Coreopsis lanceolata* - Lanceleaf coreopsis (5)
- *Echinacea purpurea* - Coneflower (1)
- *Elephantopus carolinianus* - Elephant's foot (1)
- *Hibiscus lasiocarpus* - Rose mallow (3)

- *Manfreda virginica* - Agave (5)
- *Monarda didyma* - Bee balm (1)
- *Oenothera biennis* - Evening primrose (4)
- *Ratibida pinnata* - Gray-headed coneflower (2)
- *Rudbeckia hirta* - Yellow coneflower (10+)

Seeds sown, still waiting for germination:

- *Scaly blazing star* (*Liatris squarrosa*)
- *Dutchman's pipe vine* (*Aristolochia tomentosa*)
- *Illinois bundleflower* (*Desmanthus illinoensis*)
- *Blue sage* (*Salvia azurea*)
- *Curlytop ironweed* (*Vernonia arkansana*)
- *Wild quinine* (*Parthenium integrifolium*)

Edible (non-native) perennial plants/seeds added:

- 1 Bartlett pear dwarf supreme
- 1 Moonglow pear standard
- 1 Arkansas black apple semi-dwarf supreme
- 2 Hansen's bush cherry
- 2 Hinnomaki red gooseberry
- 4 Horseradish
- 1 Rhubarb
- 8 Purple passion asparagus
- 16 Jersey knight giant asparagus
- 8 Mary Washington asparagus
- 2 Valerian
- 3 Curly leaf parsley (biennial)
- 3 Italian parsley (biennial)
- 2 Thyme
- 3 Spearmint
- 3 Peppermint
- 1 Grey santolina
- 2 Sweet marjoram
- 1 Sage
- 3 Oregano
- 1 Lemon balm
- Saved seeds cilantro
- 2 rows perennial onions (potato onions)
- Seed packet salad burnet
- Seed packet sorrel

Other non-native perennials:

- *Artemisia* 'Powis Castle'
- *Leucanthemum superbum* 'Becky' (Shasta daisy)

Edible (non-native) perennials from seed:

- Arugula (*Eruca vesicaria*)
- Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)

Wildlife caretaking:

- 3 bird baths
- 3 bird feeders
- 2 bird houses
- 1 rock habitat for snakes, lizards, toads
- 1 bat house
- 1 brush pile

Bird species spotted:

-American robin, blue jay, Northern cardinal, American goldfinch, house finch, house sparrow, house wren, red-breasted nuthatch, red-bellied woodpecker, sharp-shinned hawk, northern mockingbird, mourning dove, red-shouldered hawk, Cooper's hawk, American tree sparrow, downy woodpecker, northern flicker, ruby-throated hummingbird, crow, dark-eyed junco, black capped/carolina chickadee, yellow-bellied sapsucker, white-throated sparrow, white-crowned sparrow, Carolina wren, brown-headed cowbird, European starling, common grackle, rock dove, Eurasian tree sparrow, white-breasted nuthatch, chipping sparrow

Wildlife guests:

- Eastern cottontail rabbit, opossum, grey squirrel, chipmunk, garter snakes, Dekay's snake, raccoon, field mice

Insects of note:

- American bumble bee (endangered), leafcutter bees, ligated furrow bees, eastern carpenter bees, long-horned bees, metallic sweat bees, European wool carder bees, fireflies, ladybugs, mantis, hanging thieves robber fly, green June bugs, cabbage white butterflies, monarch butterflies, painted lady butterflies, Achemon sphinx moth larvae, black swallowtail butterflies

Timeline:

November 2017

- Purchased home

Summer 2018

- Removed bush honeysuckle
- St. Louis Audubon Society conducted Bring Conservation Home assessment
- Removed invasive wintercreeper growing through and around chain link fence along 1/3rd of property perimeter

Fall 2018

- Removed invasive honeysuckle vine covering fence on 2/3rds of property perimeter
- Removed other invasives (clematis, tree of heaven)
- Planted persimmon, serviceberry, junipers
- Planted blueberries

- "Smother mulched" over 1/5th of turf

Spring 2019

- Planted New Jersey tea, hazelnut, wild hydrangea, chokecherry, pawpaw, witch hazel
- Sowed native flower seeds
- Planted perennial vegetables and fruit trees
- Sheet-mulched to 50% of turf

Summer 2019

- Planted numerous native herbs, flowers, shrubs, grasses
- Planted additional pawpaw and persimmon
- Planted oak, black gum, and tulip trees
- Sheet-mulched to 80% of rear yard
- Enrolled in Shutterbee program

Fall 2019

- Planted numerous native herbs, flowers, grasses
- Sowed native seeds for herbs, flowers, grasses
- Sheet-mulched to 90% of rear yard

Winter 2020

- Sowed native seeds for herbs, flowers, grasses
- Sheet-mulched to 95% of rear yard
- Pruned orchard trees

Spring 2020

- Planted additional fruit trees/bushes
- Put in a huge MDC native plant seedling order - 24 woody-stemmed trees/bushes
- Planted additional native bare-root flowers/herbs
- Put in first annual vegetable garden from seed sown directly
- Planted perennial vegetables and herbs from seed

- Added some herbs from starts and seeds
- Added bat house and rock trench
- Created 2 hugelkultur beds and 1 hugelkultur herb mound
- Created rain gardens w/ buttonbush, hibiscus, false indigo bush

Summer 2020

- Started Shutterbee native bee study hosted by Webster U and SLU (Billiken Bee Lab)
- Noticed a large increase of fireflies vs. previous years, as well as bats and dragonflies
- Added perennial herbs and additional milkweed, plus yarrow, coneflowers, mallow, native sedum, cardinal flower, verbenas

Fall 2020

- Added more blueberries, perennial onions

Winter 2020

- Finished rear property sheet-mulching to 100%

Spring 2021

- Planted 19 new native plant seedlings
- Scheduled garden certification
 - Awarded Platinum status in the Bring Conservation Home program, of only 2% of properties enrolled in the program

Summer 2021

- Named Monarch Waystation.

Fall 2021

- Designated a Wild Ones Native Plant Butterfly Garden.

Spring 2022

- 'Liberty' apple planted in the orchard.
- Third spring cool season vegetable garden
- First garden tour, scheduled for early June: Wild Ones member tour.
- Feature in Wild Ones Journal.