



Wild Ones

NATIVE PLANTS, NATURAL LANDSCAPES

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A voice for the natural landscaping movement.

Free Identification Apps and Community Science Projects



Barbara A. Schmitz

The days are getting shorter and that means my time spent on my backyard deck, sitting in a glider with my laptop as I work on the Wild Ones Journal, is coming to an end, at least for a bit. My backyard is my favorite place to work, and not just in my garden.

There's something about working outside and hearing birdsong, or about glancing up to see a tiger swallowtail or monarch flutter by. It doesn't make work seem like work. It's relaxing, almost comforting. You notice things that otherwise would go unnoticed.

That's the premise of Chris Helzer's "Hidden Prairie." Helzer, director of science for the Nature Conservancy in Nebraska, spent a year photographing life in a square meter plot. And by the end, he had taken pictures of 113 species of plants and animals. But he was most impressed by the beauty he found in that small area.

So impressed with Helzer's story (and subsequent book), the Wild Ones Loess Hills Chapter created their own Hidden Wild projects using old mailboxes, notebooks and more, open to chapter members or the public. People are asked to stop by one of their sites and contribute their observations. What an amazing way to encourage people to really look at a small area and appreciate the beauty that can be found there!

Those projects are part of community science, and Janet Allen, co-founder and current president of the Wild Ones Habitat Gardening in Central New York Chapter, writes that now it is more important than ever to contribute and help researchers document plant and animal lifecycle events and learn in the process. She also includes an extensive list of Free Identification Apps and Community Science Projects that can be found on the Wild Ones website.

This issue of Wild Ones Journal also contains great examples of what chapters and chapter leaders are doing to promote native landscaping, including developing partnerships with like-minded organizations. And it offers so much more: from stories to help you create your native garden to help it thrive, to stories on snakes, bees and cacti.

So, if it's a nice day, grab your laptop or iPad and head outdoors to your deck or porch to read this issue of the Journal. And take the time to enjoy and really observe all that nature has to offer.



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Established in 1977, Wild Ones is a national not-for-profit organization of members who teach the benefits of growing native plants and work together to grow and restore natural landscapes.

Wild Ones' definition of a native plant:

A native plant is a species that occurs naturally in a particular region, ecosystem and/or habitat and was present prior to European settlement.



could plant something around. Do you have a scraggly patch in the lawn that never looks that great anyway? Or maybe there's an area beside your house or a strip along the driveway that could stand to lose some lawn.

Step two: Adios grass. You don't necessarily need to nuke your lawn with chemicals to kill the grass or break your back digging it out. Cardboard will usually do the trick. If you have moving boxes still in the basement that you've been meaning to get rid of, or a borderline troubling Amazon addiction, you're halfway there! Put a couple layers of cardboard directly on top of the grass in your chosen location.

Step three: Talk dirt(y) to me. You can buy topsoil and/or compost at any garden center. Or, for you budget-conscious moms, check with your city or county parks departments to see if they offer it for free. Carondelet Park in St. Louis City, for example, has a giant pile of compost free to anyone with a shovel and some containers. Grab some bins and a friend (soil is heavy) and dump a good 6 inches on the cardboard. Tada! You have a new garden bed.

But note, when using straight compost to create your planting area, put it down in the fall and don't plant anything until spring. Compost gets hot when it's breaking down and needs some alone time so it doesn't burn your baby plants.

Step four: Flower power. There are great native plants for every conceivable garden situation in every ecoregion. If you have a sunny patch and love butterflies and live in the Midwest, for instance, put in some milkweed like common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) and butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*). Both are easy to grow from seed.

If your area is a little shadier and you live in the Eastern U.S., plant



Photo: Barbara A. Schmitz

The lazy mom's guide to saving the planet

Place cardboard in the fall on areas of your grass that you want to kill.

By Liz Martinez

One of the best things you can do for the environment is to rip out all your turf grass and replace it with native plants. If that seems completely overwhelming and thoroughly unfeasible, that's OK. The second-best thing you can do for the environment is: something. With that in mind, I present the lazy mom's guide to saving the planet.

You may be thinking to yourself, isn't my lawn just one big plant? Surely that is already good for the environment. The reality, however, is that not all plants are created equally. Much like how your child will flat out refuse to eat escargot or squid ink gnocchi, the beneficial insects that are the backbone of a healthy ecosys-

tem are not interested in snacking on plants from other parts of the world. They want the name brand mac and cheese of native plants!

The more native plants in your yard, and the less useless turf grass, the better. Right now, the USA has 40 million acres of turf grass. Even if you can only handle removing a small portion of lawn, that is a huge step in the right direction. Imagine if everyone took out just 10% of their turf grass and put in native plants; that would create 4 million acres of eco-friendly space, which is almost twice the size of Yellowstone National Park! A little can go a long way, so let's get started:

Step one: Select a location. Maybe you have a tree in your yard that you



Photo: Liz Martinez

Left: Place 6" of topsoil on your cardboard to create a new flower bed.
 Below: Butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) is easy to grow from seed and a monarch magnet.



purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), wild hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens*) or Indian pink (*Spigelia marylandica*). The Missouri Prairie Foundation's Grownative.org has tons of sample garden layouts and Top 10 lists if you need more ideas. And Wild Ones does, too, with its [Native Garden Designs](#) for the ecoregions of Boston, Massachusetts; Chattanooga, Tennessee; Chicago, Illinois; Denver/Front Range, Colorado; Columbia River Basin, Washington; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Greensboro, North Carolina; Lafayette, Louisiana; Las Cruces, New Mexico; Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Portland, Oregon; Princeton, New Jersey; St. Louis, Missouri; Tallahassee, Florida; Toledo, Ohio; Tucson, Arizona; and Washington, D.C.



Photo: Liz Martinez

But since this is the lazy mom's guide, here are some of the best in the St. Louis, Missouri area as these two All Star natives will work anywhere (sun or shade, dry or damp) and are so easy to grow they will laugh at your brown thumb: orange coneflower (*Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *umbrosa*) and rose turtlehead (*Chelone obliqua*).

And that's it! In four easy steps you can increase the amount of usable habitat for wildlife and join in with thousands of other ordinary heroes making sure we hand a livable planet down to our kids and grandkids.

Liz Martinez is a member of the Wild Ones St. Louis (Missouri) Chapter, a student in the horticulture program at the St. Louis Community College – Meramec and the mother of two small bug enthusiasts.