



MEMORANDUM VILLAGE OF NORTHBROOK

DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING SERVICES DEPARTMENT

TO: SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION
FROM: TESSA MURRAY, SUSTAINABILITY COORDINATOR
DATE: JANUARY 2022
SUBJECT: VILLAGE HALL RAIN GARDEN PROGRESS UPDATE

RAIN GARDEN REVITALIZATION: IT TAKES A VILLAGE



Northbrook's collaborative spirit helped transform the Village Hall rain garden in one year's time. From installing a rain barrel to introducing pollinator habitat, the rain garden serves as an example of being a steward for the earth in your own backyard.

2020-2021 progress for the rain garden is featured on Northbrook's Sustainable Land Use webpage (www.northbrook.il.us/974/Sustainable-Land-Use). The following memorandum will overview key maintenance practices deployed since then for the newly revitalized garden.

SPRING 2021



After a long winter, it may be tempting to try and parse through emerging seedlings in spring to prevent growth of any invasives you may find. This is not recommended for newly planted garden plots, because it is difficult to identify plants not fully developed. For example, you may think a young Purple Coneflower leaf is Garlic Mustard, and pull out a perfectly nice new plant. The above photo shows how the garden appeared in spring 2021, with many seedlings popping up from fall planting and a few plugs added (thanks to help from our Trustees)!

SUMMER 2021

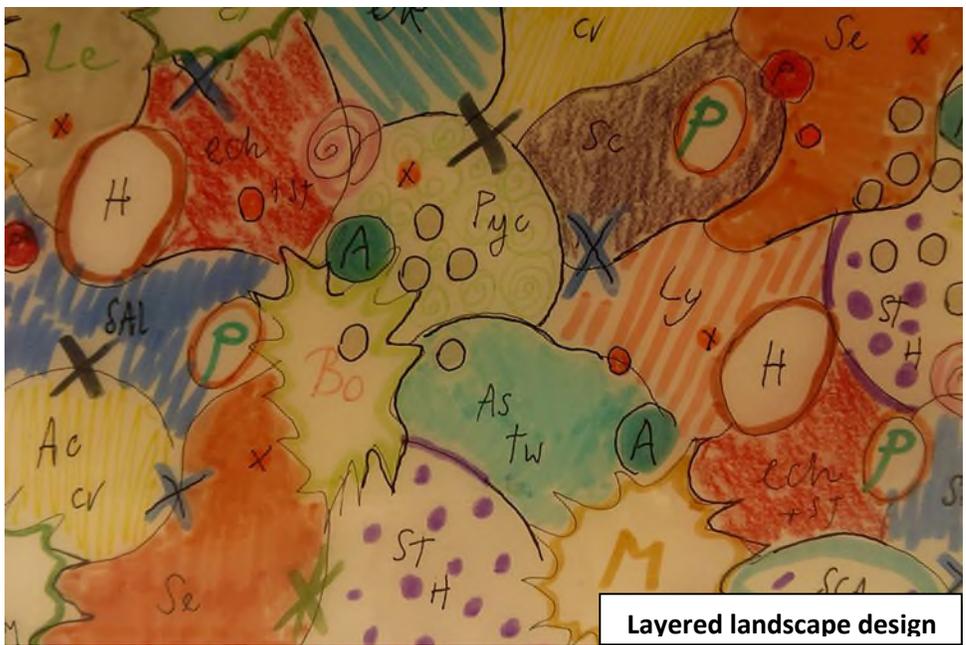


July 2021



August 2021

As you can see from the above photo, there were still large patches of empty space between plantings. Because our natural ecosystem thrives by layering groups of different plant species together, such gaps are not conducive to gardening for native plant diversity. Many native plants grow better in the presence of underground root competition. Aboveground, these plants actually help each other carry the weight of their flowers and foliage when planted in close enough proximity. For a small plot like ours, it is best to add plants in groups of 2-3 plugs per species together.



Layered landscape design

With the kindness and generosity of community partners in Northbrook (members of the Garden Club, Farmers Market, and GoGreen), the garden quickly filled throughout the summer with more native plant plugs transplanted from gardens across the Village. Thanks to them, Village staff was able to keep the garden lush and full while taking out around 50 milkweed plants for distribution at a Farmers Market giveaway event.



Milkweed plugs

Given a drought persisting throughout the summer and all the new plants being added, it was important to stay on top of irrigation. Public Works staff installed a rain barrel at the garden to capture stormwater from the roof. The barrel ensures the success of new plants with a weekly soak, all while conserving water and promoting the rain barrels available at a discount rate to residents inside Village Hall.



Rain barrel system

Rather than sticking to a few species in the rain garden, the large diversity of pollinator plants allowed for constant blooming and food sources for insects throughout spring to early fall. When aphids came to suck sap out of the milkweed plants, ladybugs came to the rescue by eating away at the aphids. Peskier colonies remained on the larger milkweeds that were easily removed with a spray bottle of water and dish soap.



Aphids and grasshopper



Ladybug



FALL 2021

By the time fall 2021 came, new seeds and bulbs were planted in remaining pockets of empty space. Village staff prepped the garden for winter using the high quality processed mulch, available for free 24/7 at Public Works. While it may be tempting to cut and remove dead or dried out plant matter, the best mode of action for wildlife is to leave these in place until at least May. Birds pass by to pluck seeds off the heads of spent flowers. Ground-nesting insects burrow underground for winter to take advantage of soil insulated by leaf litter and plant matter. In spring, native bees will cut what they need down themselves to reside in hollowed-out stems of plants. If you must cut, leave stems to at least 15 inches for overwintering pollinators. While such practices differ aesthetically compared to traditional garden plants, beauty is found in the natural life cycles that sustain a healthier environment.

