

Flutter Flyer



Introduction

Welcome to the Flutter Flyer, the quarterly newsletter for the Yard by Yard Community Resiliency Project! For new participants (and anyone who could use a refresher), we start things off with an overview of the Yard by Yard program, followed by program updates and helpful articles from our staff. Thank you all for taking the pledge to do your part to make a difference... Yard by Yard!



In This Issue...

- News and Announcements
- New Staff Spotlight
- Practice Spotlight: Bee Hotel, Bird Houses and Bat Boxes
- Understanding Urban Soils
- Certify Your Habitat
- New Years Resolutions
- and more!

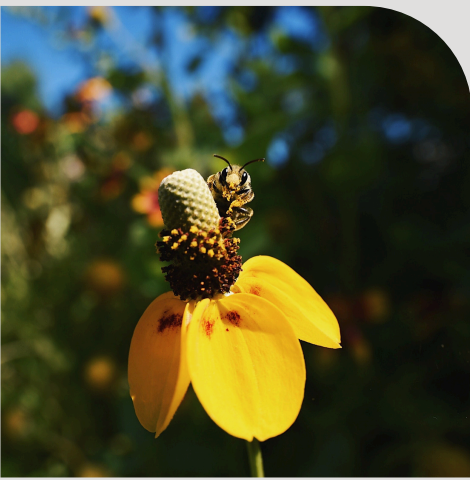
What is Yard by Yard?

The Yard by Yard Project encourages residents in cities and towns to add strength, health, and resiliency to our communities! This happens when yards are managed to improve soil health and contribute to clean water. Yard by Yard recognizes and supports citizens who take action to make their yards resilient and nature-friendly. The Yard by Yard program aims to provide three things: 1) recognition for having property that is nature friendly, 2) resources to help citizens create healthy and functional landscapes, and 3) food for our very important pollinators!

The Yard by Yard Project is sponsored by the Friends of Blue Thumb, the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission's Soil Health and Blue Thumb Programs, and by the conservation district in which you live.

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NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Blue Thumb Training

Do you love science and being outdoors? Help protect Oklahoma streams by becoming a certified Blue Thumb stream monitor!

Northwestern Oklahoma State University
709 Oklahoma Boulevard Alva, OK 73717

February 15 8:30am - February 16 4:30PM

For more information contact Cheryl Cheadle-
Cheryl.Cheadle@Conservation.ok.gov

✳ Save the Dates for Spring Events ✳

Gardening Above Ground

This free event offers people in OKC the opportunity to implement conservation in small spaces, like a back porch or balcony. Join us for this fun and educational event—we'll provide the plants and soil; all you need to bring is a pot!

Hosted at Lia's Garden in OKC on April 12th

Farm Friday - Huffman Family Farm

Come explore Huffman Family Farm, in Choctaw, on a tour guided by the farmers themselves! This event will offer insight into what makes local food unique compared to what you find at the grocery store.

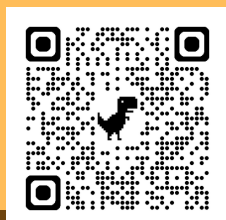
✳ **May 30th at 6PM** ✳

Tour Oklahoma Native Yards

The T.O.N.Y. Tour includes 5 native plant landscapes in NW OKC to showcase and encourage the use of local native plants. Local plant vendors will be at each home, and at a central location at Rollingwood Park.

Join us on May 24th

Follow this QR code to register, or go to oknativeplants.org



Yard by Yard and Okie's for Monarchs Wildlife Habitat Grant Program

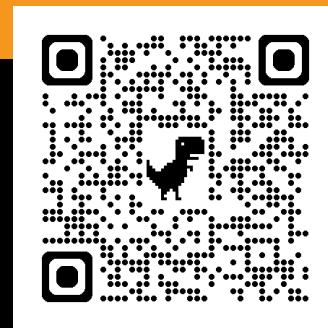
Yard by Yard and Okie's for Monarchs are pleased to announce The Wildlife Habitat Grant Program, offering financial awards for the installation of native plants used for creating new wildlife habitat that supports insects and birds.

To be eligible, participants must be Yard by Yard certified and own property in Oklahoma, Cleveland, or East Canadian County. Projects must cover a minimum of 100 square feet, with a maximum of 1,000 square feet. Awardees will receive \$525 for every 100 square feet of new wildlife habitat created!

The goal of this program is to expand urban wildlife habitats and strengthen vital corridors for migrating birds and pollinators. If you're passionate about creating space for wildlife and enhancing biodiversity, this is a great opportunity to make a difference—while getting financial support to bring your vision to life!

For more details, application, and informational webinars visit <https://okiesformonarchs.org/grants/>

The First Informational Webinar will be hosted on February 11th from 12PM - 1PM. Follow the QR code below to register!



Okies for MONARCHS



New Staff Spotlight

introducing our new staff working in urban conservation

Morgan Sommer

Hi I'm Morgan, I use she/her pronouns, and I'm the Urban Conservation Technical Assistant at the Oklahoma County Conservation District! My position is funded by a National Association of Conservation Districts Grant to help educate the public about conservation services and programs in Oklahoma County and promote urban conservation. I grew up in Tulsa, but currently live in Norman after recently graduating from OU with a Bachelors in Environmental Sustainability. I have a lot of love for our earth and that is what drives me to conserve and protect our natural resources. I love taking photos of everything from cool cloud formations down to the shiny earthworms, and I love to show off the cool things I find even more. I believe the more we know about our amazing and unique planet, the more we will want to protect it, not just for ourselves, but future generations that will be here long after we are gone.



G Payne

Hey I'm GP and I use they/them pronouns. I am currently the Urban Conservation Resource and Outreach Specialist for OK County. I am involved in event coordination, community outreach, and connecting people to the variety of resources OKC has to offer. I hold my master's and bachelor's degrees in Biology thanks to the University of Central Oklahoma. Plants are my passion, and as a botanist it brings me joy to share my admiration for the environment with others through field walks and talks! I've been in Oklahoma for over a decade now, and what I love most is how tight-knit the community is. In my time with the OK County Conservation District, I plan to host workshops that empower communities with scientific knowledge relevant to the ecosystem they are a part of.



Practice Spotlight: _____

Bee Hotels, Bird Houses, and Bat Boxes

How to Bolster a Blossoming Wildlife and Native Ecosystem



Keeping Bees Busy

Native bees are among the most important of 200,000 species of pollinators! An easy way for homeowners to protect and increase the population of these pollinators, is to build bee hotels, which are essentially the insect equivalent of a birdhouse! A bee hotel mimics nesting habitat and provides shelter from weather and predators. They can be a vital resource for bees in areas where natural habitats may be scarce. They can be relatively easy to construct using old reed or bamboo, as well as hollow stems from plants such as sunflowers, fennels, brambles, raspberries, or elder. Bee hotels provide a place to lay eggs during a warm season as well as give a place to overwinter when seasons change. For those who want to offer one, place it about chest high on a tree, fence, or wall near a nectar source. It's best to try and place it tilted downwards and facing east in a sunny spot so it gets morning light.



Photo by Nicol Ragland

Photo by Sean Washington



Birds in the Air and at Home

In urban areas, birds are particularly affected by the lack of suitable nesting sites which prevents them from utilizing their surrounding habitat. Providing bird houses can afford them many benefits as they can deter predators or parasites, and withstand winds, storms, or flooding. Here in the Southern Great Plains we have about 30 species of cavity-nesting birds, and with that it's important to find out which species you want to nest and the specifications they like for their house! Good nesting boxes are made of rough wood and should have a roof over all sections to protect them, small holes are also important for drainage and ventilation. It's especially important to keep the inside as dry as possible so extending the roof a few inches beyond the front is important, as well as drilling drainage holes. Keeping them cool in our hot summers can be achieved by drilling several vent holes in the sides or dropping the sides or front a quarter inch from the roof. Checking bird boxes weekly and keeping records is especially important to note any challenges (pests, predators, etc.), and how to overcome them.



Bird Box? No, It's a Bat Box!

Bats are amazing insect eaters that feast on moths, beetles, and even those pesky mosquitoes! Bat boxes can be very useful to the average gardener or vegetable grower to welcome bats to their property for a free and natural form of pest control. Oklahoma is home to at least 23 species of flying mammals (and the only mammals that can fly are bats), but only seven of them are most likely to occupy bat houses in urban and rural areas.

The location and design of the house greatly influences the chances that a bat friend will move into your yard. The most successful houses have roost chambers of at least 20 inches tall and 14 inches wide with a 3 to 6 inch landing area extending below the entrance. Providing chambers also helps regulate temperatures to support larger populations. Venting on the front of the box is a requirement as well. When thinking of materials and placement, bats are very particular. Pressure treated wood should be avoided to avoid toxicity. Color of the material has a large effect on the temperature and therefore comfort for them as well.

Location must be carefully considered due to sun exposure and heat absorption. Houses should face southeast for the most sunshine and warmth. Being within one quarter mile of permanent freshwater is necessary as well. Single chambered houses can be mounted on wooden or masonry buildings but multi chambered houses should be placed on wooden or metal poles, at least 20-30 feet away from the nearest branches or utility wires to avoid pests, and they should all be 12 to 30 feet above the ground.

Precautions should be taken to stop predators from reaching the bat houses. Even then it can take up to two summers for bats to start using them, and if not try a new location!

Why These Critters Matter

Providing habitats for these creatures to reside in are key ways we can make an impact within our local ecosystem. Bees, birds, and bats all play vital roles in pollinating, pest management, and upkeep to an overall healthier ecosystem. Bees, birds, and bats play a huge role in pollinating our crops and flowers, as well as birds and bats dispersing seeds wherever they may roam. Birds and bats are especially vital for controlling pests and nuisances we may face in our own gardens. It's important for us to be stewards of the land when we can in order to support the world that supports us back, and these are great ways to make a lasting impact!



Photo by Nicol Ragland



Sam Says!

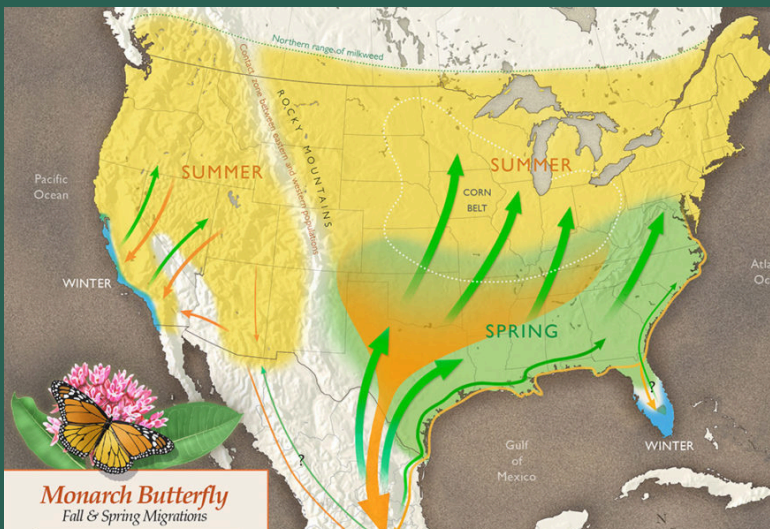
Fleeting Flutter



We have about 5% the number of monarchs now that we had in 1980. I may be an animated raccoon, but since Flutter is my best friend, it is important to know these things. In fall of 2024, a late hatching cousin of Flutter's suffered a sad fate, and it caused me to think about all the perils that exist out there for us wild animals, in this case butterflies.

Monarch butterflies (and lots of additional insects and other animals) are in serious decline. The lack of native plants (especially milkweed), loss of habitat overall, and the use of pesticides has been rough on Flutter's kinfolk. Then there are the natural issues faced as well, such as that which befell Toby, Flutter's cousin.

It is critical for everyone to understand the importance of sharing spaces with other creatures. Everywhere she goes Flutter makes friends and is much admired. All of her siblings and cousins are admired too! With loss of habitat being such an issue, please be sure that your yard has native plants for Flutter and her kinfolk to use for nectar and as host plants. People were inspired by Toby, they can also be inspired by how pollinator friendly your yard is too!

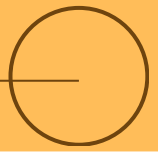


Toby emerged from his chrysalis in Tulsa County which is no small feat. He was pumping his wings to get fluids into them so that they would be functional. But hours passed and Toby's wings never straightened out. It is likely that he was a victim of *Ophryocystis elektroscirrha*, a parasite. Toby's life was made comfortable by Cheryl, who took him in and offered him sugar water and some flowers from the yard. Toby went to a couple of Yard by Yard presentations with Cheryl, so for his short life he had a number of experiences. Everyone who met Toby was inspired by him, although his lack of functional wings caused concern. Toby lived for almost a week. The point of telling Toby's story is this: Common issues like the parasite that caused Toby's death are especially rough on an insect population that has declined so much.



Understanding Urban Soils

By Jack Titchener, Urban Soil Health Specialist



Urban soils have most likely been converted from an agriculture use to nonagricultural uses as suburban sprawls encroached into previously rural areas. More often, cropland, grazing land, or wildlife habitat was the primary management use. Today, most urban soils are formed from different (i.e., human-altered and human-transported) parent materials than natural soils and need different considerations for use and management. This is often due to construction and demolition activity at the site or surrounding sites. The mixing and addition of offsite soils is relatively common in developed areas.

Examples of how urban soils are altered are:

Soils are excavated and stirred, often replaced in the profile in a different order.



Fill is often brought in from offsite and frequently has characteristics different from the native soils.



The areas may be graded to level high spots and fill low areas.



Compaction layers and non-soil materials becoming part of the soil profile.

Over time, urban lands can have great variation in the characteristics of the soils. Although urban soils can be wildly variable and, in some areas, polluted, they have potential for urban agriculture if they are managed, and used correctly.

Compaction is an important soil health indicator. Urban soils may have been compacted from previous agriculture use. This is appropriate for many structural construction purposes, but it can create an unsuitable growing medium. Soil compaction is the process by which soil is compressed and pore space is reduced. Pore space is where water and air move into the soil and where roots can grow through soil. Flattened roots can be an indicator of compaction, as well as pooling or puddling of water in low areas. Many urban soils are compacted from construction and building of suitable housing or road structures.



During any site assessment phases, testing for contaminants should be considered to protect the producer, gardener, and the public from health risks. Testing should be conducted by trained environmental professionals using proper personal protection equipment. Common contaminants in urban soils include pesticides, petroleum products, radon, asbestos, lead, chromated copper arsenate, and creosote. In urban areas, soil contamination is largely caused by human activities. Some examples are manufacturing, industrial dumping, land development, local waste disposal, and excessive pesticide or fertilizer use.

Digging should only be done on a site after any assessments are completed. Utility, right of way, previous dangerous industrial uses, or chemical plants located upstream would be major concerns and are potential reasons for soil testing. At a minimum, the investigation should include a soil sample done with a spade slice. A soil probe may be used instead of a spade to examine soil structure. The investigator should look for such things as soil quality, compaction, and organics.

Contamination, compaction, and low organic matter are common problems with soil in urban areas and must be addressed before putting urban land into food production. One of the most significant issues to identify and resolve is the risk of exposing farmworkers and community members to soil that is contaminated with toxic compounds. Working with environmental experts to carefully assess the site and its land-use history, along with testing the soil, will help you evaluate the risks and determine if it's feasible to use the site for urban food production. The strategies for improving degraded, contaminated soils include physical (such as soil removal), chemical (such as altering pH) and biological (such as adding composts) practices.

Remediation, or excavating large amounts of contaminated soil and replacing it with clean soil, can be expensive and is usually reserved for only the most contaminated sites. Burying contaminated soils with healthy soil material may be a more economical option. In-place mixing of organic materials and subsequent mulching and use of appropriate plantings are often good options for green spaces and gardens.



Certify Your Habitat!

By: Amanda Fitzgerald

Already got your yard certified with Yard by Yard? That's awesome! You've officially created a space that supports pollinators, and now it's time to take it to the next level. Here's where Okies for Monarchs comes in. Registering your habitat with them is the perfect next step in your monarch-saving journey. Here's why:

Help Monitor Habitat Health: You've already made your yard a pollinator paradise, but monarchs have some specific needs. Monarchs rely on specific habitats for breeding and feeding, including areas with milkweed (their primary food source) and nectar-rich flowers. Registering your habitat helps conservation groups monitor the availability and quality of these crucial environments.

Support Conservation on a Bigger Scale: By registering your monarch habitat with Okies for Monarchs, you're part of something much bigger. Your effort helps us protect the monarch's migratory routes and expand their habitat across the state. By registering your habitat, you're helping us track and monitor the health and spread of pollinator-friendly spaces. This can provide important data for conservation programs and initiatives. Think of it as the ultimate team-up: your yard + a whole network of like-minded monarch heroes!

Raise Awareness and Inspire Others: Now that you've made your yard an official certified pollinator haven, let's spread the word! By registering with Okies for Monarchs, you're showing the world that anyone can make a real difference. Plus, you might just inspire your neighbors to follow suit and get their yards on the monarch map too.

So if you've already got that "Yard by Yard" sign proudly in your yard, now it's time to level up! Registering with Okies for Monarchs habitat helps gather crucial data, supports long-term conservation goals, and encourages others to join the effort in ensuring monarch butterflies have the habitat they need to thrive. Plus, it's a tangible way to contribute to the protection of one of North America's most beloved and imperiled species! Let's make sure monarchs are flying through your neighborhood for generations to come!

New Years Resolutions for Wildlife Habitat

By: Cheryl Cheadle, Tulsa, Oklahoma

IN 2025...I do have some goals. I will be doing a little more “management” in my yard, and here is the rest of the story:

I will give a little more time to hand-pulling Bermuda grass and thinning out the native wildflowers that tend to be invasive. This will add beauty, and it will also increase the quality of habitat offered.

I will walk my perimeters and be more alert to remove non-native shrubs and I will encourage the native ones. Both my front yard and back yard have minimally managed perimeters that I can make work for my butterflies, birds, and bees...and my neighbors.

I will remember that my Yard by Yard sign means that I am a representative of living in a world where I kindly share my space. We in Yard by Yard kind of walk a tightrope on being ambassadors, having to keep in mind what our creatures need and what our neighbors think. We are always trying to recruit others.

I will be better about knowing my elected officials and sharing my thoughts with them. This is very difficult for me...I have to do better.

These are a few of the ways that my yard and I will make a difference in 2025. I hope that you have a list as well!

Share Your Flutter Flyer



The Flutter Flyer is the seasonal newsletter for participants of the Yard by Yard Community Resiliency Project. Even though the newsletter is for a specific audience, the information is of a general enough nature to be helpful to lots of people. It is okay to go ahead and spread your Flutter Flyer to a larger group!

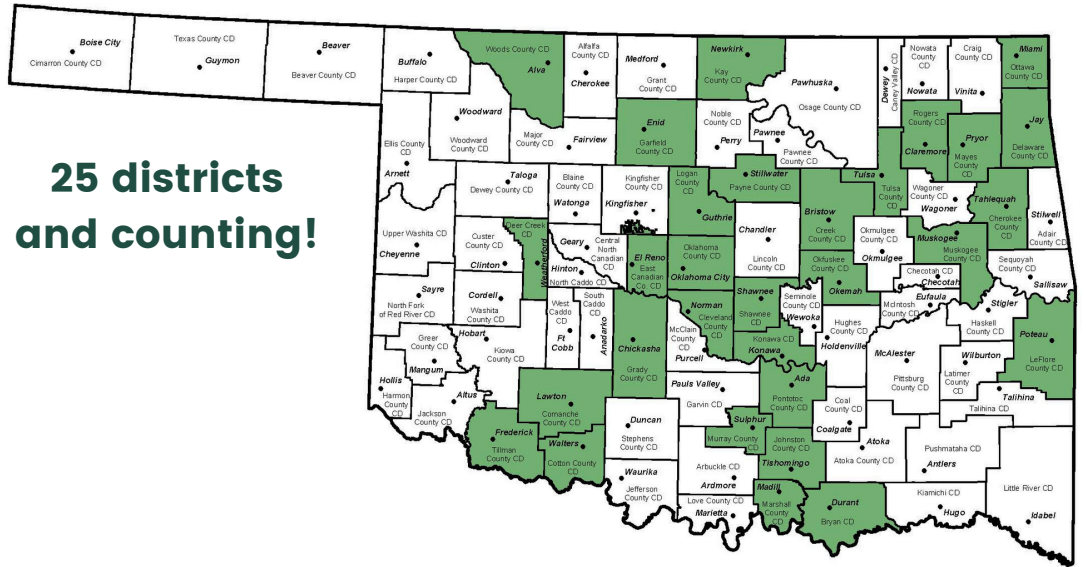
This is how information moves into new places – by our sharing. Think about the friends you have who perhaps mow their yard really short. Think about a teacher at the local school who is known to do science projects. Think of a small business with a small green area or even just a planter who could qualify for a mini space sign. Just forward your Flutter Flyer their direction!

Participating Conservation Districts



Do you know your conservation district?

Conservation districts offer a variety of services to farmers and homeowners, including Yard by Yard. Learn more about your district here: conservation.ok.gov/district-services-division



Questions? Comments?



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okconservation.org/yardbyyard



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