

Final Report for *Grant Agreement #05-015W* with IDNR

Native Species Hummingbird & Butterfly Garden

INTRODUCTION

Pilcher Park Nature Center wanted to create a "Native Species Hummingbird & Butterfly Garden". This garden was to be created behind the Nature Center. Once the plants are established this garden will be an extension of the living museum that is apart of the Nature Center. Tours of the Nature Center and other field trip could then incorporate the natural history of hummingbirds and butterflies into the repertoire. Naturalists can share the intricacies of the special food web created by plants that have evolved unique structures that can only be pollinated by creatures with specialized mouths.

The garden will also give visitors a living visual reference on how tall plants get, how beautiful the flowers are, the bloom time of individual species of plant, especially which plants attract butterfly, hummingbird, or both. This habitat is a great tool to encourage visitors to plant native "backyards" for wildlife.

Another benefit of this project is establishing a permanent native habitat for hummingbirds, butterflies, and other invertebrates. This is important because native habitats for these target species are disappearing at an alarming rate in Illinois. Habitat restoration has been shown to be the best conservation approach for these species. If we encourage visitors to also plant gardens with these species, there will be an ever increasing number of wild places with food for these beautiful flying creatures.

MATERIALS & METHODOLOGY

Prior to submitting this grant, research was done on flowering plants that attract either hummingbirds or butterflies. Hummingbirds require the nectar from flowers to fuel their high energy metabolisms. Butterflies have a two-fold requirement in plants. First, butterflies lay eggs on the foliage of plants that the caterpillars they become can eat. The second group of plants are flowering and produce nectar for the adult butterflies. Plants were also selected and situated in the garden according to height, bloom time, soil moisture, and sun exposure.

The garden site was selected in an area that includes both sun and shade. One year old plants were purchased from four native plant nurseries located in the Midwest. Plants from three companies were shipped by mail. We ordered two hundred thirty forbs of forty three species, six shrubs of three species, and one tree. The plants came bare root and packed in mulch or in very small pots.

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RESULTS—DISCUSSION—SUMMARY

All the plants have been put into the proposed site. We have kept each species of plants grouped together for greater impact for both the prospective gardener and the butterfly or hummingbird to see a food source from a distance. Initially, all the plants appear to be doing well. A few plants even have blossoms at a very early date. Most of the plants came to us with a height of five inches or less. We are not expecting too many blooms this first year especially with the drought conditions. By next year, the roots of these hearty prairie, savanna, and woodland plants will have established deep roots and attain their full heights.