



In the Herb Garden

By Priscilla Jurkovich, Master Gardener

The herb section will highlight an herb that can be grown in the South Dakota region.

Russian Sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*) is a woody-based aromatic perennial herb in the Lamiaceae (mint) family with square stems and grows in zones 5 to 9. It propagates by cuttings and by seed. Russian Sage grows upright between two to four feet in height and likes full sun to part shade in a variety of soil conditions. Stems will flop if plants are grown in part shade. The leaves are grayish-green arranged in the mint family opposite pairs. The two-lipped, tubular lavender/blue flowers attract bees and butterflies and bloom from July through October.

Russian Sage flowers and leaves have been used to soothe an upset stomach, treat a cold, flu, fever, anxiety or wash a wound. Russian Sage has a sage-like smell. Its volatile oils are useful clearing sinuses or a head cold with an inhalation steam.



Gardener Provides Blooming Habitat for Pollinators and Birds

By Erin Campbell and Teresa McConville Master Gardener



Imagine sitting on an oversize hammock chair amongst blooms of native flowers...wild bergamot, phlox, black eyed Susans, prairie blazing star and many more. You could spend the afternoon just watching the butterflies, and maybe even see one you have never seen before such as a Question Mark butterfly. The Yellow Swallowtails are numerous, but also Black Swallowtails can be seen, and even a Pipevine Swallowtail and a Giant Swallowtail have been spotted here. Monarchs, Red Admirals, Mourning Cloaks, Karner Blues and even Skippers and others are frequent visitors. Hummingbirds hover and feed on the phlox. Finches and chickadees swoop in and perch on the wild sunflowers and coneflowers, feeding on the seeds. A variety of dragonflies zoom overhead, feeding on other insects. And an astounding variety of bees buzz busily about, seemingly oblivious to your presence.

As the sun goes down, the fireflies rise from the tall grasses and with their soft sparks of yellow-green light put on an evening show.



This continually growing habitat haven is the result of 16 years of love and care by Erin Campbell. As a first-time home owner, she had inherited from the previous owners a mere patch of day lilies. She began her garden by planting flowers to attract butterflies. Soon her interests led to a focus on providing habitat with native plants. Now she has converted nearly half of her lawn to garden area. She gardens without the use of any chemicals. In the middle of the city, her small habitat is surrounded by concrete and chemically treated lawns.



Erin says when she started gardening for butterflies, she was planting nectar or food sources to attract them. Zinnias are ones that she always plants; the butterflies do love them. Then she saw the importance of adding host plants for the caterpillars as well. "I started by adding milkweed for monarchs. I dug one up by the root and transplanted it into my garden. Now I have a nice amount of milkweed. I have also added

swamp milkweed and butterfly weed. I have been seeing many more monarchs. I have gotten to witness them laying their eggs on the milkweed plants. And it is fun to find their caterpillars." With the addition of blue lupine, which is the host plant for the endangered Karner Blue butterfly, she has been

enjoying seeing more of these as well. Some host plants for swallowtails she has included are dill and Queen Anne's Lace, both which were started from seed.



In planting for butterflies, she had the pleasant surprise of attracting more wildlife in general, especially other pollinators and birds. She saw that she wasn't just gardening for herself but for other living things as well. And she really was enjoying all the visitors! She took note that the native plants she had incorporated were hot spots which attracted a lot of life. Soon her butterfly garden was evolving into a garden with an emphasis on providing habitat with native plants.



"I used to feel overwhelmed with all the plants that are available and what to include. When I began to focus on native plants it all just came together. The plants are easy to grow, and it has given my gardening a direction and a purpose that is in line with my values and love of nature. It has been so rewarding."

As her interest in gardening with wildlife in mind has grown, she has studied the work of University of Delaware professor and entomologist Douglas Tallamy. She shared some of what she has learned from his work. Douglas Tallamy has been studying the effects of land development on populations of beneficial insects and birds.

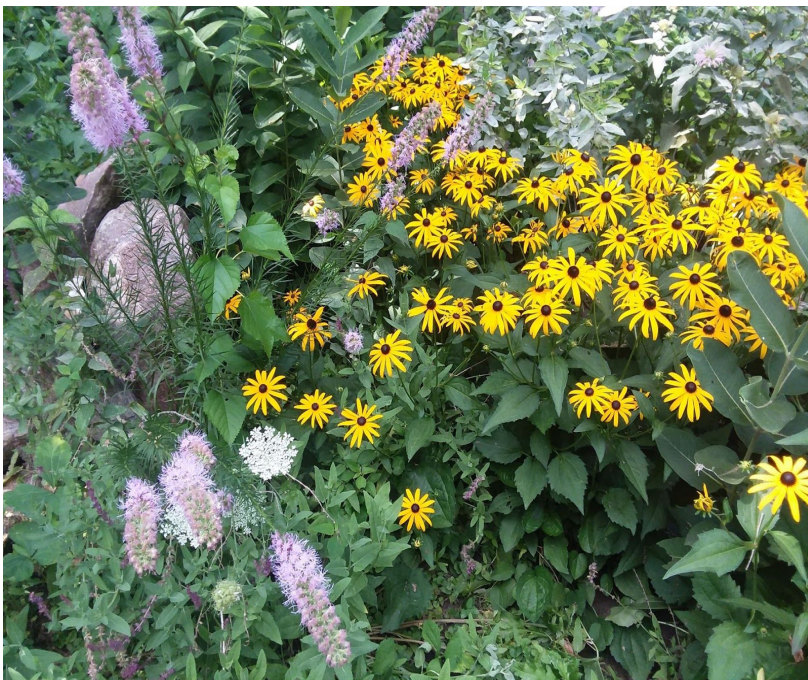


He writes in his book **Bringing Nature Home** that the current consensus among ecologists is that 95-97% of the land in the 48 contiguous United States is now being used in agriculture or serves as an urban or suburban area. Once diverse ecosystems including prairies, wetlands, and forests have been converted to large areas comprising of poured concrete and infrastructure or large chemically treated monocultures of crops and lawns. And many of the plants commonly used in landscaping are not native to the area or even to America and contribute little, if anything to ecosystem survival. Douglas Tallamy has found that the few remaining areas of habitat that exist are too fragmented or isolated to support populations large enough to guard species against the threat of extinction. He states that in the last 50 years there has been a 50% reduction in population size for many species of birds in the US. He teaches that to support bird populations we need to have larger continuous connected "corridors" of habitat. He encourages people to think about how much lawn area they really need and to include native plants where they live. He feels that our living areas can serve as pieces of ever connected habitat. He says we can no longer afford to assume nature will survive someplace else. He emphasizes that planting native plants is the most vital thing we can do to restore ecosystems for our fellow creatures.

Why are native plants so important for a healthy ecosystem, many may wonder. It is because plants are the basis of the food web.



After plants, insects are the next level of the food web. And insects have evolved very closely with native plants to be able to eat only certain ones, which is called specialization. The monarch is the insect most commonly known for its specialization with the milkweed plant. Many people know that without milkweed we will not have monarchs, since it is the only plant their caterpillars can eat. But specialization like this is the rule with herbaceous insects, rather than the exception, Douglas Tallamy teaches. If we care about birds, we must care about the insects they eat. He has found that 96% of birds rear their young solely on insects, and they feed them many caterpillars.



As Erin saw the insects visiting her plants increase, she also saw an increase in birds. She said no insect has become problematic because there is a balance of them, and some feed on each other. "I have an ecosystem, basically. It keeps itself in check nicely." And she enjoys seeing all the life in her garden. She says, "For me half of the beauty of a garden is the plants and flowers and the other half is the life the garden attracts. I am constantly delighted and surprised by the visitors in my garden."

If a person wants to get started incorporating native plants in their yard or garden, Erin suggests starting off with a smaller area because the plants will need more care when they are small. In her experience, they basically need the same care any plant does when it is just starting out, such as more watering, to be protected from bunnies and from being invaded by weeds

or other plants. Once established, native plantings are low maintenance and are usually hardy and healthy without a lot of care.



Erin also leaves her flower stalks up all winter which provides visual interest, and more importantly cover and food for birds. She doesn't clean until spring. And she keeps any organic debris behind her garden for birds to use as nesting material or puts it in the compost pile. She uses her leaves as mulch or simply leaves them and never disposes of them; this makes her soil very rich. Also, some butterflies hibernate in dried up leaves, she has learned.

Erin said her dad, who was a park ranger when she was little, has inspired in her a love and concern for nature. He has always taught her to appreciate the beauty and ecological richness of the prairie. Since retiring he has been involved in restoring a few acres of prairie on her uncle's land. Erin says the most difficult thing is that she wants to bring back native flowers everywhere. She is hopeful that more people will see the value and beauty of native plants.

Erin has ordered most of her plants from [Prairie Nursery](#) catalog. They come as little starter plants. [Prairie Nursery](#) has a lot of educational information on their website and you can find plants with different soil and light requirements listed. Also, there are other great resources and websites to find which plants are native to your area such as [Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](#), and the [Xerces Society](#) which has a list of [Northern Plains Pollinator Plants](#). Douglas Tallamy also has free lectures and interviews on YouTube, and his book **[Bringing Nature Home](#)** goes into detail about the great importance of native plants. Enjoy these photos from her garden!

Pruning Perennials—few simple cuts to improve your plants

By Ronine Klassen- Master Gardener

CLEAN UP: Most perennials need to be cut back to allow new shoots to start out without the clutter of last year's dead leaves and stems. This can be done in fall if the plants were infested with insects or diseased; the debris should be removed to prevent the new plants from being infected. Grasses and healthy plants can be trimmed in spring.

GET MORE FLOWERS: Some plants may have a large cluster of blooms; after the blooms are finished, the plant can be cut back by a third. New growth starts again from the center of other of the crown.

TIDY UP: Removing the spent flower is a good practice for appearance sake. Several options can be used depending on the type of plant. Some plants will need the center stalk removed so side shoots can bloom. Others, like hosta, iris or daylily, needs have the entire flower stalk removed at the base of the plant. Sometimes if the flowers are not valued, like hosta or lamb's ear, the flower stems can be removed before they bloom

PREVENT RESEEDING: Some perennials reseed and spread beyond the space you want to share. As soon as the flowers are spent, prune the flower stalk into the foliage to avoid ugly stubs, remove individual flowers or cut the entire plant back by a third.

DEVELOP BETTER HABITS: In late spring cut flowers that grow up to six feet tall back by half. They will be more compact and less likely to break over in a strong wind. Staking may not be needed.

BUSHIER PLANTS AND MORE FLOWERS: Pinching the growing tips of plants several times early in the season will encourage side branching to develop a more rounded plant. It can encourage the plant to continue to set blossoms later into the summer.

ENCOURAGE LARGER FLOWERS: Some plants tend to have a large center blossom and several smaller buds lower on the stem. By removing the side buds early, the center blossom can grow larger since there is less competition for nutrients. Peonies are a good example where disbudding can make a change.

BETTER AIR CIRCULATION: Any plants that are susceptible to stem and foliar diseases like bacterial wilts and powdery mildew will have less problems if there is good air circulation around the plants. Consider how close plants are placed. Consider removing some of the center stems of the plant itself.

EXTEND THE BLOOM TIME: To achieve a staggered bloom time, cut some of the stems of the plant back, up to 1/3 or 1/2 depending on the size of the plant, in late spring before they set flowers. When the first flowers start to fade the next flowers will be getting ready to bloom.

There are many reasons for pruning: For the results achieved, for flowers to cut and share and to keep your garden tidy at least this year.

Adapted from *Reasons to cut perennials* by Stephanie Petersen; Garden Gate, February 2018, Issue 139, pp.28-31

