

ALLIANCE OF
DOWNRIVER
WATERSHEDS

GROW ZONE MINI-GRANT PROJECT PROFILE

Why native plant gardens?

Native plants have deep, “thirsty” roots that help retain water on your site and filter out the pollutants in runoff. They help stabilize soils and prevent erosion. Native plants are drought tolerant, so you water less. Native plants are disease resistant and rarely require fertilizers, so you save money. Native plants improve soil conditions on their own, so you save time.

Reducing water runoff from hard surfaces and yards is key to protecting water quality. Water that runs off hard surfaces, lawns and gardens contain pollutants like fertilizers, dirt and debris. When polluted runoff enters storm drains and ditches, it is discharged into the river system unfiltered.

About the Grow Zone Mini-Grant

The Grow Zone Mini-Grant program was established in 2008 to find host sites within the Downriver area to implement native planting projects. After issuing a call for proposals, the Alliance of Downriver Watersheds selected a total of 10 host sites, which included several schools, parks and municipal properties.



O.W. BEST MIDDLE SCHOOL NATIVE PLANT GARDEN

DEARBORN HEIGHTS, MICHIGAN

Located outside the window of the science class, the new native plant garden at O.W. Best Middle School serves as a natural laboratory for students by inspiring them to learn about the natural environment. The garden, with its purposeful use of the school’s rooftop run-off, educates students on natural rain water management and helps to improve the water quality of the Ecorse Creek, located just south of the school.

The 1,700 square foot native plant garden replaced a lawn area with a low maintenance combination of native grasses and plants. Since planting, students have had the opportunity to watch the project take root and blossom. The garden has already attracted beneficial bugs, butterflies, birds and plants, helping to serve as an outside classroom.



What’s a grow zone?

A “grow zone” is a native planting area that is implemented to improve water quality and wildlife habitat. Grow zones, which usually replace lawn areas, provide many benefits:

- reduce stormwater going to our rivers
- increase wildlife habitat
- improve water quality, and,
- cost less to maintain than traditional lawn areas



BEFORE

Once the native plant garden was completed at O.W. Best Middle School, Wayne County tested the effectiveness of the project. The native plant garden performed well. It provides an almost ten-fold increase (980 percent) in infiltration compared to the infiltration rate of the former lawn area. Plus, the native plant garden will save the school approximately \$154 per year in maintenance costs.



PLANTING DAY - MAY 2009

Over the course of the next several years, the Alliance of Downriver Watersheds (ADW) will engage in the monitoring of each grow zone site (10 were completed in 2009) and is committed to implementing additional green infrastructure projects to realize regional water quality and habitat diversity improvements.



AFTER

About the Alliance of Downriver Watersheds

The Alliance of Downriver Watersheds (ADW) is a governing body in southeast Michigan established to carry out stormwater policy and management across the Ecorse Creek, Combined Downriver and Lower Huron River watersheds. The members of the ADW include the Wayne County Airport Authority, Woodhaven-Brownstown School District and 24 units of government in the Downriver Area.



www.allianceofdownriverwatersheds.com

Project at a Glance

Location

O.W. Best Middle School
22201 Powers Avenue
Dearborn Heights, MI

Applicant

Dearborn Heights Watershed
Stewards Commission

Partners

- Girl Scout Troop #5301
- Dearborn Heights School District No. 7
- Wayne County

Award Amount

\$3,136

Funding Source

Clean Michigan Initiative
Nonpoint Source Program

Planting Date

May 2009

Planting Size

1,700 square feet

Estimated Increase in
Rainwater Infiltration

980 percent

Estimated Maintenance
Savings

\$154 per year

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