



Wild Geranium (*Geranium maculatum*)  
PHOTO: Dr. Thomas G. Barnes,  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



Showy goldenrod (*Solidago speciosa*)  
with monarch  
PHOTO: Arlene Kjar



Closed gentian  
(*Gentiana andrewsii*)  
PHOTO: John Magee



Wild Columbine  
(*Aquilegia canadensis*)  
PHOTO: Susan Cohn

“Pocket gardens are a great way to introduce people to native plants . . . it allows people to become more familiar with them . . . and really get started with native plants.”



Native ferns grow in an alley in Manhattan, which is part of the gardens between the main Library of New York University and the University Visitor Center on West Fourth Street, just across the street from Washington Square Park.

PHOTO: Courtesy of Darrel Morrison

# POCKET GARDENS



Coneflower (*Echinacea*)  
PHOTO: Chan Mahanta



**Boneset**  
*(Eupatorium perfoliatum)*  
 PHOTO: John Kreutzfeldt

BLOOM TIME	April-May	June-July	August-October
<b>FRONT</b>	Prairie smoke Columbine Wild strawberry	Prairie phlox Hairy wood mint Wild onion	Bottle gentian Aromatic aster Wild petunia
<b>MIDDLE</b>	Golden Alexanders Wild geranium	Evening primrose Blue flag iris White wild indigo Pale purple coneflower	Cardinal flower Blue lobelia Meadow blazing star Boneset
<b>BACK</b>		Swamp milkweed Cutleaf coneflower	Showy goldenrod Prairie blazing star New York aster Sneezeweed Sweet black-eyed Susan

**10-foot by 10-foot Native Pollinator Garden** — These plants are possible suggestions for a 10 x 10 native garden that would provide a variety of native plants that would bloom throughout the growing season. The garden is arranged to provide tall, medium and short plants. SOURCE: Tom Dickhudt, Sunrise Native Plants

# become particularly popular

By Barbara A. Schmitz, JOURNAL Editor

**D**ig may be better. But when you don't have a lot of space available in your yard, small also works. And that's why pocket gardens are becoming increasingly popular.

Whether they are tucked away in a corner of someone's yard, patio or balcony, in the median between the sidewalk and street, on street corners, or on pathways or in between two buildings, these lush green spaces bring color, pollinators and birds to our yards and spaces and are often easy to maintain.

Landscape architect Darrel Morrison may be best known for his large landscapes at the Native Plant Garden at the [University of Wisconsin Arboretum](#) in Madison, or the [Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](#) in Austin, but he has designed a small "native woodland garden" at New York University in the heart of the West Village. An advocate for using native plants in whatever space you have, Morrison says: "Among the most important things we can do in the 21st century, individually and collaboratively, is to protect natural beauty where it remains, and to manage for its perpetuation. In places where it has been lost, even on so small a place as a backyard or so big a place, collectively, as the school grounds and roadsides of this country, we can work to restore it. And with the restoration of natural beauty, we will be providing places for the plant and animal life that has been silently insidiously disappearing from our world and our lives."

[Doug Tallamy](#), professor and chairman of entomology and wildlife ecology at the University of Delaware, also talks about the importance of small native gardens around homes, writing in "[Bringing Nature Home](#)": "Our studies have shown that even modest increases in the native plant cover on suburban properties significantly increases the number and species of breeding birds, including birds of conservation concern." In addition, he says our natural areas are too small, fragmented and isolated to sustain the plants and animals

that run our ecosystems. "But by using native plants in our neighborhoods and corporate landscapes we can restore ecosystem function where we live and work."

If you need help creating a pocket garden, there are many books on the market that should provide you with needed inspiration. And yes, there are apps and YouTube videos for that, too.

But one of the best books is a 2014 children's book, titled "[Plant a Pocket of Prairie](#)," by Phyllis Root, says Tom Dickhudt, a hobbyist and owner of [Sunrise Native Plants](#) located in Minnesota's St. Croix River Valley. The book teaches children how changes in one part of the ecosystem affect every other part and encourages readers to "plant a pocket of prairie" in their own backyards.

"I started hearing people talk about 'pocket gardens' last year, but they are basically just small gardens," Dickhudt says. While pocket gardens can have almost any type of plants in them, he advocates the use of all native plants when he gives presentations on these small gardens to members of the St. Croix Oak Savanna chapter of Wild Ones, where he is also a member, or to other groups.

"Pocket gardens are a great way to introduce people to native plants," he says. "It allows people to become more familiar with them ... and really get started with native plants."

Not only do pocket gardens allow people to become familiar with native plants, but they also allow them to become more knowledgeable about the habitats in which they exist. "You can start thinking about bugs and birds and how they work together," he said.

To help people get started on their small gardens, Dickhudt created a chart for a 10-foot by 10-foot pocket garden, choosing Midwestern native plants that would provide flowers all season long. (See infographic above.) In general, his plan calls for planting three of each plant in clusters, with shorter plants in front and taller plants in the rear. He chooses the plants by when they flower, so as to provide flowers from April to May, then from June through July, and finally from August to October, providing reliable food sources for pollinators and



**Wild petunia**  
(*Ruellia humilis*)  
PHOTO: Jeanette Mayo



**Wild onion**  
(*Allium canadense*)  
PHOTO: George F. Mayfield



**Brown-Eyed Susan**  
(*Rudbeckia triloba*)  
PHOTO: Joan Rudolph



**Herb-Robert**  
(*Geranium robertianum*)  
PHOTO: geograph.org.uk

a dynamic garden that you can enjoy as it changes with the season. He adds that it would be also be good to include some native grasses like Little Bluestem (*Andropogon scoparius*) into a pocket garden, and notes that other native flowers could easily be substituted for any of those he recommends.

Dickhudt hopes peoples' pocket gardens will grow larger as people become more familiar with native plants, allowing them to save the seed and gradually expand their planting in future years.

"We are never going to take soybean fields in western Minnesota and turn them into prairies again," he says. "We need to depend on backyard mini prairies to provide the habitat, so start with a 10-foot by 10-foot area and go from there."

Everyone has a corner of their yard that they can convert to a native plant garden, and they can do so without spending a lot of money, he adds.

"A lot of people are putting in fairy gardens, butterfly gardens and pollinator gardens," he says. "But put in a native garden and it will cover all that. The main point behind the movement is that if a lot of people do it we will have continuity for those little critters that depend on native plants."

No matter the size of your native garden, Dickhudt says you will notice the impact. "There is no doubt you'll have more pollinators and birds in your backyard," he says. But he says he also has less trouble with pesky bugs in his vegetable garden thanks to his use of native plants. "The native plants attract the bugs, which attract the birds, and the birds are doing a good job on the bugs on my cauliflower and broccoli," he says. "My yard is starting to make sense ... and seems to becoming alive. And that just feels good." 🌿

## Plant a Window Box for Pollinators

**Help pollinators by planting for them**

Pollinators make use of food and habitat anywhere it is found, whether on a roadside strip, in a schoolyard garden or a planter on a windowsill. Even a small garden like a window box can help support pollinators.

**Bee Showy:**  
Provide blooms in spring, summer and fall.

**Plant Natives:**  
Select native plant species.

**Bee Patient:**  
Start small and expand over time.

**Bee Diverse:**  
Include an assortment of flower sizes, shapes and colors, heights, and growth habits.

**Bee Chemical Free:**  
Limit or eliminate use of pesticides.

**Bee More Aware:**  
Observe your garden. Educate visitors. Inspire others to plant for pollinators.

### USDA launches 'plant a window box for pollinators'

Pocket gardens don't need to be in your yard; they can be in your window box. That's the premise of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which is urging people of all ages to "Plant a Window Box for Pollinators" by using their new online tool available at the redesigned [People's Garden Initiative](#) website.

The new tool allows people to determine which plants will provide pollinator forage based on their ZIP code. Site visitors can then print out the list of plants to take to their local native plant nursery and grow them in a window box. There is also a [virtual window box game](#).

Even a space as small as a window box can help pollinators by ensuring they don't have to fly too far to find food. The interactive website also includes the live USDA "bee cam," which broadcasts honeybee activity on the roof of the USDA's building in Washington.