

BRR ALLIANCE INC.

Building Bridges to a Brilliant Future

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Eco-Friendly Gardening

By Sharon R. Adler

In honor of Earth Day, here are some tips and suggestions to help restore the health of our ecosystem when planting gardening and landscaping.

Knowing the pH of your soil is critical to helping your plants to survive and thrive! Cornell Master Gardeners can take a sample and guide you. Niagara County #433-8839 or Erie County: <http://erie.cce.cornell.edu/gardening>

Add native plants, healthy populations of native (local) plants are more sustainable and resilient in supporting cleaner water, diverse wildlife, and thriving ecosystems. These plants encourage pollinators, for example: bees, butterflies, moths, hummingbirds, wasps and flies. Plant diverse flowering species with abundant pollen and nectar with specific plants for feeding butterflies, moths, and caterpillars. See <https://bnwaterkeeper.org> for a list of native Western New York plants.

Some beneficial (YES, there are “good” ones!) insects include: lacewings, ladybugs, ground beetles, and praying mantises. As an example, Monarch butterfly caterpillars will only eat leaves from the milkweed family, so if you plant a milkweed, you can encourage Monarch butterflies to mature, since there is a steep decline of these beautiful butterflies!

Check out new plant varieties that have improved characteristics, such as pest and disease resistance, drought tolerance, more abundant flowering and lower maintenance. An efficient plan is to group plants together with similar water and sun needs.

Organic gardeners recommend using NO PESTICIDES, example, “RoundUp”, herbicides, or chemical fertilizers; it’s harmful to the soil, water, and beneficial insects.

A suggestion is to pot seedlings and beginner plants in biodegradable material, example: newspaper, fiber or peat and then transfer them to your soil, the material will decompose, over time.

A raised bed for a vegetable garden, can be helpful to a gardener’s back! There are many tips online, and/or join a community garden, we have four in our Black Rock and Riverside area!

Solar outdoor lighting is very popular with a wide variety of selection and prices available, its more energy efficient than standard lighting and can offer an ambience to a night garden that is priceless!

Another tip is to water early in the morning, not in full sun; there is less evaporation and possible run off;

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House Wrens

A plain brown bird with an effervescent voice, the House Wren is a common backyard bird over nearly the entire Western Hemisphere. Listen for its rush-and-jumble song in summer and you’ll find this species zipping through shrubs and low tree branches, snatching at insects. House Wrens will gladly use nest boxes, or you may find their twig-filled nests in old cans, boots, or boxes lying around in your garage.





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Eco-Friendly Gardening (cont.)

aim for the roots, when watering, not the flower head. Watering in the evening can create mildew on the plants, which encourages rotting.

A conservation tip would be to use a water barrel, since it will capture the rain. Use it frequently for your garden. Keep water moving and aerated so mosquitos do not collect. You can order rain barrels and composters by 5/25/18 through Erie County DEP, #858-6370, the cost is 50% off of retail. <http://ewid.com/store/eriecompostersale/> If you have a water garden with fish, you can add this natural fertilizer for healthier plants.

Start a compost pile in the corner of your property, add leave cuttings, mowed fall leaves and tree cuttings, along with food scraps (careful, not to draw rats, see online information

for more instruction). Add compost to your garden soil (you can buy a bag, too), every time you plant a new plant or when you need better drainage (example: clay soil), this provides needed nutrients to the soil to feed the plant roots. There will then be less run off and more needed water absorption.

Remember, trial and error works, log your successes and misses for future reflection. Be patient, don't become overwhelmed, start small, and you can get many tips from other gardeners, they are quite friendly and are happy to share what they have learned over the years. Attend a garden meeting, or our local garden group; many are listed in the Buffalo News' Friday paper. Visit your local garden nursery, they have a wealth of knowledge, just ask! Happy digging!!

Sunflowers and Sunshine

Now that we are seeing consistently warmer temperatures and ample sunshine, it is time to once again get sunflower seeds in the garden and watch our community bloom as the 1000 Sunshine Project goes into its second year. Last year with over 75 people planting over 1500 sunflower seeds in the Black Rock/Riverside/Grant-Amherst/West Hertel neighborhoods, sunflowers were definitely the talk of the town. They look great along fence lines, in front of your porch, or along-side your walkways, and they are easy to grow.

If you haven't gotten your sunflower seeds yet from BRRAlliance, stop by during our regular office hours or call Anne at 716-202-9070 and arrange a time to pick them up. We have five varieties to choose from this year, so don't delay, they are going fast.

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Wren House

If you do one bird house for your yard this year you may want to consider a wren house. Easy, they love all kinds of containers to nest in and the bird is small and sings beautifully. Here are a few pictures and some fun facts.



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How to Make your Yard a National Wildlife Habitat

Ever wonder how you can encourage more birds, butterflies, bees and bunnies to visit your yard? Or maybe you have an abundance of them already and don't know what to do. Visit the BRRAlliance website at www.brralliance.com for more information on how you can be part of our Wildlife Habitat Project.

2018 Northwest Buffalo Tour of Garden

New name, new gardens, new look! The Tour of Gardens for Northwest Buffalo is changing things up for this the 13th year of bringing people to the communities and yards we call home. Some of the highlights of this year's Tour of Gardens includes:

Two nights of evening Starry Night Garden viewing (different gardens each night) – Friday, August 3 & Saturday, August 4 from 8pm-10pm

Self-Guided Walking Tours – Saturday, August 4 from 9am-4pm

Guided Bus Tour – including some garden stops and historic landmark stops – Saturday, August 4

Lunch – for purchase at Tour Headquarters – Saturday, August 4

Garden Art Market – with local artisans and vendors – 11am-5pm

Art exhibit through the University Heights Art Association and the #GardenVisions poster art contest

We are also expanding the footprint of the Northwest Buffalo Tour of Gardens by including our neighbors to the east in North Buffalo, so the Tour will not only include our Black Rock/Riverside/Grant-Amherst/West Hertel neighborhoods, but it will also be open to gardens from Kenmore Ave to Amherst Street and over to Colvin. We are very excited to expand the tour and work with the North Buffalo Organization on this expansion, so if you haven't signed up yet, please download the application and send it so we can be sure to get your garden on the tour this year!

Applications to have your garden on our maps can be found at www.BRRAlliance.com

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Nesting Materials

It is certainly the time of year for our backyard birds to be building their nests. Even if you've provided trees, shrubs and birdhouses, birds still have to build individual nests in which to lay eggs and raise their young. You can give our bird friends a hand by providing nesting materials, such as string, grass and twigs.

String

One way to offer these materials is by placing string, yarn or twine in a basket or onion bag and hanging it from a bird feeder or tree limb. You may [refer to put these materials directly on tree limbs or shrubs. It may seem messy but the birds will clean it up quickly. The strings should only be about four inches long to prevent entangling baby birds or their parents.

Grass and other items

Sparrows will grab feathers, hair, fur and old paint brush bristles to complete their home building. Grass and leaves are materials that make great nests. You can put them in a small pile in your yard.

Finally, mud is an important component of robin and swallow nests, so leaving a pan or trash can lid with a little mud will make these birds very happy. Keeping the area damp with a garden hose occasionally will help the mud nest builders.

Now sit back and watch those birds build their nests and raise their young.