Campus Native Plantings

Several native planting projects are championed by student and community groups.   Participants include members of Grand Prairie Friends, Red Bison, Students for Environmental Concerns, Allerton Allies, East Central Illinois Master Naturalists and a variety of individuals ranging in age from 3 to 70+. The Student Sustainability Committee provided funds for two of the projects.

A prairie at Florida and Orchard streets next to the UI President’s House in Urbana is the major SSC project.  The field was seeded three years ago by Pizzo and Associates which made a major donation.  It was soon evident that this former no mow zone harbored an extensive weed seed bank.   The weeds dominated much of the site and herbicides were used to combat grasses.

In the spring of 2012 about 6000 seedlings propagated in a University greenhouse by students were planted along Florida Ave. edge of the planting where roundup was used to eliminate growing weeds.  UI Facilities and Services helped with site preparation and mowing.   The plants are closely spaced to provide colorful vista along this busy road.   The drought made it difficult to establish the seedlings, but most survived thanks to watering by community volunteers.   Many hours were spent this summer in extreme heat watering the area and weeding out crab grass, foxtail, and pokeweed.  With the help of adequate soil moisture, the prairie forbs will be well established next year in this area.  The rest of the field was treated this fall to kill invasive grasses and additional forb seeds will be scattered.

The Natural Resources Building received two plantings.  Behind the building along Pennsylvania Ave., is a small prairie plot with about 15 species.   They too were propagated by students and planted as plugs.  The area had a 2 inch layer of wood chip mulch.  This plot has few weeds probably because the area was originally lawn and the mulch suppressed seed growth.   Large numbers of insect pollinators are using the planting. Monarch butterfly larvae were seen on milkweed.

In the front of the building are 5 plots of woodland wildflowers. Assuming they survived the drought, they will be in bloom next spring.  The NRB plantings are maintained by staff from the Prairie Research institute and student volunteers.

F&S provided woodland wildflowers for a planting along the south side of Burrill Hall between the two entrances.  It was planted by volunteers including Entomology and other faculty.  This area has 20 species including many dozens of small jack-in-the-pulpit and spring beauty corms.  Additional plants were provided with SSC funding.

The final project is adding diversity to the Allerton Park Prairie.   Students and Allerton Allies cooperated to clear four circular plots in the grass-dominated prairie and planted a variety of forb seedlings.  They survived the drought and were well established by fall.

Volunteers are needed to help these plots become firmly established.  John Marlin is coordinating much of the volunteer activity at these sites. if you wish to help,he can be reached at 649-4591 (jcmarlin@sbcglobal.net).