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### The green infrastructure – in your own backyard

By Patrick T. Reardon on Wed., 09/23/2009 –9:27 am.

*Third of four*

**“People think, ‘Nature’s over there.’ Well, we know Nature’s in our backyard. And how are we treating Nature there?” --- Steve Barg**

Steve Barg is the executive director of Liberty Prairie Conservancy, a non-profit conservation group in Lake County, Ill. He’s a naturalist and a Nature lover. He’s quick to quote Ralph Waldo Emerson: “What is a weed? A plant whose virtues have not yet been discovered.”

But he’s not a zealot.

He knows that lawns with their shallow root systems don’t do much to help the ground soak up rain, but he also knows the value of being a good neighbor. Which means that, out in front of his Grayslake home, he’s got a lawn.

“But you have to draw a line,” he explains. “I decided I’m not going to use chemicals on my lawn. My lawn’s still green. It still looks good. A couple weeks of the year, I’ve got dandelions --- which, for some reason, we’ve vilified.”

His neighbors haven’t been upset about the dandelions. In fact, Barg says that, based on his example, they’re not using chemicals on their lawns either.

The green infrastructure is a vast network of natural areas, including rivers, meadows, lakes, woods, prairies, parks, forest preserves and other open spaces.

And it’s also the plot of green in front of and behind your house.

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## ABOUT THIS BLOG

This blog is about history, planning and the future. It’s rooted in the recognition that we live in a world that is created by plans – and by the failure to make plans. [\[MORE\]](#)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

[Patrick T. Reardon](#) is a Chicagoan, born and bred. He has been writing about the city, its region and planning issues, mainly in the Chicago Tribune, for nearly 40 years. [\[MORE\]](#)

## The "weed patch"

The green infrastructure is a major concern for those planning future land-use in the Chicago metropolitan region. But conservationists emphasize the need for everyone to help.

Barg may have a lawn in front, but, behind his house, he has a bit of a prairie as well as a rain garden, which he created by directing the downspout from his gutters to a spot in the yard.

"The rain garden," he says, "is made up of plants that love water --- sedges and rushes and irises and marsh milkweeds."



A marsh milkweed, also called a swamp milkweed

On the Internet, the marsh milkweed is often referred to as a "butterfly MAGNET!" And, sure enough, butterflies are frequent visitors to Barg's rain garden, as are insects and birds.

"By keeping the water on our property," Barg says, "we're not contributing to flooding --- and it's pretty."

"My neighbor jokingly calls it my 'weed patch' --- in a fond way. He and his wife like to see the butterflies."

*Next: The nurturing (city) forest*