

A Pollinator Paradise



Client Overview

During the Covid-19 lockdown, Leah and Dan Cunningham spent a lot of time walking their Minneapolis neighborhood where they noticed that several homeowners had converted their lawns to native plants. They found it intriguing and inspiring, along with a book Dan read called Nature's Best Hope by Douglas Tallamy. The book encourages people to create a national park in their front yard. Dan and Leah saved money during Covid, and they decided to use it to create a pollinator paradise for bees, caterpillars, butterflies, and birds.

Challenge

With a newly constructed home, the Cunningham's yard was full of sod that wasn't doing well, and it became more evident during the drought. Leah said, "The grass didn't do well unless we watered it and wasted water constantly and I noticed that the native landscapes looked healthier. Our soil is 'shovel breaking clay soil,' which isn't good for growing a lawn and non-native plants. And we didn't like mowing the lawn, so we needed to make a change.

Solution

Leah turned to soil expert Russ Henry who knows how to revitalize soil, and that's what Russ did, along with his Minnehaha Falls Landscaping team. Leah and Dan walked the yard with Russ, they bounced ideas around, and they gave him their budget. He approached the project like an open canvas and knew what plants would do well, based on the direction the house faces and other environmental factors.

Leah and Dan chose native plants because they support the ecosystem, and planted 20 varieties, including Joe Pye Weed, Swamp Milkweed, Bee Balm, and Red Lobelia. A bee friendly mixture was laid down that will create a no maintenance natural mulch, and rain gardens were installed, along with native trees, including Poplar, Burr Oak, and Honey Locust.

Results

The Cunningham's now qualify to become a Certified Wildlife Habitat® by the National Wildlife Federation Certification, and they are applying for this distinction. Leah says, "Bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds showed up immediately after installation. It's fun to watch them and it's a learning experience to see how everything is interconnected." Dan and Leah say their pollinator paradise has prompted a lot of discussion in the neighborhood, and other homeowners are installing native plants. Leah added, "And we don't have to mow!"

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- Leah Cunningham

