

SUSTAINABLE URBAN LANDSCAPE CONFERENCE SESSION DESCRIPTIONS – FRIDAY, JUNE 26

9:00 - 9:45 a.m. - Morning Keynote

ROOM A

Butterfly Diversity and Community Dynamics in Urban Gardens - Dr. Emily Geest, OKC Zoo and Botanical Gardens

Urbanization has reshaped landscapes worldwide and is known to strongly impact biodiversity. Butterflies can serve as indicators of urbanization because of their short lifespans, diverse habitat requirements, and sensitivity to temperature and microclimates.

Urban butterfly gardens are frequently promoted as conservation strategies because they provide habitat patches for butterflies. To evaluate the effectiveness of butterfly gardens, it is important to understand how butterflies colonize gardens and how butterfly communities change over time within gardens. To explore butterfly communities in urban gardens we examined three complementary datasets from gardens at the Oklahoma City Zoo and Botanical Garden. Butterflies were recorded immediately after gardens were created. After 28 survey weeks butterfly diversity differed with landscape context: the garden adjacent to a woody-shrub habitat accumulated more species and individuals than the garden surrounded by impervious surface. By the first summer post-planting butterfly communities remained distinct with some overlap beginning to occur. A long-term dataset showed butterfly communities were distinctly separated by time period. Together these complementary results highlight that butterfly gardens can make meaningful conservation contributions, but their success is strongly dependent on both landscape context and time.

Further studies are needed to determine how plant selection, weather variability, seasonal timing, and surrounding landscape influence colonization trajectories and long-term butterfly community dynamics.

Dr. Emily Geest is a broadly trained ecologist with a research focus on understanding how human-driven land-use change and management decisions impact insect biodiversity, particularly butterflies. She received her BLS/BA from University of Missouri St. Louis, her MS from the University of Nebraska Omaha, and her PhD from Oklahoma State University. She's currently a conservation scientist at OKC Zoo researching butterflies in urban environments.

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SESSION DESCRIPTIONS - FRIDAY, JUNE 26

10:00 - 11:00 a.m. - Breakout Sessions

ROOM A

What is a Micro-environment and What is Mine - Susan Chambers, Oklahoma Native Plant Network

Researching your soil, sun, rainfall and plant community to determine what you can plant.

Susan Chambers holds a bachelors of Science in Biology from SWOSU and a Masters of Horticulture in Nursery Production from OSU. Susan is the owner of Rose Rock Landscape and uses native plants wherever and whenever she can.

ROOM B

Avoiding Plant Diseases & Integrated Pest Management - Sara Wallace, Plant Disease and Insect Diagnostic Lab at OSU

An introduction to plant disease and how to avoid them through basic practices.

Sara Wallace is a plant person, mom and new grandmother. She grows edible, native and pollinator plants in her backyard nursery and works as a Plant Diagnostician for Oklahoma State University. She teaches the Plant Disease class to Master Gardeners around the state.

ROOM C

Earthen Urban: Hardscape Materials and Methods to Shape the Landscape - Jessica Lerner, PLA, ASLA

A look at existing, emerging, and traditional technologies for building structures and pavement to shape the landscape while caring about your carbon footprint and stormwater runoff. We'll consider the merits and limitations of a variety of materials including accessibility and maintenance.

Jessica Lerner is an Urban Designer and Licensed Landscape Architect based in Oklahoma City who designs public and commercial places with user comfort and accessibility top of mind. She values well executed details, shaded pedestrian areas, and playgrounds that support children's development. Jessica earned a master's degree in Landscape Architecture at the University of Oklahoma after studying literature, history, and philosophy for her Letters degree. She also has 10 years of professional experience in graphic design and branding. As a principal at LAUD Studio, Jessica contributes to design development, details, construction documentation & observation, and graphic production.

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11:15 p.m. - 12:15 p.m. - Breakout Sessions

ROOM A

Trees in Landscaping: From Selection to Survival - Natalie Evans, ISA, OKC Beautiful

This session explores the full lifecycle of successful tree planting - from thoughtful species selection to establishment and maintenance strategies that ensure survival and resilience. Participants will learn how to choose climate-appropriate and native species, understand the ecological and community benefits of planting native trees, and apply best practices for proper planting, watering, mulching, and structural pruning during critical establishment years. We'll examine common causes of early tree failure and how to avoid costly mistakes that shorten a tree's lifespan.

Natalie serves as Executive Director of OKC Beautiful, where she focuses on community development, neighborhood engagement, and urban sustainability. She began her career with Keep Oklahoma Beautiful in 2016, helping municipalities and community organizations implement sustainability initiatives across Oklahoma, and later worked in the City of Edmond City Manager's Office while earning a Master of Public Administration focused on urban sustainability and community development. Since joining OKC Beautiful in 2021, she has continued advancing beautification and environmental stewardship efforts. Natalie is a certified arborist through the International Society of Arboriculture and is actively involved in numerous professional and community organizations.

ROOM B

Botany for the Home Gardener - Michael Payne, OKC Beautiful

A brief overview of the science behind how plants grow, in specific regard to what might actually be helpful for someone who isn't trying to take a college course. Topics include growth, function and reproduction and touch on photosynthesis, nutrient uptake, soil health, and plant structure.

Michael Payne grew up in McLoud, Oklahoma, surrounded by forests, wildlife, and the freedom to explore. With a near constant exposure to his father's and grandmother's love of gardening, it's no wonder that he landed within the horticulture and botany fields. Michael has 6 years of experience in horticulture including sales, maintenance, and public education while also continuing his own education. After graduating with an associates from Oklahoma State University-Oklahoma City, Michael is now studying botany and genetics through Oregon State University's ecampus.

ROOM C

Urban Irrigation Stewardship - Andrew Fleet, OSU Oklahoma County Extension

Learn how to manage water efficiently and sustainably in your landscape. This session covers irrigation system design, scheduling, and performance, along with soil-water relationships, water quality considerations, and practical conservation strategies like drip irrigation, smart controllers, and rainwater harvesting. Participants will gain hands-on knowledge to reduce water use, improve landscape health, and protect Oklahoma's water resources.

Andrew Fleet is the Water Conservation Educator for Oklahoma County with OSU Extension. He received a B.S. in Plant and Soil Science with a focus on soil and water resources from OSU in the fall of 2024. He plans to attend graduate school in pursuit of a Master of Environmental Engineering. He is currently developing the water conservation education on the county level. His areas of focus for water conservation include irrigation, groundwater, water quantity and quality, water testing, and water policy. He is also a cohost, producer, and editor of The Urban Gardener Podcast out of the Oklahoma County OSU Extension office.

SUSTAINABLE URBAN LANDSCAPE CONFERENCE SESSION DESCRIPTIONS - FRIDAY, JUNE 26

1:15 - 2:15 p.m. - Breakout Sessions

ROOM A

Yard Waste Diversion & Backyard Composting - Kasey Meek, OKC Beautiful

Learn how to turn yard waste into nutrient-rich compost and keep valuable organic material out of the landfill. This presentation will cover balancing compost ingredients for efficient decomposition, managing weeds and other challenging materials, and practical techniques for creating healthy, productive compost from your yard waste.

Kasey is the Education Director at OKC Beautiful, leading youth programs in school gardening, environmental education, and student leadership. She also chairs the Education Committee for the Oklahoma Compost and Sustainability Association, where she helps deliver hands-on composting and sustainability workshops. Kasey holds a degree in Ecology for Environmental Science from the University of North Texas. Her passion for composting began as a Park Ranger at Scissortail Park, where she managed community composting initiatives. Today, she combines her love of education and sustainability to inspire environmental stewardship across OKC.

ROOM B

Urban Prairie Restoration - John Krupovage, Natural Resources Manager, Tinker AFB

For over 25 years, Tinker AFB has been successfully converting urban turfgrass spaces to native mixed grass prairie. This presentation will highlight proven, results-driven prairie establishment techniques for the challenging urban environment. Topics include: Seeding with minimal soil disturbance, combatting aggressive urban weed competition, seeding at the right time, estimating restoration costs, post-establishment care and more.

John Krupovage has served as the Tinker AFB Natural Resources Program Manager since 1988. He and the natural resources team are responsible for fish and wildlife management, urban forestry, agricultural outleasing, invasive species control, wetland/floodplain protection, prairie/woodland restoration, and wildland fire management. He received his B.S. degree in biology and M.S. degree in wildlife science from New Mexico State University.

ROOM C

Edible Landscaping - James Spicer, Green County Permaculture

A practical session on edible landscape design in the Southern Plains, drawing on 15 years of permaculture practice. The talk explores how thoughtful, site-based decision-making and regional best management practices can guide the creation of resilient, functional landscapes that integrate food production, ecology, and human use.

James Spicer lives in NE Oklahoma where he operates Green Country Permaculture, an ecological land management consultancy and the Tulsa Farmer Incubator, an immersive farm school for new and beginning farmers.

SUSTAINABLE URBAN LANDSCAPE CONFERENCE SESSION DESCRIPTIONS – FRIDAY, JUNE 27

2:30 - 4 p.m. - Afternoon Keynote

ROOM A

Water Harvesting for Food Production - Brad Lancaster, Author of *Rainwater Harvesting for Drylands and Beyond* and co-founder of NeighborhoodForesters.org

Food is virtual water—originating from the source of irrigation. Local, sustainable food is all the rage, but we can take it further by growing that food with local, sustainable water. This talk covers the growing of food using rainwater, stormwater, and greywater for irrigation. Case studies include rain-fed greenhouses, dry farming, backyard market gardens, granada greywater groves, and climate-appropriate traditional and appropriate plantings.

Brad Lancaster is the author of the award-winning *Rainwater Harvesting for Drylands and Beyond* and co-founder of [Neighborhood Foresters.org](http://NeighborhoodForesters.org). Since 1993 Brad has run a successful permaculture education, design, and consultation business focused on integrated regenerative approaches to landscape design, planning, and living. In the Sonoran Desert, with just 11 inches (280 mm) of average annual rainfall, he and his brother's family harvest about 100,000 gallons (378,000 liters) of rainwater a year on an eighth-acre (0.05 ha) urban lot and adjoining right-of-way. This harvested water is then turned into living air conditioners of food-bearing shade trees, abundant gardens, and a thriving landscape incorporating wildlife habitat, beauty, medicinal plants, and more. The goal of his book series and overall work is to empower his clients and community to make positive change in their own lives and neighborhoods—by harvesting and enhancing free on-site resources such as water, sun, wind, shade, community, and more. It's catching on, as evidenced by tens of thousands of practitioners and demand for Brad's work around the world.

SUSTAINABLE URBAN LANDSCAPE CONFERENCE SESSION DESCRIPTIONS – SATURDAY, JUNE 27

9:00 - 10:30 a.m. - Morning Keynote

ROOM A

Community Food Forests - Brad Lancaster, Author of *Rainwater Harvesting for Drylands and Beyond* and co-founder of NeighborhoodForesters.org

This presentation is about neighborhood forestry efforts empowering citizens, and contractors, to effectively plant the rain and native food-bearing vegetation to grow vibrant and resilient abundance where they live, work, and play. Then train them up and support them with the education, guidance, collaborations, and policy that enable them to better steward the plantings for decades to come. Dramatic results include cooler neighborhoods, healthier eating, a revitalization of indigenous cuisine, deeper connections with people and place, reduced flooding, skill building, greater soil fertility, and more beauty and joy. The strategies and practices are accessible to all and most are free or cost no more than the price of a shovel.

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SUSTAINABLE URBAN LANDSCAPE CONFERENCE SESSION DESCRIPTIONS – SATURDAY, JUNE 27

10:45 - 11:45 a.m. - Breakout Sessions

ROOM A

Water-Wise Garden Design - Chris Patton & Matt Cronin, Sustainable Gardening Solutions

One topic we love talking about is Water-wise Garden Design. Giving tips and tricks of what to look for when designing a garden with or without sprinkler access, how to retain more rainwater, good plant choices, and more.

We are Sustainable Gardening Solutions, Located in North Oklahoma City. We specialize in landscape maintenance, design, and installation prioritizing the use of native plants tailored to your yard's specific needs. We also cultivate our own selection of native plants. Co-Owners and Operators Chris and Matt are both graduates of OSU-OKC with degrees in Horticulture Technologies, each with expertise in sustainable horticulture as well as nursery and greenhouse production. With over ten years of combined experience in horticulture, We specialize in transforming your outdoor space sustainably and beautifully.

ROOM B

Cities: A Critical Piece of the Puzzle for Sustainability - Cheryl Cheadle

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission's Blue Thumb Program partners with volunteers and municipalities to monitor streams, collect water quality data, and promote watershed protection across Oklahoma. This presentation highlights a new stream protection training developed with the Soil Health Team, covering practical strategies for improving water quality, supporting healthy landscapes, and strengthening community partnerships.

Cheryl Cheadle has a bs degree in wildlife conservation from Oklahoma State University. She has been a staff member for the Blue Thumb Water Quality Education Program for over 30 years. Cheryl is committed to helping both children and adults to have meaningful outdoor experiences that bring them to become stewards of our land, water and wildlife.

ROOM C

The Impromptu Gardener - Daniel Pugh, Pugh Gardens

This presentation explores the journey of a couple who discovered the joys and challenges of gardening without formal training. Set at Pugh Gardens, it highlights how improvisation, creativity, resourcefulness, and perseverance in a demanding environment can lead to unexpected success. The talk also offers practical tips, inspiring stories, and lessons learned from embracing a spontaneous, naturalist approach to cultivating biodiverse landscapes of native plants, trees, and grasses that support wildlife, pollinators, and monarch migration.

Daniel Pugh, a retired contractor and former espresso café owner (and a trained Master Gardener), and his wife, Ruthie, an IT specialist, acquired 5 acres of prairie and Cross Timbers groves on an abandoned hilltop homestead in Canadian County in the late 1990s. They built their forever country home and began transforming an open prairie landscape—once dominated by swaths of Johnsongrass—into a network of native flower beds and paths featuring annual and perennial native plants and grasses. After recently acquiring an adjoining 40 acres of open prairie and Cross Timbers canyons, they are developing new prairie and woodland nature trails.

SUSTAINABLE URBAN LANDSCAPE CONFERENCE SESSION DESCRIPTIONS – SATURDAY, JUNE 27

12:45 - 1:45 p.m. - Breakout Sessions

ROOM A

Setting the Table for Pollinators: Hosting Habitat with Native Plants - Amanda Fitzgerald, Okies for Monarchs

Pollinator gardens are gaining popularity across Oklahoma, yet many native plant landscapes face resistance from neighbors, HOAs, or municipal codes, often due to misunderstandings about appearance, maintenance, or insects themselves. This presentation focuses on how to design Oklahoma-native pollinator gardens that provide all-season blooms and, critically, the host plants pollinators need to complete their life cycles, while remaining visually intentional and community-approved.

Amanda Fitzgerald grew up in Moore, Oklahoma, where her passion for nature began early. She earned a degree from the University of Oklahoma and has worked in wildlife education, sustainable agriculture, and conservation. Amanda spent seven years at the Oklahoma City Zoo mentoring volunteers and now serves as Community Engagement Manager for the Oklahoma Monarch Society, leading education and outreach efforts that support pollinator conservation across Oklahoma.

ROOM B

Prioritizing Sustainable Landscapes in Municipal Codes - City of Oklahoma City Planning Department Staff

This session includes a facilitated panel discussion featuring representatives from the City of Oklahoma City's Planning Department. The speakers will each briefly introduce key aspects of how the City's proposed development codes update will mitigate the effects of the urban heat island by right-sizing required parking, enhancing landscaping requirements, improving enforcement, and emphasizing tree survivability. The panel will also take questions from the audience.

Joe Hudson, a Senior Planner for the City of Oklahoma City, he serves as a Beautification Planner for the Planning Department and as Project Manager for MAPS 4 Beautification projects. Dr. Banery Mujica-Ortiz is a Program Planner with the City of Oklahoma City's Planning Department, where she leads initiatives related to long-range comprehensive planning, environmental preservation, and zoning policy. Marilyn is a Program Planner in the City's Planning Department. Marilyn is managing the City's process of updating its development codes, including the Zoning and Planning Code and Subdivision Regulations.

ROOM C

Beyond the Lawn: How Homeowners are Redefining Their Yard - Marcus Long, Walter Jaques, Sara Ferguson, Chris Patton & Matt Cronin

This session will feature a panel of homeowners who have transformed their yards into native landscapes. Panelists will share the challenges they faced, the resources and techniques that helped them succeed, and how they navigate conversations with neighbors about their unconventional landscaping choices.

This panel will feature Walter Jaques, Sara Ferguson, Chris Patton & Matt Cronin, and be moderated by Marcus Long

SUSTAINABLE URBAN LANDSCAPE CONFERENCE SESSION DESCRIPTIONS – SATURDAY, JUNE 27

2:00 - 3:00 p.m. - Breakout Sessions

ROOM A

Improving Soil Health - Mason Huddleston, OSU Oklahoma County Extension

Healthy soil is the foundation of productive gardens, resilient landscapes, and sustainable urban agriculture. This program explores the key principles of soil health, including soil structure, organic matter, biological activity, and nutrient cycling. Participants will learn practical strategies to improve urban soils through composting, cover crops, mulching, and reduced soil disturbance. Common challenges such as soil compaction, poor drainage, and low fertility will be discussed, along with effective sustainable solutions for homeowners and gardeners.

Mason Huddleston is an Urban Agriculture Educator with OSU Extension and holds a B.S. in Agricultural Science from Truman State University. Prior to joining OSU Extension, he worked with the Missouri Department of Conservation as a field biologist and as a horticulturist at Scissortail Park. In his current role, Mason delivers research-based educational programs throughout Oklahoma County. His primary areas of expertise include soil health, small livestock production, backyard poultry, small ruminants, and beekeeping; helping Oklahomans build sustainable gardens, landscapes, and food production systems.

ROOM B

Trees for Pollinators - John Leonard, Mollie Spencer Farm

John Leonard will be sharing his knowledge about some unique Oklahoma trees and the pollinators they support. He will discuss their identification, growing conditions, and the unexpected surprises you may find of the types of butterflies & moths that they host.

John Leonard and his mom owned & operated a certified organic farm for 18 years. They grew a wide variety of produce and starter plants for farmers markets and restaurants. In 2008, John was nominated to the Oklahoma Agriculture Leadership Program at OSU, where he learned about a diverse range of agriculture practices throughout the state, trained as a lobbyist in Washington DC., culminating with a stint as an ag ambassador for the state in Spain & Morocco. For the last 14 years, he has managed the Mollie Spencer Farm, in Yukon. The farm has been in the Kirkpatrick family for over 130 years and serves as an educational & festival venue, as well as a livestock rescue. John is a Master Gardener, Certified Pollinator Steward, beekeeper, & pollinator educator.

ROOM C

Ecological Lawn Care, Julia Laughlin, OSU Oklahoma County Extension

This session will discuss how to reduce fertilizer use on your lawn by using natural fertilizer sources. Julia will also share about herbicides that don't harm insects and pollinators but control weeds. The session will include tips to create a bee lawn in the Oklahoma climate.

Julia holds a BS and an MS in Horticulture from Oklahoma State University. She was on Faculty at OSU-OKC beginning in 1992 and became Department Head of Horticulture in 1999. She was one of the main founders of the OSU-OKC Farmers Market. Julia holds the position of Oklahoma County Horticulture Educator for the OSU Extension Service. She is the Advisor of the Oklahoma County Master Gardener Volunteer Organization which has over 250 active gardening volunteers and she appears regularly on Fox 25 with gardening tips on the "Growing Oklahoma" segment.

SUSTAINABLE URBAN LANDSCAPE CONFERENCE

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS – SATURDAY, JUNE 27

3:15 - 4:00 p.m. - Afternoon Keynote & Wrap Up

ROOM A

Native Plant People Panel - Katie Huskerson, Connie Scothorn, Paul Mays

Join a panel of native plant professionals as they discuss designing landscapes that are both beautiful and ecologically functional. Panelists will share their approach to site evaluation, plant selection, and integrating ecological diversity while meeting the goals of the site and the needs of the client. The discussion will also explore where they found inspiration, knowledge, and mentorship throughout their careers.

Connie Scothorn is an Oklahoma licensed landscape architect and founding principal of CLS & Associates, Landscape Architects. She specializes in site design that creates beautiful, sustainable spaces tailored to support and enhance each project's function. Over the course of her career, Connie has designed thousands of award-winning projects—from residential gardens to parks, campuses, and streetscapes. When possible, she incorporates native plants to promote ecological health and long-term resilience. With business partner Brian Patric, she co-authored the book "Oklahoma Native Plants, A Guide to Designing Landscapes to Attract Birds and Butterflies."

Katie Huskerson is the owner of Pollinators + Prairies based in Oklahoma City, OK. Additionally, she leads the native plant division at her family's century old nursery, Mann's Greenhouses, and is the education programmer for the Puterbaugh Center located in McAlester, OK. She has an Associate Degree of Applied Science in Horticulture from Oklahoma State University – OKC and a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education from the University of Oklahoma. Currently she serves as the president of The Oklahoma Native Plant Network, is a volunteer with the OKC Harvest Program at Wilson Elementary and is on the garden care team for Mesta Park.

Paul Mays is owner of Blue House Urban Farms, located in the Historic Paseo Arts District in Oklahoma City. Blue House offers native and edible plants as well as design and native ecological landscaping services.