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DANE COUNTY OFFERS FREE NATIVE PLANTS FOR SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY PROJECTS

The Dane County Land and Water Resources Department has a limited supply of free native plants available for school and community projects. Native plants have tremendous benefits for water quality. In natural, native plant-covered landscapes, rain soaks gradually into the ground. However, today much of the land is covered by impervious surfaces – such as streets, parking lots, roofs, compacted lawns, and heavily tilled agricultural fields – where the water cannot soak into the ground. Instead, water runs off over the land, picking up pollutants, sediment, and nutrients along the way and transporting them to local streams, rivers, and lakes.

The deep root systems of native plants help decrease soil compaction and infiltrate water back into the ground, reducing stormwater runoff and protecting nearby water bodies. Native plants are also adapted to our local climate and soils, are more drought tolerant and disease resistant, and provide important food and habitat to wildlife and pollinators.

The free native plants provided by this program are either donated from community members through the Plant Dane native plant sale or grown by local volunteers who want to make an impact in their communities. Since the program began in 2016, more than 4,700 plants have been distributed to 15 schools and 16 community groups, including neighborhood associations and community centers. Goodman Community Center was one of these recipients, receiving over 500 plants to help them expand their outdoor learning space.

Goodman's Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) Specialty Teacher Deborah Crabtree said, "Many youth were first-time gardeners and excited to get their hands (and faces!) dirty. While experiencing the wonder of nature, youth learned about the importance of tilling before planting and discovered many pill bugs and worms indicating that our soil was rich in nutrients. Disguised and intentional learning opportunities such as these are especially valuable during out of school time as they support learning in a hands-on, engaging format. By connecting with nature and monitoring the plants as they grow, it is our hope that youth realize the importance of nature and responsibility to care for our Earth and precious natural resources."

School and community groups interested in receiving free plants can fill out an application on the Dane County Office of Lakes and Watersheds website and submit it by July 22:
<https://olw-lwrd.countyofdane.com/Management/Native-Plants-and-Natural-Shorelines/Native-Plants-for-Schools-and-Community-Projects>

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