

Chicago, Illinois, USA

Southside Blooms: Flowers That Empower

Quilen Blackwell^{1,2}, Iza Redlinski³, and Ellen Woodward³

¹Southside Bloom, ²Chicago Eco House, and ³Field Museum

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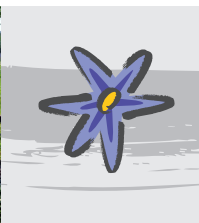
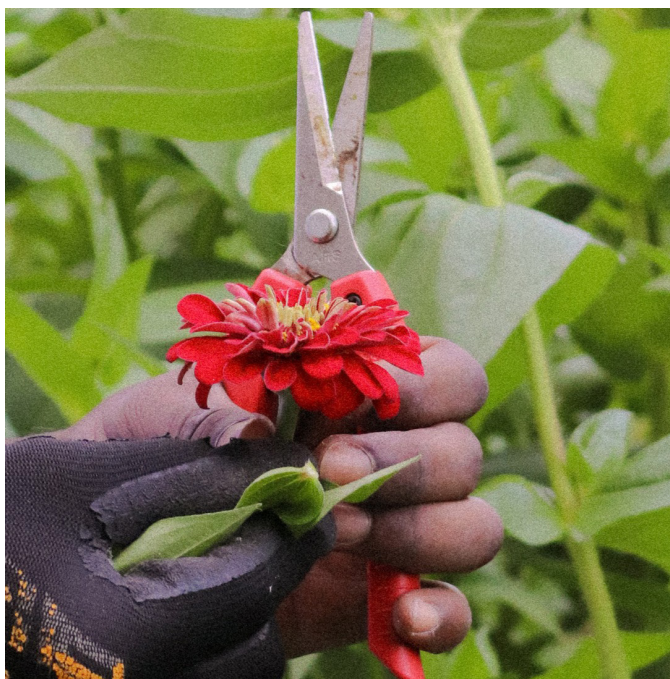
More than Just Flowers

Explore how Southside Blooms turns vacant lots on the South Side of Chicago into farms that bring employment, beautiful natural ares, and hope to local community members.



Southside Blooms is a farm-to-vase florist that creates unique, fashion-forward floral arrangements while maintaining an uncompromising dedication to the environment and local community. Southside Blooms converts vacant lots on Chicago's South Side into solar-powered flower farms. This is a project of Chicago Eco House - a nonprofit with the mission of using sustainability to alleviate inner-city poverty. Founded in Englewood in 2014 by Quilen Blackwell, Chicago Eco House began as an effort to spur bottom-up economic development.

Today, Southside Blooms has farms in multiple neighborhoods throughout Chicago; offers K-8 after-school programming; and hosts a workforce development program for young adults, ages 16 to 24. These farms also serve as community spaces for hosting local events. To learn more visit chicagoecohouse.org and southsideblooms.com



Southside Blooms: A story through a Field Guide

This field guide tells the story of Southside Blooms, focusing on the organization's four pillars - Economic development, Sustainability, Education, and Community building - and the beautiful plants that are central to its mission. Think of this guide as a way to tour Chicago Eco House/Southside Blooms' farms - whether you are there in person, or exploring their model remotely.

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Economic Development

Southside Blooms brings economic benefits to its community, employing local youth and creating a sustainable green business model that is good for plants and people. The following flowers are included in many bouquets for their subtle beauty, alluring texture, and incredible vase life.



1. Anise Hyssop
Agastache foeniculum
LAMIACEAE

The plant's leaves and flowers have a strong licorice aroma and can be used in teas or as flavoring.



2. Blue Vervain
Verbena hastata
VERBENACEAE

The candelabra-like formation of the purple blue flowers provides the plants with a unique appearance.



3. Golden Alexanders
Zizia aurea
APIACEAE

Plants in the carrot family like this one are host plants to the swallowtail butterfly, making them a vital food source for the caterpillars.



4. Gray Headed Cone Flower
Ratibida pinnata
ASTERACEAE

The seeds have pleasant but strong fragrance and are a treat for many birds including goldfinches.



5. New England Aster
Symphotrichum novae-angliae
ASTERACEAE

This aster species has a beautiful contrast of purple petals and yellow center which attracts pollinators including the monarch butterfly.



6. Rattlesnake master
Eryngium yuccifolium
APIACEAE

The scientific name of this plant (*E. yuccifolium*), meaning "like yucca leaves," reveals a lot about its structure.



7. Sand coreopsis
Coreopsis lanceolata
ASTERACEAE

An early blooming yellow flower that brightens any garden.



8. Showy goldenrod
Symphotrichum novae-angliae
ASTERACEAE

Goldenrods, including this species, are a vital source of food for many pollinators during the fall months.

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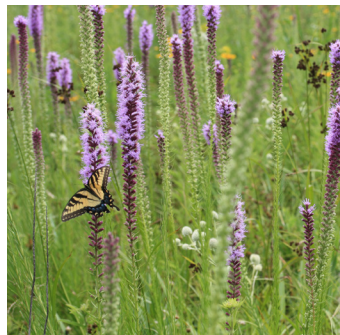
Sustainability

Southside Blooms is the first off-grid commercial flower farm that prioritizes renewable energy and rainwater irrigation, while never using pesticides, herbicides or synthetic fertilizers. Also, Southside Blooms uses native plants like the ones below to promote a more sustainable city for people and nature.



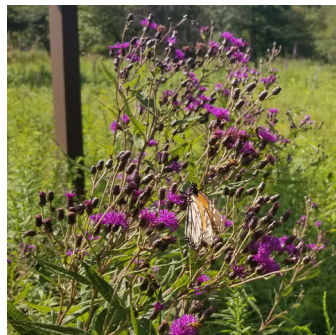
9. **Big Bluestem**
Andropogon gerardii
POACEAE

State grass of Illinois, also called 'turkey foot' due to the characteristic shape of its seedhead.



10. **Blazing Star**
Liatris spicata
APIACEAE

This prairie plant is probably more widely cultivated in gardens than seen in wild places.



11. **Common Ironweed**
Vernonia fasciculata
ASTERACEAE

Vibrant purple flowers attract many pollinators - this is the smaller of the ironweed species, its cousin tall ironweed can grow 8 ft tall.



12. **Indian Grass**
Sorghastrum nutans
POACEAE

One of the dominant grass species of the Midwestern Prairies.



13. **Joe Pye Weed**
Eutrochium maculatum
ASTERACEAE

This late summer bloomer can be easily identified by more than 2 leaves growing in a "whorl" around the stem. Many pollinators' favorite.



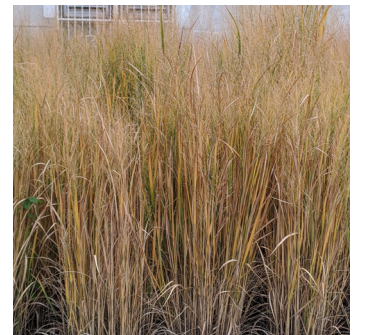
14. **Prairie dock**
Silphium terebinthinaceum
ASTERACEAE

The taproot of prairie dock can reach 12 feet into the ground!



15. **Rosinweed**
Silphium integrifolium
ASTERACEAE

A tall plant that resembles the sunflower, but blooms before sunflowers do.



16. **Switch Grass**
Panicum virgatum
POACEAE

This grass remains upright and standing in winter and provides a great home for birds during the cold months.

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Education

Southside Blooms brings young people onto its flower farms for educational after school programming and employs teens in green jobs growing and selling flowers. Ecological knowledge can help folks identify and grow plants like these that support pollinators and provide fresh produce.



17. Butterfly Milkweed
Asclepias tuberosa
APOCYNACEAE

This milkweed likes dry sandy soils and lots of sun. Like other milkweeds, it is vital food for the monarch butterfly caterpillars.



18. Cherry Tomatoes
Solanum lycopersicum var. *cerasiforme*
SOLANACEAE

Although they are often called "vegetables", tomatoes - botanically speaking - are fruit.



19. Common Milkweed
Asclepias syriaca
APOCYNACEAE

The most common milkweed, often preferred by the monarch butterfly. Can easily spread in the garden.



20. Grapes
Vitis sp.
VITACEAE

The grapes we eat are derived from wild grape varieties.



21. Kale
Brassica oleracea var. *sabellica*
BRASSICACEAE

Kale, cabbage, cauliflower and broccoli are all varieties of the same plant!



22. Strawberries
Fragaria × ananassa
ROSACEAE

Strawberries are, botanically speaking, not really berries.



23. Swiss Chard
Beta vulgaris
AMARANTHACEAE

Swiss chard does not originate in Switzerland and is a descendant of wild beet.



24. Whorled Milkweed
Asclepias verticillata
APOCYNACEAE

One of the most delicate milkweeds, with small leaves and white flowers.

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Community Building

Southside Blooms was formed in 2017 when neighbors worked together to secure two vacant lots in Englewood for their first flower farm. The community helps to create these green spaces and reaps the well-being and beautification benefits brought from the following plants.



25. Foxglove Beardtongue
Penstemon digitalis
PLANTAGINACEAE

Blooms for a long time with large white flowers that might have a tint of violet. Bees get nectar by wiggling inside of the flower.



26. Goldenrod fireweed
Solidago rugosa
ASTERACEAE

Cultivar of a native goldenrod, meaning it was bred for specific characteristics which sometimes occur naturally.



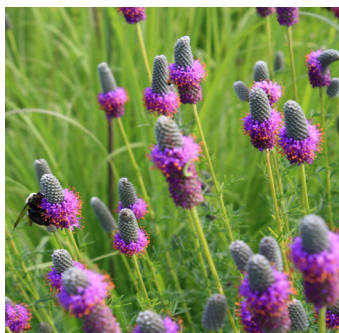
27. Prairie Smoke
Geum triflorum
ROSACEAE

This plant gets its name from fuzzy parts that appear when the plant is in full bloom and resemble smoke.



28. Purple Coneflower
Echinacea purpurea
ASTERACEAE

This lovely plant also has many traditional medicinal uses.



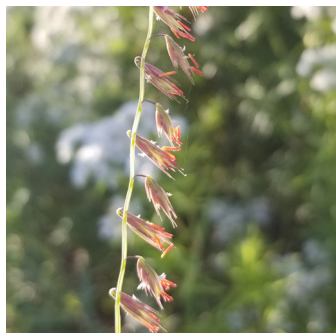
29. Purple Prairie Clover
Dalea purpurea
FABACEAE

In the bean family, the purple prairie clover is a nitrogen fixer, meaning it fertilizes the soil.



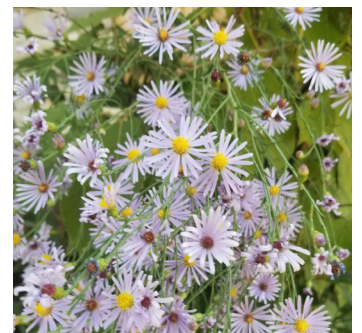
30. Rose Milkweed
Asclepias incarnata
APOCYNACEAE

Sometimes called swamp milkweed, this plant prefers moisture and full sun but will grow in dry and partly sun conditions too.



31. Side Oats Grama
Bouteloua curtipendula
POACEAE

This species is found throughout most areas in central North America and all the way down to Argentina!



32. Smooth Blue Aster
Symphotrichum laeve
ASTERACEAE

Attractive and versatile plant that can survive in many garden conditions and thrives even in compacted urban soil.