
# Seedlings for Schools 2024–25 Final Report

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FLORIDA Wildflower FOUNDATION

## Program Description, Criteria and Timeline

The Seedlings for Schools grant program introduces students to the importance of Florida's wildflowers and their role in sustaining natural ecosystems. Through the grant, pre-K through 12th grade schools across Florida receive native seedlings, classroom resources, and professional guidance to help establish and maintain wildflower gardens.

Applications are accepted annually between March 1 and April 30. To qualify, teachers must have a suitable garden space and commit to integrating native wildflowers into their curriculum throughout the year. Applications must also include three photos of the prepared garden space.

Awarded teachers complete a year-end survey in December to share their garden experiences, which informs this report. Teachers who meet all requirements are eligible for additional seedlings in the spring and may continue applying for the grant each year.

## Grant Awards

This year, 40 schools were awarded grants out of 44 applicants, selected based on the quality of their applications and suitability of their garden spaces. The awarded schools included:

- four PreK-K programs
- two PreK-K
- one PreK-5
- one PreK-8
- one K-5
- two K-8
- 20 elementary schools
- two middle schools
- one grade 6-12
- four high schools

Teachers reported that 7,086 students actively used the gardens. Many noted that even more students benefited simply from having the gardens on campus, whether or not they were directly involved in planting, maintenance, or curriculum. At some schools, multiple classes worked in the gardens, while at others, a single class took the lead. Of the students engaged in the gardens, 3,472 participate in a free lunch program, underscoring the program's reach into underserved populations.

Seedlings were supplied and shipped by Native Butterfly Flowers Nursery of Melbourne. Each school received six seedlings each of the following species: Leavenworth's tickseed (*Coreopsis leavenworthii*), Tropical sage (*Salvia coccinea*), Blue porterweed (*Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*), Frostweed (*Verbesina virginica*) and Scorpionstail (*Heliotropium angiospermum*).

In spring, 27 schools that remained eligible and opted for additional seedlings received the following mix: Leavenworth's tickseed (*Coreopsis leavenworthii*), Tropical sage (*Salvia coccinea*), Frostweed (*Verbesina virginica*), Snow squarestem (*Melanthera nivea*), Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*) and Forked bluecurls (*Trichostema dichotomum*).

Fall seedlings (Left to right): Scorpionstail, Tropical sage, Leavenworth's tickseed and Snow squarestem

## Garden Sites and Conditions

Because seedlings arrive in small one- to two-inch liners, many teachers chose to start them in pots before planting them in the ground, giving them time to establish in a more protected environment. After transplanting, most seedlings were planted directly in garden sites, while others were grown in raised boxes. About half of the gardens were in full sun and half in part sun (3–6 hours per day). Roughly half of the sites stayed occasionally moist, while the rest required irrigation as needed. About half of the schools also supplemented their soil with organic bagged media.

Griffin Elementary School

## Challenges and Successes

Six schools reported fall issues with seedlings arriving in poor condition due to shipping. The Foundation replaces damaged plants if teachers notify us within a few days of delivery. One school left its seedlings in the box too long, and the plants struggled as a result.

Several schools were affected by Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton. Two schools lost all seedlings to storm damage. Another reported initial failure due to poor soil, but after replacing it, found much greater success with spring plantings.

Other challenges included:

- A lawn company mistakenly mowing down one school's garden—highlighting the importance of signage for protection and education.
- Deer browsing on wildflowers at one site.

## 2024 Seedlings for Schools Grant Award Winners

- Avalon Elementary, Orlando
- Bailey Elementary, Dover
- Bonneville Elementary, Orlando
- Cocoplum Nature School, Delray Beach
- Cordova Park Elementary, Pensacola
- Deerfield Beach Middle School
- Dorothy C York Innovation Academy, Apollo Beach
- Dundee Elementary Academy
- East Pasco Education Academy, Dade City
- Gateway Environmental K-8 Learning Center, Homestead
- Griffin Elementary, Cooper City
- Harmony High School, St. Cloud
- Heritage Elementary, Tampa
- J.D. Parker Elementary, Stuart
- Lake Magdalene Christian School, Tampa
- Lake Orienta Elementary, Altamonte Springs
- Lake Shore Middle School, Belle Glade
- Naples High School
- Okeechobee Healthy Start
- Palm Bay Magnet High School, Melbourne
- Palm Beach Central High School, Wellington
- Philip O'Brien Elementary, Lakeland
- Rain Lily Montessori School, Fernandina Beach
- Roberts Elementary School, Tallahassee
- Rock Springs Elementary, Apopka
- Roots Nature and Leadership Academy, Sarasota
- Sand Lake Elementary, Orlando
- Sheridan Hills Elementary, Hollywood
- Southside Elementary, Sarasota
- Sparr Elementary, Anthony
- Springwood Elementary School, Tallahassee
- St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic School, Naples
- St. Paul Catholic School, Pensacola
- Storybrooke Academy, Fort Pierce
- Suwannee Pineview Elementary, Live Oak
- The Goddard School of Baymeadows, Jacksonville
- Timber Lakes Elementary, Orlando
- Trinity Tots Preschool, Lake Placid
- Twin Rivers Montessori Academy, Oviedo
- Web of Wisdom Elementary, Holiday

- Iguana damage at Cocoplum Nature School in Delray Beach, where students observed wildlife interactions firsthand and discussed solutions:

  "*Our biggest obstacle is the proliferation of iguanas in our area. Last year they ate the Black-eyed Susan and Coreopsis, so we prioritized them for protection with the few cages we had. But then the iguanas ate all of the other unprotected flowers over the course of a single weekend. Teachers have had discussions with the children about how to enable pollinators to access the flowers while also keeping out the iguanas. The children haven't yet been able to engineer a solution for butterfly access, but they did observe that bees were able to get through the cages' wiring to the flowers.*"



Left to right: Web of Wisdom Elementary, Lake Shore Elementary, Bonneville Elementary

Despite challenges, most schools reported success. Sixty-four percent of teachers observed more than half of their plants blooming in the fall. Leavenworth's tickseed (*Coreopsis leavenworthii*), Tropical sage (*Salvia coccinea*), and Blue porterweed (*Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*) were noted as the most successful species.

Thirty-four of the 40 awarded schools completed the required fall survey. Of those, 27 requested a spring shipment of 30 additional seedlings. Overall, 33 teachers indicated plans to make their garden a permanent fixture on campus.

## Gardening Partners

Many teachers tapped into school and community resources to support their gardens. Partnerships included:

- Fellow teachers and staff volunteers
- Community groups such as the Swinton Community Project and Florida Atlantic University, which provided funding for vegetable gardens
- Local garden clubs and parent volunteers
- Master Gardeners and local UF/IFAS Extension offices
- Local native nurseries, including Amelia's Native Wildflowers
- Student groups such as Green Teams and 4-H clubs

## Gardens as Educational Tools

A core goal of the Seedlings for Schools program is to promote outdoor learning experiences that help students achieve Florida's academic standards. Teachers reported using their gardens across multiple subject areas — not only science, but also math and language arts. Learning opportunities included:

- Measurement
- Seed collection
- Conservation
- Wildflower research
- Soil quality
- Pollination
- Figurative language and imagery
- Ecosystems and food chains
- Plant part identification
- Native vs. non-native species
- Erosion

Marisa Crane of East Pasco Education Academy described the impact of the native garden on her students:

> *"As an alternative school, we have a unit for the emotionally behaviorally disabled students. They took great pleasure in participating in the planting and watching the garden flourish. Our expectations matched the outcome. Teaching the value of native plants in the environment and the difference between invasive species and how they displace the natural plants is always the best teaching point for our student body. Our school is a temporary placement for at risk teens. Therefore, they spend between a few weeks to a full school year here preparing them for a successful transition to their home school. The focus is on self-regulation and coping skills in addition to core academics. The garden has been a great tool for de-escalation and self-care."*

East Pasco Education Academy

## Promoting Gardens to Others

Many teachers shared their gardens beyond the classroom. Photos appeared on school Instagram and Facebook accounts, while others produced YouTube videos or wrote about the gardens in school newspapers and yearbooks. Lake Orienta Elementary even published an article in Seminole County's Grant for Great Ideas newsletter.

## Florida Wildflower Foundation Resources

Teachers received access to the Foundation's classroom resources web page (www.FlaWildflowers.org/classroom-resources), which features *Wild About Wildflowers!*, a downloadable activity guide aligned with third- and fourth-grade Florida standards but adaptable for other grades. The guide includes math, science, and language lessons centered on native plants, pollinators, and ecosystems. An updated edition will be available for the 2025–26 grant season.

The classroom resources page also provides guidance on preparing garden sites, linking gardens to curriculum, identifying invasive and non-native plants, and more. Ninety-four percent of teachers reviewed the Wild About Wildflowers! Activity Guide, and most reported using the classroom resources provided.

## Survey excerpts

Following are teacher comments from the December 2024 and May 2025 surveys that demonstrate how students have connected with the school gardens.

### Avalon Elementary, Orlando; Joseph Brown

This project was great! Our box arrived and we planted the plugs in small pots until they were about 5" tall, then the students planted them in their permanent home, the "outdoor classroom." The students learned what makes a plant "native" They also learned about why wildflowers are important to our ecosystem and how pollinators from the outdoor classroom end up increasing the yield of our edible kitchen garden. We planted with ollas, which will help irrigate over winter breaks. We look forward to spring blooms to incorporate an art project!

Avalon Elementary

### Bonneville Elementary, Orlando; Heba Itani

Our students planted, maintained and watered the garden. They observed the parts of a plant in real time while they were learning about it in science. The younger grades brought students out to observe the pollinators and look for butterflies as they were learning about the life cycle of butterflies.

### Cocoplum Nature School, Delray Beach; Fernanda Wolfson

The children cared for the seedlings in window planters for four weeks until they grew larger. Then they determined where to plant them in the garden and they did the planting. They placed cages around the flowers that iguanas have eaten in the past. Finally, the children watered while the flowers were getting established. The children engaged in a cross-curricular unit about native plants. In addition to planting this wildflower garden, they created a map of the entire outdoor playscape where they collaborated to sketch and label every single plant. They differentiated between edible, medicinal (topical), not edible and toxic; and they differentiated between native, non-native and invasive. They attended a field trip facilitated by the Institute for Regional Conservation where they identified various native, non-native and invasive plants, and participated in invasive removal. Five months after planting, they are now working hard in their food garden and learning about the importance of the pollinator plants for the success of their food plants.

> *This program is amazing. Providing flowers to schools is a fantastic way to help students develop a love for nature and understand the importance a garden can have on a community.*
>
> *— Betty Fritz, Gateway Environmental K-8 Learning Center*

### Cordova Park Elementary, Pensacola; Connie Naff

The students truly enjoyed the experience of planning where to plant and then planting the seedlings. They enjoy seeing the plants grow and blooming.

### Dorothy C. York Innovation Academy, Apollo Beach; Jerry Turner

We compared and contrasted plants of various species and types (fruits, flowers, veggies, etc.) and were able to identify the parts of various plants. Thank you for your continued generosity!

### Dundee Elementary Academy, Dundee; Lauren Yearry

Students were excited to prepare and plant our native garden. They were also responsible for weeding, watering and maintaining the garden area. We completed a whole unit on native plants and Florida's ecosystems! The students were so excited to learn about, then plant native plants! We so appreciated and enjoyed the program! We are so excited to grow our native garden!

### East Pasco Education Academy, Dade City; Marisa Crane

The art class had a garden sign project this year. Each student created their own sign representing their interpretation of plant life. The garden is exceeding our expectations and was very beneficial to our pollinator lessons. We celebrated Bee Day on May 20 with an interactive exercise identifying the wildflowers and pollinators. On Earth Day, we do a water conservation learning activity that outlines the benefits of using native plants for less water use, with the wildflowers playing a big part of water conservation and Florida Friendly Landscaping.

### Gateway Environmental K-8 Learning Center, Homestead; Betty Fritz

Around 20 students participated in planning and working on our garden project. Some students set up the box garden, others planted seedlings and decided on the garden's layout, choosing to place plants randomly instead of in groups. Additionally, some students took on the responsibility of watering the garden. I think this program is amazing. Providing flowers to schools is a fantastic way to help students develop a love for nature and understand the importance a garden can have on a community. The additional bonus of attracting butterflies enhances the experience even more.

> *I love this program! This is our second year of participating and so excited to introduce new species into our garden.*
>
> *— Brittney Sapienza, J. D. Parker Elementary*

### Griffin Elementary, Cooper City; Jacqueline Sanchez

Our wildflower garden is incorporated into our environmental area that contains a food forest, vegetable garden beds and butterfly gardens. It's a great addition to instill the need for pollinator plants in our landscapes and can be used for our 2nd grade standards about the butterfly life cycle.

Griffin Elementary

### Harmony High School, St. Cloud; Tammy Mabry

All students took part in every aspect of the garden: weeding, sowing, planting, watering and discussion of growth in their science logs.

### Heritage Elementary, Tampa; Lori Hanson

I am a native gardener at home, so I am actually incorporating some additional plants to improve our native area. I have added Sunshine mimosa and Rosinweed to our garden area. Students in our club will be making models and posters to teach the school learning community about the plants. Students will be painting paint stir sticks as plant markers.

### J.D. Parker Elementary, Stuart; Brittney Sapienza

I love this program! This is our second year of participating and so excited to introduce new species into our garden. My Garden Club members were able to plant some of the seedlings. They enjoy being able to add something new into our space and get excited to see them growing and changing.

### Lake Magdalene Christian School, Tampa; Melissa Pachacz

Having seedlings for students to plant was a great experience. We discussed native plants and how they are beneficial to our ecosystem. After the seedlings were planted, students used pine straw as mulch to suppress weeds from growing.

### Lake Orienta Elementary, Altamonte Springs; Linda Nunez

The students are all excited about having a place they can come to see butterflies and learn about the native plants we have. These native seedlings more than met my expectations. The kids are so excited about being outside and learning the names of the plants and butterflies. We have had Monarchs, Black swallowtails, Painted ladies and Skippers in our garden.

Heritage Elementary

### Naples High School, Naples; Karin Stewart

The club will use the garden as a means to raise awareness about the importance of saving areas for pollinators, the discuss the reduction of Monarch butterfles, and have Earth Day conversations about the importance of native species in our Florida environment on and off campus. Club members are interested in learning about the different native species and how they have acclimated to the different soils and sand types we have in SW Florida.

### Okeechobee Healthy Start, Okeechobee; Dawn Lawrence

Our garden was a great success! We used this as a family day quarterly to enjoy the outdoors and quality family time. The children loved getting their hands dirty and coming back and seeing all the flowers in bloom.

> *The children love to check the garden every day and are so excited to see what is blooming.*
>
> *— Kati McClurg, Rain Lily Montessori School*

### Palm Bay Magnet High School, Melbourne; Alina Lanio

My students learned how growing native plants helps attract pollinators. They also learned about the harmful effects invasive species can have on an ecosystem. I think this is a wonderful program and I am very happy that I was chosen for this opportunity!

### Palm Beach Central High School, Wellington; James Shrefler

The wildflowers were intended to be a Student Garden Club Project. The dozen regular members worked on site preparation, planting, sign making and watering at various times. Sometimes they brought friends along who helped. Students from science classes helped from time to time with planting, watering and weeding. That also provided moments to observe and discuss pollinating insects. The garden is in a location where it can be viewed from an elevated walkway that daily has

a lot of student and staff foot traffic. For this reason, lots of people are able to view the wildflowers casually. Staff members from the special education program brought students to assist with planting and sign-making activities. Several teachers encouraged students to participate in garden club activities.

Palm Beach Central High School

### Philip O'brien Elementary, Lakeland; Mark Robbins and Sara Ohl

We walked students through the garden and explained what we were doing. We had an after school garden club for students. They really loved being in the garden, planting and watching them bloom.

### Rain Lily Montessori School, Fernandina Beach; Kati McClurg

Our students have been involved from the very beginning. They helped unpack the box of seedlings and transplant them into pots, they watered them and observed them, and then we transplanted them into larger pots before finally placing them in our prepared garden beds. The children helped prepare the beds by weeding, transplanting other plants and adding new soil. They love to check the garden every day and are so excited to see what is blooming. We have all been excited to see the many butterfly species it has attracted. We've seen a lot more Zebra longwings since adding the plants. The children have also loved observing the bees that visit the blossoms. The plants are still small, but they are healthy and I believe they will continue to grow well.

> *The entire process has helped reinforce the plant life cycle. It has also helped some students understand that pollinators aren't out to just sting students; they have an important job.*
>
> *— Laura Stockwell, Sand Lake Elementary*

### Rock Springs Elementary, Apopka; Karyn Densberger

Students learned about the importance of planting native species, how and what a plant needs to grow, how ladybugs naturally provide an alternative to pesticides, and how bees gather pollen from plants. Thank you so much for enhancing the education of our students!

Rock Springs Elementary

### Sand Lake Elementary, Orlando; Laura Stockwell

This is the second year of our Florida Native Flower Garden. We have had three seedling plantings. The garden is thriving, and the kids love to see what's growing. It has been great to see the cycle of the flowers. Right now, the plants are mostly "dormant" because of the cooler temperatures, lower light, and the garden itself being shady at this time of year. Things start popping in the spring! The entire process has helped reinforce the plant life cycle. It has also helped some students understand that pollinators aren't out to just sting students; they have an important job. Love the program as always. The students are very proud of their flower garden.

### Sheridan Hills Elementary, Hollywood; Wade-Ann Morrison

The students were hands-on in the preparation of the garden bed and the planting. They had a great time planting and gave me reports on how the flowers were growing at each garden club meeting. The would check in on the flowers when they went to recess. We were able to have discussions about pollinators and their importance. Students often think of flowers such as roses, daisies and tulips. However, it was nice to show them flowers native to Florida and discuss how they are more suited to our environment. Overall, it was very enjoyable and exciting for the students. Thank you for this program! The students loved it!

### Southside Elementary, Sarasota; Amanda Daughtry

Twenty students planted; more than 200 were part of the watering, observing and maintenance schedule; and 700 were able to enjoy the garden. The garden served as a valuable hands-on learning space for teaching students about native plants and environmental education. By planting species native to the region, students were able to observe firsthand how these plants support local ecosystems, including pollinators like butterflies and bees. Lessons focused on how native plants require less water, are more resistant to pests, and help maintain biodiversity. Additionally, the garden was used to demonstrate the role of vegetation in preventing erosion. Students learned how plant roots stabilize the soil, reducing runoff and helping to maintain the integrity of the landscape during heavy rains. This practical experience reinforced classroom instruction about sustainable practices and environmental stewardship.

> *Students learned how plant roots stabilize the soil, reducing runoff and helping to maintain the integrity of the landscape during heavy rains.*
>
> *— Amanda Daughtry, Southside Elementary*

### St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic School, Naples; Megan Van Wart

The students prepared the site and planted the seedlings. They had a wonderful time doing so. We planted them across three different plots. One of our plots is doing amazing. Thanks so much for this opportunity!

### St. Paul Catholic School, Pensacola; Brittany Franzo

All plants are thriving. I was surprised to see how quickly they all bloomed. Tropical sage and Leavenworth's tickseed seemed to be the quickest and most productive. We started off this project by installing our garden beds; then our 7th grade students filled the beds with native soil, and planted, watered and labeled the plants. We periodically checked on the beds to weed them and monitor the plants' growth. We were pleasantly surprised to see how fast the plants were growing and how productive the flowers were. We completed a bioblitz and witnessed so many butterflies and other pollinators. Students also created infographics during project-based learning and will be voting on their favorites to display. Students taught our 1st graders about these plants and helped to weed the beds together. Our garden was extremely successful and inspired us.

Storybrooke Academy

### Storybrooke Academy, Fort Pierce; Dixie Solano

This gardening project involved students in various stages of garden preparation. They actively participated in building a ground stone garden bed, removing weeds, and amending the soil by mixing new bagged dirt with the existing soil. While the initial expectations were for an abundant array of flowers, the tropical storm and hurricanes presented a challenge, causing some damage to the plants. Fortunately, many of the plants were able to recover, since they are native. The overall outcome was still considered successful as most of the plants recovered. Our experience highlights the unpredictable nature of gardening and the importance of being prepared for unexpected challenges. It was a great learning experience.

### Twin Rivers Montessori Academy, Oviedo; Belinda Padilla

We learned about types of soil, water needs and plant growth under different conditions. We also talked about native plants versus non-native plants.

### Web of Wisdom School, Holiday; Anna Gourley

Web of Wisdom School

Students participated in preparing the raised bed by removing all old soil and placing new soil in the bed. The 5th grade students planted the seedlings and all the other classes participated in tending and watering the plants weekly. The garden did better than expected, even surviving the hurricanes. Our art class has painted the raised bed and will be painting signage during the year. Students were invited to examine the leaf structures, comparing them to other plants in the environment. They learned about how to harvest seeds and preserve for future use. Once again, we have a beautiful wildflower garden that is producing seeds that we harvest and will share with all the students. The students are responsible for collecting seeds and placing them in small packages, which will be passed out to the families at the end of the year for their home wildflower gardens.

## Program Coordinator Comments

This was our second year partnering with Native Butterfly Flowers Nursery as the seedling supplier. Although they do not typically ship plants, they have adapted their process to support this program. They have been fantastic partners, and we are deeply grateful for the extra time and care they devote to ensuring students have meaningful, hands-on experiences with Florida's native wildflowers. This program would not be the same without their dedication.


## Acknowledgments

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