

# Planting a Butterfly Garden at Wilson Elementary

BY HEATHER RAWLINGS, ALPENA NFWCO

The Alpena National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (NFWCO) partnered with Wilson Elementary School second and sixth graders on October 10 to plant a 20 x 40 ft. butterfly garden on their playground. This was the first of what we hope are many projects with this school to encourage unstructured play of the elementary school students. This opportunity allowed children to learn how to properly plant native plants. Fourteen different types of wildflowers and grasses were purchased from Wildtype Nurseries in Mason, Michigan, and all plants were native to Michigan. Plants were chosen for their hardiness in a sunny environment, height, color and attractiveness to insects and birds. Biologists Andrea Ania and Heather Rawlings chose the plants and organized the project. The funds to purchase the plants, topsoil, mulch and some hand tools required to complete the project were provided by the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.



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Second graders from Wilson Elementary School in Alpena, Michigan, plant a butterfly garden on their school grounds in cooperation with the Alpena National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office.

parents used their tractor with a small backhoe to remove the sod from the garden area, and the kids finished the sod removal manually with shovels. On the morning of Friday, Oct. 10, biologist Andrea Ania and Rawlings were on-site with several strong sixth graders to direct the delivery of topsoil and mulch furnished by contractor Sharboneau and Sons. The trucks were able to back right up to the garden to dump the soil, but 30 yards of soil had to be manually spread throughout the garden. The second grade class with teacher Mrs. Lisa Syma planted the garden in the afternoon. Once the plants were in the ground, mulch was carefully spread throughout the garden to cut down on weeds and to retain more water for the plants during precipitation events.



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This second grader is intent on planting her flowers in the butterfly garden at Wilson Elementary School.

The butterfly garden was planted adjacent to the playground, so the entire school can play in it, watch it grow, and observe fauna that come to use the garden. The tallest plants and grasses were planted in the back (big bluestem, switch grass and giant sunflower) and can reach 6-7 ft. tall. All of the classes (kindergarten through six) will use this site as a part of their school curriculum, but the second grade will have specific assignments involving the garden and will maintain it. Each year the Alpena NFWCO would like to add another component to this playground to eventually create a natural area on Wilson School's property to allow nature to be more tangible to the kids, and to encourage imagination, unstructured play and a relationship with nature that the children may not be receiving at home. The Alpena NFWCO has "adopted" this second grade class and is making an effort to be in the classroom once a month to assist the



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**Students fill buckets with mulch which will be carefully placed around flowers in the new butterfly garden.**

teacher by incorporating more experiences in nature with the children. Sixty-five elementary school students assisted in the construction and planting of the butterfly garden, and the entire school will eventually benefit from these efforts.



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**Second graders from Wilson Elementary School proudly pose in front of their new butterfly garden, created with the assistance of staff from the Alpena National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office.**

For further info about the Alpena NFWCO: <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/alpena/index.htm>