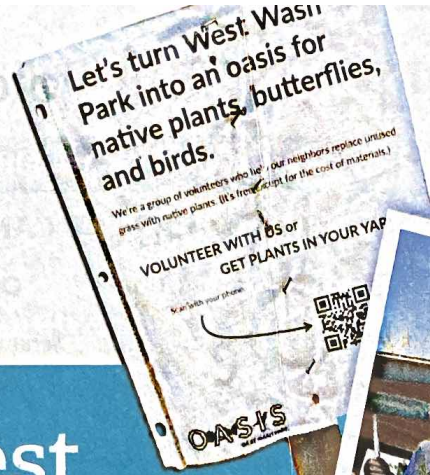


BY AVI STOPPER

Let's Turn West Wash Park Into an Oasis

In May, we launched a volunteer project to help neighbors replace unused grass in West Wash Park with drought-tolerant native plants that attract bees, butterflies, and birds. Since then, we've completed 10 projects and 50 neighbors have volunteered. The project now has a name (Oasis - West Wash Park), a website (PlantAnOasis.org), and most importantly, stickers.



This planting adventure sprouted from a conversation with Deb Lebow (whose writing often graces these pages.) If you've wandered the neighborhood enough, at some point you've run into Deb, presiding over her low-water garden with TLC and dry wit.

Deb's spread is the anti-baroque garden. It's about coexistence with, not dominion over, nature. Jardin du Luxembourg caretakers might scratch their heads – C'est un jardin?! But this ain't Paris, ami; Deb's garden

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den is ideal for Denver and the high plains of the American West. It's an explosion of plants that sip water and produce fireworks of flowers, topography that catches rain, and well-nourished pollinators.

As folks mozy down the sidewalk, a hallway of sunflowers, they often tell Deb: "I'd love to do this to my yard but I don't know how."

That's how I got dragooned into it. One day I was walking by and Deb and I started talking about how we might solve this problem. How could anyone, on practically any budget, with any level of experience, create a garden like this? So we put up some signs around the neighborhood and a few days later had a crew of volunteers.

Powered by bagels and coffee, we completed our first project. With plants in the ground and yet another two-bit sign I made in Powerpoint, planting requests and new volunteers started flowing in.

We're trying to turn West Wash Park into an oasis, but the revelation of this project for me has been the opportunity to meet new people who volunteer, ask to have their yards planted, or wander by and chat with us while we're planting. Just being

outside, in front of a house – rather than driving into the garage, entering through the back door, and rarely setting foot out front – creates opportunities to connect with neighbors.

We've had boisterous conversations: should we listen to Oasis's 1995 anthem "Wonderwall" on repeat while we plant? (Definitely not.) And we've had comical adventures: learning to operate a mini bulldozer; finding free boulders on Craigslist and taking them through the carwash; and ringing a neighbor's doorbell to ask if we can transplant the volunteer catalpas growing in her petunias.

We're learning and improving our methodology as we go. Doing this as a volunteer project in which we're trying to keep costs as low as possible creates limitations that big, professional landscaping operations don't encounter. But project by project, we're developing the knowledge to do this at a substantial scale so someday soon, West Wash Park may truly be an oasis for native plants, pollinators, and birds.

Volunteer at PlantAnOasis.org or sign up to get the royal planting treatment in your yard.