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**Review: A Healthy Nature Handbook; Illustrated Insights for Ecological
Restoration from Volunteer Stewards of Chicago Wilderness**

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Pepper, J. and Parker, D., eds. *A Healthy Nature Handbook: Illustrated Insights for Ecological Restoration from Volunteer Stewards of Chicago Wilderness*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2021. 168 pp. ISBN: 9781642832426, hardcover, US\$20.00.

Imagine what a city park looked like before it was a park. Was it a wetland? Prairie? Grassland? What native flora and fauna frolicked where the drainage pipe now comes out? How about a backyard? Before it was a lawn, before it was a vegetable garden, or before the urban chickens took over, what was there? As cities and suburbs grow and take more land, as once lush forest and grasslands become absorbed into the urban landscape, as animals and native plant populations dwindle, we look for ways to restore the native habitats that are just distant memories. *A Healthy Nature Handbook* is an illustrated guide on how to restore natural areas.

In the style of *Cooks Illustrated*, this text breaks down the recipes for restoration in tested step by step guides that are meant to be repeatable. From growing a volunteer force to backyard native plant propagation, habitat restoration, and sustainability, this text walks through each process in attainable chunks with real examples. These are organized into habitats which also translate into projects. The ending chapter gives processes on how to sustain the transformations.

Natural habitat restoration is not a one-time afternoon gathering of volunteers that magically transforms a place from wasteland to its former glory. The projects described in this text consider the time consuming, gradual nature of plant love. At the beginning we start with quilt making - or the parcel division at Nachusa. By breaking up the land into parcels and working on each parcel over time, the whole area will be covered. The chapter, "Backyard Seed Factory" gives tools to anyone with a backyard or gardening space in order to propagate and grow native plants. This section comes with a

beautifully illustrated glossary of plants the author and volunteers were cultivating while highlighting the power of the individual.

The volunteer and human aspect of conservation and restoration is addressed throughout the book. How to build and keep a community around the projects described, and how to continue to foster that growth. Description of a “humming” lunch table demonstrates how to keep the community mind active and engaged throughout the day (p.10). In the section on growing monitors, we learn how to train volunteers and community conservationists to watch for signs in the wildlife (p. 111). One technique is setting up monitor mentors to learn together. “Assemble a Tribe of Doers” talks about building a culture around the activities that support the project, and how to support the skills for success in that tribe (p. 126).

Another common theme through the projects is information collection. How to keep notes on what soil composition works with what seeds in a very detailed chart is described on page 41. The chapter, “Monitoring Fit for a Steward” discusses multiple techniques for data collection and sharing (pp. 66-90). This chapter makes assessment attainable.

Finally, this book is beautiful. From the Island Press <https://islandpress.org/books/healthy-nature-handbook> ad copy, “Contributions from local artists bring the region’s beauty to life with vibrant watercolors, oil paintings, and sketches.” The end matter contains biographies on the 8 contributing artists that help to illustrate the book from drawing individual plants to conceptual charts, photographs, and the art that separates each section. This level of detail draws the reader in and makes the content come to life.

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