



consumption in the winter by acting as a windbreak.

**Garden plants and trees intercept intense rain, slow rainwater runoff, and reduce the pressure on storm sewers.**

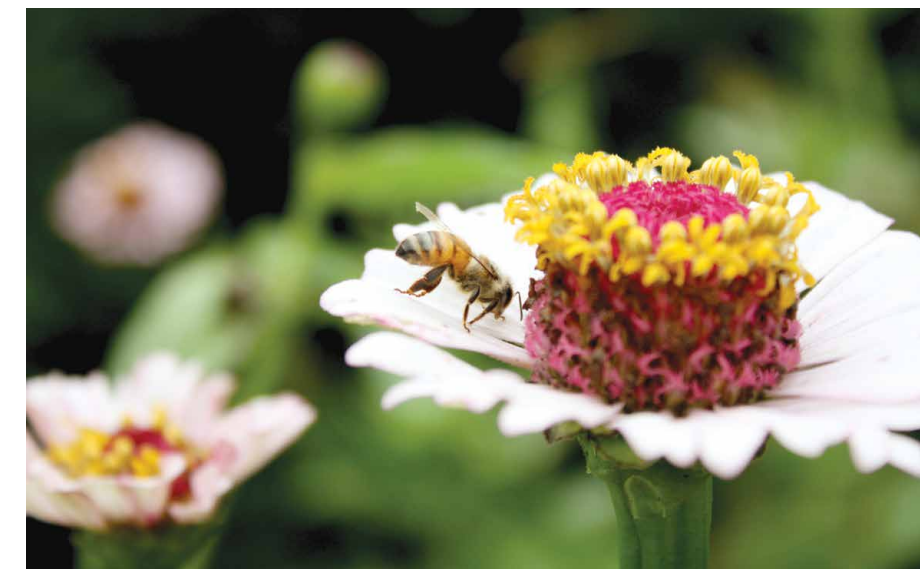
More gardens and less impervious surfaces result in less rainwater runoff—a condition that’s certainly on many minds after recent flooding in Madison.

**Gardens and plants provide urban biodiversity.**

We see this at Olbrich Botanical Gardens every day. We’re home to a wide variety of resident and migratory birds; turkeys, hawks, and owls are common sightings; and a variety of wildlife, from foxes to minks, also reside at Olbrich. According to the RHS article, even small urban gardens promote wildlife biodiversity regardless of their isolation from rural areas.

**Gardens support human health.**

The activity of gardening eases stress and improves psychological well-being, and nearly everyone can garden in some way, whether they tend a large manicured garden, a small urban garden, container gardens on a deck or patio, or simply a pot of herbs by the kitchen sink. Olbrich’s outdoor garden and conservatory volunteer crews are great examples of this! Additionally,



many garden visitors describe the healing power of simply being in a well-designed landscape, such as Olbrich’s many outdoor gardens and tropical Bolz Conservatory.

The RHS goes on to suggest that more study is needed to determine the value of gardens—both public gardens and home gardens—as carbon sinks that counter the effects of humans’ carbon footprints. How much carbon is offset by gardens? How much carbon is emitted by gardens? Additionally, the RHS points out that water will be essential to maintain healthy plants and gardens in future urban environments, especially as many urban areas are experiencing the effects of climate change. Although

Madison seems to be getting more rain in recent years, we have had summers in the past 10 years with mild drought conditions.

What’s known for sure is that we can all do our part to add more gardens and greenspaces to our areas, from urban to suburban to rural spaces. Plant some milkweed, install a rain garden, organize a group to beautify your neighborhood greenspace—the sky’s the limit! Visit other urban gardens to see the ways they’re impacting their environment.

We’re making new changes to better the gardens of the Olbrich urban oasis this year too. You’ll see some new plantings in the outdoor gardens and more alterations in the Bolz Conservatory, so stay tuned!

# VALUE OF Urban Gardens

BY ROBERTA SLADKY

In early January, looking to refresh my workspace for the new year, I was cleaning out files and came across an article I had printed from the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), a United Kingdom organization. The RHS advocates for gardens, manages gardens, publishes gardening information, and is a driving force in the conservation and gardening community of Great Britain. This article answered two questions: what is the value of gardens in urban areas and do gardens sustain our cities?

The answers, according to the RHS, are surprisingly simple and straightforward. It’s clear that they also apply to

both the mission of Olbrich Botanical Gardens and the values that our community places in this urban garden and the garden spaces they cultivate as their own.

**Gardens and plantings help moderate the temperature of cities.**

In Madison and other cities where summer temperatures can get high, the impervious surfaces such as roads, parking lots, and buildings, retain heat. Vegetation—primarily trees and vines—can shade buildings if oriented correctly. Additionally, strategically placing hedges, shrubs, trees, and other plants around buildings can help reduce energy



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Photographs provided by Olbrich Botanical Gardens.

