Title- **VISTA Gardens Gets a Grant!**

VISTA Gardens is delighted to announce that it is the recipient of a grant award from the *2021–22 Viva Florida Landscape Demonstration Garden Grant Program,* sponsored by the Florida Wildflower Foundation.

The location VISTA Gardens has chosen as the site for our Florida Wildflower Demonstration Grant Project is the earthen berm that extends from the entrance to VISTA Gardens toward the east along the garden’s northern border. The plantings will begin at the entrance gate to VISTA Gardens, surround the existing pergola, benches and Little Free Library, and extend 138 feet along the crest of the berm, ending among tall pines. This expansion of VISTA's existing wildflower plantings will support bees, butterflies and other insects while enhancing our vegetable garden beds and the overall health of our natural environment.

VISTA Gardens' mission emphasizes our focus on providing education and serving as a sustainable model for organic gardening, native landscaping, and related technologies while providing opportunities to participate in healthy outdoor activities, responsible environmental leadership, growing organic food, and community building. Our vision with this grant project is for VISTA Gardens to be the Native Plants Ambassador to our members, neighbors, and the general

public by providing quality information about native plants and their importance to wildlife including butterflies, native bees and other pollinators, hummingbirds and other birds, and other wildlife. As Ambassadors we will teach people about non-native and invasive species and encourage the use of species that will attract desirable pollinators and wildlife into their rural, suburban, and urban neighborhoods. In doing so, we will be helping our communities learn about wise land management policies including those that support water quality and retain natural flow rates in our streams. We will include teachings about appropriate uses of

fertilizers and minimizing fertilizer and pesticide practices that are detrimental to wildlife, pollinators, fish, and human health. We plan on presenting at least two education events each year, and hopefully more if the budget allows.

We are focused on including ALL members of the community in our wildflowers and native plants education programming, and not limiting this to our VISTA members. We believe the physical location of the plantings we achieve through this grant will “lure” you, our community, in and help you see how wildflowers and native plants can enhance and beautify your neighborhoods and your environment.

We invite you to visit VISTA Gardens’ website page about our current Florida native plantings. There are many photos and lots of downloadable information about many of our plants. (https://www.vistagardentampa.org/nativeplantsinformationsheets)

As we develop this Florida wildflower garden along the berm, we'll be sharing our best practices of clearing the site and readying it for planting. Once the site is prepared, we will continue to document the best practices for placing the plants in the ground, and the care they need to become established and thrive. All of this will then be combined in a “how to” document for anyone to access at the site itself and/or to download from our website. As we do now with our butterfly and native plant gardens at VISTA, we'll be installing plant identification tools showing what each plant looks like, its common name, and its scientific name. Information about plants will be available through QR codes. Laminated pages describing the plants and their benefits will also be placed at the wildflower sites. In addition, informational documents from the Florida Wildflower Foundation and other reputable sources about the best practices for planting, watering, and pest management of our Florida native plants, plus information about each plant will be available for anyone to access at the site and/or to download from our website.

We welcome your involvement, as a community volunteer to help establish this new garden, as a member of VISTA to grow vegetables, fruits, and flowers, or as a donor to help us pay for the infrastructure costs this grant does not include. We will happily receive your donations (real and in kind) toward this wildflower demonstration project to fund the hardscape, irrigation system, and signage. (VISTA is a 501(c)(3) not for profit organization.) Feel free to contact us through our website, vistagardentampa.org. We’d be delighted to hear from you!

*“Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds that you plant.”* *Robert Louis Stevenson*

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