

Pollinators

With summertime in full swing, gardens growing, flowers blooming, fruit trees showing promise and crops developing, the FLC Creation Care Committee felt that this would be a good time to discuss pollinators. As you likely know, pollinators include bees, birds, butterflies, bats, beetles, flies and a host of other animals that carry pollen from one plant to another. Did you know that these industrious workers help pollinate the vast majority of flowering plants and crops? Their role is critical in the production of most fruits, vegetables and necessary for flower reproduction. According to the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), the annual value of pollination of crops by native and domesticated bees alone approaches \$23 billion!

Despite their tremendous importance, pollinators of all kinds are in peril. Plummeting populations are largely occurring as a result of habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation. Human activities that replace native vegetation such as expanding roadways and paved surfaces, buildings, manicured lawns and monoculture crop-fields account for much of that habitat loss. Improper and frequently widespread use of pesticides is known to negatively impact pollinators.

The good news is that we have the ability to correct many of our activities that contribute to pollinator loss. For instance, have you considered replacing some of that sterile manicured lawn with a pollinator garden full of native plants that bloom throughout the growing season? This could become a beautiful, sustainable and thoroughly enjoyable family related activity. Nesting and nurturing sites on your property can be established by studying the needs of various species (Monarch butterflies and milkweed plants). Please consider avoiding or significantly limiting pesticide use. There are a variety of chemical free alternatives to limit the effects of plant pests.

So, how can one get started on this mission to help our invaluable pollinators? There are an abundance of websites dedicated to pollinators including the US Fisheries and Wildlife Service, the MN BWSR and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. A newly established program by the MN BWSR called "Lawns to Legumes" can help provide funding to individuals as well as communities to establish pollinator habitat. Our local Becker County Soil Water Conservation District has a robust native plant program that not only provides plants, but also can provide assistance for establishing native habitat. The Becker County master gardeners are also excellent resources for plants and planting suggestions. I'm sure that a little homework will uncover a variety of other resources that can help. The FLC Creation Care Committee can also provide native plant and flower lists as well as listings of native plant nurseries in our region.

So, what are we waiting for? Let's step forward and help our precious pollinators. Remember that by taking this action, we will also be taking steps to ensure our own survival and that of a host of fellow inhabitants.

Thank you! FLC Creation Care Committee
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