

## Willington Joins the Pollinator Pathway!

The Pollinator Pathway project is organized by volunteers from town conservation organizations working together to establish pollinator-friendly habitat and food sources for bees, butterflies, hummingbirds and other pollinating insects and wildlife along a series of continuous corridors. Most native bees have a range of about 750 meters, so the goal is to connect properties that are no farther apart than that. This project began in 2017 in Wilton, CT. Since then, pathways have been established in over 200 towns in CT, NY, MA, NJ, PA, and the list keeps growing.

The Willington Conservation Commission, working with Willington Girl Scout Troop 67079, came up with a plan to plant three key pollinator gardens in town to get Willington on the Pollinator Pathway. These gardens were planted at Fenton-Ruby Park & Wildlife Preserve, Center Elementary School, and Hall Middle School. The next step in the plan is to get members of the community to join the Pollinator Pathway by planting their own pollinator gardens and adopting pollinator friendly practices in their property. In fact, Troop 67079 has already helped two Willington homeowners join the Pollinator Pathway by planning and planting pollinator gardens on their properties!



### **Pollinators and why they are important**

A pollinator is anything that helps carry pollen from one plant to another. Pollen must move from the male part of a flower (the stamen) to the female part of the same or another flower (the stigma). Pollination must occur for plants to produce fruits, seeds and young plants. Pollination can occur when pollen is carried by wind or water, but most plants are pollinated by insects and animals including butterflies, bees, birds and bats.

Why are pollinators important? At least 75% of the flowering plants on earth are pollinated by insects and animals! This means that 1,200 food crops and 180,000 different types of plants rely on pollinators! Pollinators are necessary for our own food supply, but also support the food and habitat of animals. The plants pollinated by our native pollinators help stabilize our soils, clean our air, supply oxygen and support wildlife.

### **Risks to native pollinators**

Pollinators are in trouble across the world. Habitat loss, pesticides, parasites and diseases, non-native species and climate change are all threats to native pollinators.

### **Ways you can help pollinators**

While there are many ways to help our native pollinators, planting native plants on your property is the easiest! **Native plants support native pollinators.** Native plants support local ecosystems better than introduced species, primarily by supporting food webs far better than non-natives. Wildlife evolved alongside the native plants in your region and use those natives as food, shelter, and a place to raise their young. As a result, nearly every living creature on the planet relies on native plants for survival. They are the foundation of local food webs, giving butterflies, birds, and other wildlife what they need to survive. Native plants have tight relationships with wildlife, formed over many thousands of years, providing natural sources of food, cover and places to raise young. Without healthy native plant communities, wildlife cannot survive. Every native plant counts!

Other ways to help pollinators including doing away with harmful Neonicotinoid pesticides and synthetic fertilizers, providing water sources for pollinators, leaving leaf litter in your yard over the winter to provide habitat and protection for insects and caterpillars, and rethinking your idea of a "lawn" and replacing it with more eco-friendly native options.

## Pollinator gardens in Willington

The first pollinator gardens were planned for community spaces and the obvious choices were Fenton-Ruby Park & Wildlife Preserve, and the town schools – Hall Memorial School and Center Elementary School. These gardens are made up of native plants, both perennials and annuals. Plants used include: Columbine, Coneflower, Butterfly Weed, Culvers Root, Yarrow, Joe Pye Weed, Boneset, Bee Balm, Clethra (Pepperbush), Verbena, Cardinalis, Goldstrum, Quinine and Boltonia.



*Fenton-Ruby Park Garden*



*Center School Garden*



*Hall Memorial School Garden*



*Homeowner Gardens being planted by Troop 67079*

## Other Helpful Links:

Pollinator Pathway Organization <https://www.pollinator-pathway.org/>

CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection <https://portal.ct.gov/deep/wildlife/learn-about-wildlife/pollinators-in-Connecticut>