

Nature Newsflash – March 25, 2024

Pollinators

“Be a friend to pollinators.” That is what the sign at the pollinator garden by Como Conservatory says. Pollinators numbers are plummeting at an alarming rate. As covered February 26th in Nature Newsflash, Minnesota’s own rusty patched bumble bee and the Dakota skipper butterfly have diminished to the point of being listed as federally endangered. Pollinators are important. They are needed for crops including apples, blueberries, sunflowers, canola, and more. The USDA tells us that of the 1,400 crops grown around the world for all of our food and plant-based industrial products, almost 80% require pollination.

The Minnesota Department of Resources tells us that habitat loss, pesticides, diseases, and climate change are responsible for the loss of pollinators. That’s where we, the residents of Falcon Heights, come in. We can nourish pollinators in whatever piece of land or apartment balcony we tend. First on the agenda is to plant a variety of things, including Minnesota native flowers, grasses, trees and shrubs. Native plants attract the most beneficial insects. Plant nectar-rich flowers for adult butterflies and bees, and host plants for butterfly larva. Plant an aspen tree and watch for the tiger swallow tail, or milkweed and look for the beloved monarch. Trees and fruiting shrubs offer shelter, huge bouquets of flowers, and a banquet of berries.

Most insects are beneficial. According to the USDA, less than 1% are considered harmful. So go easy on the use of pesticides and herbicides. Let’s not wipe out a slew of beneficial insects in the attempt to kill one that we dislike. Also, don’t over tidy your garden. Loose brush and leaf litter provide cover for pollinators. Keeping all or part of a dead tree (the parts that are safe to keep) will house still more.

The City of Falcon Heights encourages “diverse landscaping, particularly that which restores native vegetation. Native vegetation requires fewer inputs of water, fertilizers, and herbicides. It also supports pollinators and birds.” The city understands that planting and maintaining such landscaping promotes “resiliency, diversity, and a richness to the quality of life.” These are apt words, reminding us that it is worthwhile to be a friend to pollinators. Fill your yard with plants of all sorts and life will flourish, providing you with countless moments of joy.

Resources for friends of pollinators:

The University Extension has information on creating a butterfly garden:
<https://extension.umn.edu/landscape-design/creating-butterfly-garden>

University of Minnesota Bee Lab: www.beelab.umn.edu

Pollinator Partnership Gardening Resources: www.pollinator.org/gardens.htm

Learn more and find grants from The Minnesota Board of Soil and Water Resources at Lawns to Legumes: Your Yard Can Bee the Change: <https://bwsr.state.mn.us/121>.

Capitol Region Watershed District, which covers most of Falcon Heights, has a Stewardship Grant Program to promote water quality improvement.

Rice Creek Watershed District, which covers a smaller area of our city, offers a Mini-Grants Program to promote native plants and other projects.

Submitted by Amy Christiansen, resident of Falcon Heights and member of the Environment Commission

Is there something you want to see in the Nature Newsflash, or are you an expert and want to be included in future articles? Send your ideas over to Hannah Lynch, Community Development Coordinator, at hannah.b.lynch@falconheights.org.