

Who are Pollinators and Why are they important?



If you walked through Brightwood Park this spring, you may have seen some areas blocked off with caution tape. The tape is to protect pollinator gardens we planted this spring.

So, what is a pollinator garden? It is a garden of flowering plants that attracts pollinators. Pollinators are animals, such as bees, butterflies, flies, moths, hummingbirds, bats, and others, that spread pollen from one plant to another.

Pollen is a yellow powdery substance that flowers produce that needs to be spread to other flowers to create fruit and seeds. A plant is pollinated when pollen spreads from one flower to another. Pollinators play a major role in getting that pollen from one flower to another. For example, bees collect nectar and pollen from flowers for food. They carry pollen on their legs. As they move among the flowers, they spread pollen from one flower to another. Any plant with seeds or cones needs to be pollinated. Pollinators are a crucial part of the pollination process.

Pollination of plants is critical for survival of all living things! The food we eat is dependent on pollination. Our environment also needs plants that are produced as a result of pollination. For example, plants produce oxygen and remove carbon dioxide from the air. They also improve water quality by holding soil in place with their root systems. Their leaves capture rain water and allow moisture to remain in the air.



There has been a decline in pollinator populations throughout the world due to a number of factors:

1. **Habitat loss:** Pollinators need a place to live and eat, i.e. natural vegetation and unimproved land;
2. **Non-Native Species:** Native pollinators have evolved alongside native plants. Their bodies are designed to feed off specific plant structures. They are not equipped to feed off non-native plants. When non-native plants out-compete and push out native plants, it leaves native pollinators without food sources. When non-native insects are added to the mix, they may compete with native insects for food.
3. **Pesticides:** Pesticides can directly kill pollinators, poison their food supply, kill plants they need to survive.

4. **Climate Change:** Due to changing climate patterns, pollinators and plants may not be in synch with one another.
5. **Parasites and Disease.**

You can find more information on pollinators at the National Park Service website:
<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/pollinators/index.htm>

In the park, we planted zinnia, cosmos, Indian blanket, and partridge pea seeds along with some milkweed, ragwort and other native flowering species. If all goes well, the flowers will hopefully bloom in mid-July. Next year, we will hope to expand our gardens.

You can help pollinators, too! Plant a pollinator garden in your own yard or volunteer to plant pollinator gardens in Brightwood Park!