



# The Vermont Pollinator Challenge

It's estimated that 70% of the crops we grow depend on pollinators – the bees and other creatures whose help we need to be able to produce many of the foods we eat. Unfortunately, both honeybees and many species of native bees are in trouble. Populations of both are in sharp decline due to pesticide use, disease and parasite problems, and loss of food and nesting habitat. Many honeybee colonies have been lost to colony collapse disorder, a devastating problem whose cause is not fully understood. This is why it's so important to learn about and do all we can to protect all kinds of pollinators. Plants need pollinators – and we need plants!

KidsGardening.org, the Intervale Center (IC), the Vermont Community Garden Network (VCGN), and other non- and for- profit partners are collaborating to raise awareness of the importance of pollinators and create more pollinator and beneficial insect habitat across Vermont.

KidsGardening.org is one of the founding conservation and gardening organizations of the National Pollinator Garden Network, an initiative of the Obama Administration, which launched a nationwide campaign called the Million Pollinator Garden Challenge (MPGC) in 2015. Designed to spur the creation and preservation of pollinator habitats across North America, the Challenge is a call to action to help reverse the decline of pollinators such as honey bees, native bees, and hummingbirds, as well as monarch butterflies. KidsGardening.org helps educate young gardeners about the vital role of pollinators and the importance of protecting and nurturing them through its educational materials, activities, curriculum, events, and outreach.

The IC and VCGN already manage and support many pollinator gardens in the state. In addition to native perennial gardens at their homestead, the IC manages hedgerows and forests in the Burlington Intervale in support of pollinator habitat and hosts two acres of pollinator sanctuary in partnership with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The IC's Conservation Nursery plants 20,000+ native trees each year, largely on farms, creating diverse habitat for the insects that are a critical component of our food web. VCGN works with hundreds of community-based gardens all over the state. These vibrant food production and community-building sites create habitat for – and benefit from – a wide variety of pollinators. Many of these sites have dedicated pollinator-friendly plantings and/or wild areas. Additionally, VCGN's Community Teaching Gardens in Burlington include pollinator and beneficial insect plantings.

## Goal:

Our goal is to increase public awareness in Vermont of the benefit of pollinator- and beneficial insect-friendly habitats and to encourage the creation and preservation of wild pollinator habitat in the state. We also want to educate Vermonters of all ages about the vital role that pollinators play in our food systems and environment and show them the diversity of ways in which they can be involved in pollinator conservation. By working together, Vermont's public and private sectors can make a positive difference for a wide variety of pollinators and beneficial insects.



## Objectives:

- Increase public understanding of the importance of pollinators to our food systems and planet, the factors that have led to their decline, and how every pollinator garden - no matter how small - can make a difference.
- Engage homeowners, businesses, schools, and community gardens to create permanent wild spaces to provide pollinator-friendly habitat.
- Create a pollinator educational area at the IC that could be used for school field trips as well as for educational opportunities during IC events such as Summervale.
- Engage and collaborate with other key Vermont environmental organizations, pollinator experts, and the University of Vermont. Many groups are already working on pollinator protection, including the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, Farm2School, Vermont Center for Ecostudies, Audubon Vermont, and National Wildlife Federation.
- In Phase 2, make an educational program available to Vermont schools targeted to third-graders on pollinator protection and advocacy, including lesson plans, activities, etc.

## 2016 Phase I: Key Program Components

### Launch in Chittenden County:

- **Form Pollinator Working Group (August 2016)** - Engage other key stakeholders in a discussion about a statewide Pollinator Initiative, including organizations mentioned above, Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility, state chambers of commerce, and USDA Rural Development. We will also engage key pollinator science experts to ensure that recommended actions are best practices to help pollinator populations.
- **Launch Program (September 2016)** – Encourage businesses, homeowners, and schools in Chittenden County to create or preserve uncultivated pollinator habitats that are left wild, organic, and weedy. Also encourage the creation of landscape and/or container plantings with plants selected to benefit pollinators, with an emphasis on native plants, and the adoption of pollinator-friendly garden practices. To demonstrate program participation, we will provide Wild for Pollinators signage free of charge for up to 100 schools and non-profits and for a nominal fee to for-profit businesses.
- **Intervale Center Pollinator and Wild Space Garden** – The collaborators installed a pollinator garden and wild space garden with appropriate educational signage in July 2016. The signs target both youth and adult audiences. Eventually, the group wants to create a wayfinding system for a walking informational tour of all of the pollinator areas at the Intervale.
- **Collaborate to reach businesses and schools** – In addition to its community gardens, VCGN has a workplace garden program and can begin to educate businesses on creating pollinator-friendly habitats on business properties. VCGN and KG.org will engage with Farm2School and schools across the state to encourage similar habitat creation on school properties. KG.org will provide appropriate educational materials and activities and co-table at Summervale 2016 as well as at VCGN at the fall Grow It community and school garden leader workshops.

To learn more about “Wild for Pollinators”, contact Maree Gaetani at [mareeg@kidsgardening.org](mailto:mareeg@kidsgardening.org)

