Supporting Pollinators in the Landscape (We Need Them!)

Bumblebees buzzing and scrolling the air … butterflies and moths fluttering about … birdsong … The sounds and motions of pollinators feed our senses and connect us to the seasons, and their work supports life on earth. Pollinators include **bees, wasps, butterflies, moths, beetles, flies, birds** and **bats.** As pollinators move through the landscape foraging on flowering plants, they transfer pollen, which results in the reproduction of these plants. Pollinators fertilize a third of our food supply and 90% of flowering plants, and are a key food source for birds and wildlife. They are critical to a healthy, diverse ecosystem, yet many pollinator populations are in alarming decline today. We can all support pollinators in our yards by providing pesticide-free habitat and forage. Every patch of land counts!

LEFT: A pollinator garden at Canillas Community Garden makes a wonderful outdoor classroom. RIGHT: Bumblebees and a Black Swallowtail butterfly foraging on *Echinacea purpurea* at Canillas. Canillas is managed organically, without pesticides or chemical fertilizers, in part to support biodiversity, pollinators, and soil health. Healthy, fertile soils, in turn, enhance the natural suppression of pests.

What can we do to help pollinators?

- **Support native bees by planting native flowers.** Bumblebees and many other native bee species (nearly 200 native bee species in NH) are a "hidden treasure" in their vast contribution to pollination, yet the populations of native bees and butterflies are in decline. Pollinators derive their nutritional needs and food for their young from the nectar and pollen of flowers. Native wildflowers are the best source of nectar and pollen for pollinators. Planting flowers with overlapping bloom times will support pollinators from spring to fall. Large, drifting patches of plants (8 or more of each species) support efficient foraging. Keep in mind that some cultivated flowers, such as modern hybrids, offer little pollen and nectar for pollinators, and many pollinators avoid new varieties and exotics.

- **Choose *untreated, organic* seed and plant sources.** Pesticides harm pollinators. Some seeds and nursery plants today, such as those sold at some large garden centers, are treated with neonicotinoid pesticides that enter plants systemically and end up in the pollen and nectar. This is a challenging irony for those who want to help the bees with flowers, but are unknowingly planting plants and seeds that may be doing the bees harm. The organic (and sometimes non-GMO) label offers assurance that the plants/seeds haven't been treated with pesticides. If you're not sure if a plant has been treated, ask! For more information on Northeast native species and supporting pollinators, visit Northeast Native Plants.

- **Support butterflies.** Some butterfly species need a specific type of plant for their young, such as milkweed for monarchs. Today, excessive herbicide use is contributing to the demise of milkweed, and monarch populations are suffering as a result. We can help by planting milkweed and forgoing pesticides.

Pollinators and plants have co-evolved.
Pollinators receive pollen and nectar from flowers, and
transfer pollen to other plants, resulting in fertilization,
seed formation, and the next generation of plants.
The seeds and fruits from these plants, and the pollinators themselves,
feed birds and animals — all part of a complex web of life.
We need the pollinators!

- **Enjoy chemical-free landscaping.** Pesticides harm pollinators, and are not needed to maintain a healthy, beautiful yard and garden. Herbicides remove flowers that pollinators depend on. Save money and time, and forgo the chemicals!

- **Create a healthy lawn that supports ecological balance.** Today many people are forgoing large lawns to allow flowering weeds to grow. Consider leaving areas of your lawn uncut, and letting the
wildflowers bloom! We don't need to use chemicals to have healthier, more attractive lawns, parks, and fields.

- **Embrace weeds! Many people find that a lawn consisting of a variety of grass and broadleaf species is quite attractive — and the diversity is much healthier!** The clovers, dandelions, ground ivy, violets, hawkweeds, goldenrods, and asters are among the historical (if not native) plants of our region. Clover and dandelions supply sustenance to endangered monarch butterflies until milkweed blooms later in the season. And what is a weed, anyway? "A wild plant growing where it is not wanted and in competition with cultivated plants." That formerly unwanted weed could become an appreciated wildflower offering nectar and pollen for bees and beauty, color and form in the landscape.

- **Design your yard with the elements pollinators need.** Piles of branches, stones, hay and brush, logs and stumps, coverings of leaves, bunchgrasses, bare mud patches, natural debris — all these provide shelter and spots for bees to raise their young.

- **Create and support pollinator gardens in your community.** Do you know a spot in town where a pollinator garden could be planted? Plant a garden and observe the bees foraging and pollinating