



## Ashford Pollinator Pathway News

By Jennifer Sterling-Folker, July 2023

Greetings Ashford! Let's talk BUGS! Most people dislike bugs and sure, many of them can be hard to love, especially the kind that bite &/or carry diseases. But most insects don't bother humans, are not disease vectors, & they are incredibly important to our environment. Besides pollinating flowering plants and crops, which makes them essential to our food supply, insects also provide a number of other ecofriendly



services for free. For example, they help decompose organic matter & recycle nutrient. No one wants termites in their home, but in your back yard they are breaking down woody materials that would otherwise quickly overwhelm it & the surrounding forest. Similarly, pill bugs and other insects under leaf litter are feeding on decaying organic matter which helps recycle nutrients back into the soil, making it possible to grow crops and plants in the first place.

Many insects also act as free, natural pest controllers. The spider on your deck or ceiling corner might give you the creeps, but it's also catching a lot of other insects for you. Similarly, ladybugs and parasitic wasps cannot sting you & are helping control pests in your garden organically. Other insects are responsible for dispersing seeds or helping particular plants thrive. Don't brush ants off your peonies as they help peony buds open by feeding on the plant's secretions. Finally, insects are a food source for birds & other animals, playing a crucial role in the food chain and maintaining ecological balance. Without insects there would be no birds, who also play a role in pollination and seed dispersal.

So even if they aren't very loveable, we need insects & they serve as an indicator of environmental health. Their dramatic decline in recent years has serious consequences for our gardens, food sources, & eco-systems. According to some estimates more than 40% of insect species are declining globally, with a third endangered.



Email us ([AshfordPollinatorPathways@gmail.com](mailto:AshfordPollinatorPathways@gmail.com)) to be added to our Newsletter distribution list, if you have questions, want site/plant advice, for a list of local nurseries with native plants or to visit a native plant garden. Also let us know if you register your land with Pollinator Pathways so we can give you a free medallion (courtesy of the Ashford Conservation Commission). And a big THANK YOU (!) to all who stopped by our table at the Ashford Arts Council Event at Westford Hill Distillers in June (event photos will be in the next Citizen issue).

## Insect Friendly Practices

- 1. Preserve or restore natural habitats** by creating insect-friendly spaces in your own garden or land with native plants that insects need to survive.
- 2. Minimize pesticide use** by opting for organic, environmentally-friendly alternatives. If pesticide use is necessary, follow instructions carefully & target specific pests rather than blanket applications.
- 3. Support organic, sustainable agriculture** by supporting local environmentally-friendly farmers who adopt techniques that promote insect diversity & minimize ecosystem disruptions.
- 4. Reduce light pollution** for the sake of nocturnal insects (like fireflies whose numbers have dropped dramatically) by using energy-efficient outdoor lighting, directing lights downward, & turning off unnecessary lights.
- 5. Contribute to scientific research** by participating in citizen science projects focused on insects (like "Bugs in Our Backyard," "Bioblitz," or "Firefly Watch") which collect data on insect populations, distribution, & behavior to help scientists better understand how to protect them.

- 6. Join Pollinator Pathway** by registering your property as eco-friendly. The national sign-up link is: <https://www.pollinator-pathway.org/join-us>

Even small, individual actions can help make a significant difference in protecting insect populations & our ecosystem