



Ashford Pollinator Pathway News

By Jennifer Sterling-Folker, May 2022

Greetings Ashford! The push to include native plants in gardening leads to some obvious questions such as, what exactly is a native plant? Why are they so important? Where can I get them? According to the USDA, **native plants** are “part of the balance of nature that has developed over hundreds or thousands of years in a particular region or ecosystem.” Only plants found in this country before European settlement are considered to be native to the US.

Many plants available in gardening nurseries, on the other hand, are **cultivars**, bred to enhance the appearance and longevity of either native plants (called **nativars**, which do not retain the plant’s original characteristics) or **non-native plants**. Some non-native plants **naturalize**, meaning they reproduce or spread in a new place without continued human help. **Invasive plants** are a small, but troublesome, sub-category of naturalized plants that disrupt ecosystems.

The problem with all these cultivated alternatives is that pollinators evolved along with native plants and cannot easily adapt to non-native or cultivated species. This does not mean that a garden of cultivars & nativars serves no ecological purpose, but many pollinators struggle to collect sufficient nectar/pollen from cultivated varieties and/or need specific native plants for larvae development. The relationship between declining Monarch Butterfly populations and declining Milkweed, as the only food its caterpillar can eat, is just one example of what is happening to many other pollinating species due to land development and habitat destruction. The good news is that simply by adding some native plants to your garden, or letting them grow pesticide-free somewhere on your property, you can help pollinators.

Where can you get native plants? The Ashford Library Seed Bank has free native seed packets, and we are lucky to have **Ashford Garden Center**, a family-owned & operated garden center right here in town. They are celebrating their 20th year and are also an Ashford Pollinator Pathway Partner committed to supporting pollinators. They have a



limited number of native plants, an extensive selection of natural and organic products, and offer a variety of gardening and landscaping needs, all in a casual, outdoor setting. They are located at 330 Ashford Center Road (Direct inquiries: 860-429-0854 or Ashfordgardencenter@gmail.com). For an extensive list of local/regional nurseries with native

plants, just email us at AshfordPollinatorPathways@gmail.com

As always, we (myself, Melinda and Heather) are happy to answer questions, provide site/plant advice and exchange ideas. Let us know if you register your land with Pollinator Pathways so we can drop off a free medallion (courtesy of the Ashford Conservation Commission).

Calendar



“NO MOW MAY”: Please consider allowing grass to grow unmown for the month of May, creating habitat and forage for early season pollinators. Allowing lawn weeds (such as clover, violets and yes, even dandelions) to flower provides vital spring food for bees emerging from hibernation and birds foraging to feed young. If you really hate the idea of not mowing your lawn until June, leave patches unmown (perhaps in your backyard or an unused area behind a shed) or mow the edges of your lawn and leave a few meandering paths down the middle. Even small efforts will help pollinators survive & thrive!

5/7, 9AM-2PM -- Rhode Island Wild Plant Society Early Native Plant Sale, 2325 Boston Neck Rd, Saunderstown, RI 02874

5/7, 10AM-4PM – Spring Fair at the Garden on the Bridge, Willimantic (440 Main St). Enjoy musicians, demonstrations, and vendors of plant-related items.

RESERVE THE DATE: Saturday, June 25, 2PM – “Pollinators in Our Yards” at Westford Hill Distillery. Details TBA

Be sure to check our Facebook page for more upcoming events, native plant sales (or free give-aways), and articles of interest: <https://www.facebook.com/AshfordPollinatorPathway>