

Pollinator Habitat and Legacy Forest

To celebrate the 20th anniversary of becoming a specialized municipality, a Legacy Forest and Pollinator Habitat was introduced to Strathcona County in June of 2016. Volunteers from Strathcona in Bloom and families from the community joined Strathcona County's Council and Parks staff to plant the Pollinator Habitat on National Garden Day. Many pint-sized gardeners helped with the planting, connecting a new generation who will grow with this garden. Located south of the parking lot closest to Sherwood Drive in Centennial Park, this outdoor space includes informational signage, native plants, a native grass pathway and benches.

Cathy Reed, a certified arborist at Strathcona County, envisioned a Pollinator Habitat that would both involve and benefit community members. Many departments within Strathcona County worked together for two years to plan and complete this project. Preparation of the area in the spring was delayed with the discovery of a nesting great horned owl close by. There are over 370 plants in the garden which attract native bees, butterflies, moths, hummingbirds and other birds. The plants came from the Edmonton Native Plant Group as well as local greenhouses and growers that do not use neonicotinoids, which are harmful to pollinators. Signage throughout the park includes pictures of some of the plants and an explanation of why supporting pollinators is so important.

Why plant a pollinator habitat? Due to increased use of pesticides, habitat loss and other factors, the number of bees and other pollinators have been declining for many years. One of the purposes of the garden is to encourage residents to incorporate pollinator habitats into their own gardens. There are over 350 different varieties of native bees in Alberta and 35 different species of bumblebees. Male bees do not have stingers and bees are generally too busy collecting pollen and nectar to be aggressive toward people. Hummingbirds feed on nectar and many different birds enjoy the seeds when the plants have finished flowering. The presence of bees, butterflies and humming birds significantly adds to the delights of local gardening!

The three types of trees in the garden, which support pollinators with flowers and fruit, are Japanese lilac tree, Dropmore linden and Showy mountain ash. Other plants that are both hosts and food sources for butterflies are Joe Pye weed, globe thistle, golden marguerite, false sunflower, fleabane, Shasta daisy and pearly everlasting. Three varieties of milkweed are included as they are excellent sources of nectar for all butterflies as well as hosts for Monarchs, which will sometimes migrate this far north. Butterflies are attracted to flowers that have large "landing pads" such as members of the daisy family, which include asters, fleabanes and coneflowers. They also enjoy members of the mint family such as catmint, blue sage, thyme and hyssop.

Bees are particularly fond of blue flowers and flowers that have packed clusters of tiny flowers like globe thistle, catmint, stoncrop, lamb's ears and yarrow. Hummingbirds are attracted to red, pink and orange flowers, especially those with a tubular shape. Some of their favourites are delphiniums, beardtongue, salvia, columbines, bee balm and hostas. Ultimately, any plant that is rich in nectar and pollen is appreciated by native pollinators.