

ARBOR DAY 2020

POWER OF POLLINATORS:

From Bees, to Bats, to Butterflies!

Monica Zabroski

What are pollinators? Why do we need them? How can we help them? Our friends offer more aid to us than we think. We need pollinators in our lives and their importance is not always understood. That's why the Stafford Township's Environmental Commission has dedicated this year's Arbor Day celebration towards enhancing our community's knowledge and understanding of pollinators and their habitats. We present: **Power of Pollinators: From Bees, to Bats, to Butterflies!**

Students of all grade levels in Stafford Township are invited to participate in the Arbor Day poster, poem, and essay contest. Those involved will have the opportunity to depict their knowledge of pollinators, along with their benefits, habitats, and our can-do spirit to help them. Awards will be presented to artists in each category from each grade who best embodies this year's theme. The awards will be presented on Friday, April 24th, 2020 at Ocean Acres Community Center at 3:45 p.m. Detailed information about this contest and event will be available at each participating school, on the Stafford Township Facebook page, and within Town Hall.

The Stafford Township Environmental Commission is searching for sponsors to support the various awards that will be presented to each of the awardees during our broadcasted event in the Spring. If any business, individual, or group is interested in sponsoring a portion of the awards or would like to donate towards the event, please contact Mrs. Annemarie Sillitoe of the Stafford Township Zoning Department at (609) 597-1000 ext. 8537 or by email at asillitoe@staffordnj.gov.

What are Pollinators you ask? Pollinators help carry pollen from the male part (anther-part of the stamen) of the plant to the female part (stigma). This process allows for fertilization of a plant (tree, shrub, flower, crops, etc.) to take place which aids in the production of fruits and seeds. These fruits and seeds then create an abundance of new plant life. Pollinators consist of an array of different animals such as the thousands of different types of bees, bats, butterflies, moths, birds, beetles, and various other insects.

But why are they so important? Pollinators not only play a vital role in agriculture, they are also the base of the food chain and biodiversity. The natural world around us depends on these "not so understood" creatures. Because a pollinator pollinated that cherry tree in the yard, tent caterpillars are able to thrive, and the chickadee bird is able to feed her young which are nested on the birch tree down the street. They create a whole life cycle for an array of different animals, plants, and even for us humans. The bright yellows, soothing greens, popping purples; the chirping grasshoppers, singing song birds, fluttering butterflies; and the delicious buttery potatoes or scrumptious house salads we enjoy, are here because of the work of a pollinator.

According to a journal article published by Elsevier, "Almost half of the species are rapidly declining and a third are being threatened with extinction". Habitat change, improper use of pesticides, and pollution, are the main drivers for such declines. A great way to help is by increasing our awareness and understanding of the how the natural environment works. The best way to understand is by connecting ourselves to the outside world by going for hikes and taking a closer look at our gardens or backyards. Another effective strategy for pollinator conservation is by encouraging pollinator abundance and increasing biodiversity. This can be accomplished by making a few changes in our community and back yards such as: planting pollinator and vegetable gardens to create habitat; reduce or eliminate our use of pesticides; plant vegetation that is native to our region; provide nesting habitat by leaving a layer of leaves on the yard; and/or keeping overwintering vegetation in place as pollinators use the stems and other plant parts as a home during the colder months.

Jason Hafstad, a colleague of mine, once said, “We are witnessing a shifting paradigm in backyard landscaping. Traditionally, yards were treated as extensions of one's home, and decisions about species selection was analogous to an interior designer choosing wallpaper. But how we define beauty in our yards is evolving away from color, arrangement, contrast, etc. and more toward biodiversity, ecological function and environmental stewardship. There is beauty in functionality that is much more profound and meaningful than form or appearance”. To bring this to an end, always remember that a few changes made by many has more impact than many changes made by few.

The Township of Stafford looks forward to all the creativity our students will use to demonstrate the Power of Pollinators. See you in the Spring!

“Bees underline the reality that we are more, not less, dependent on nature’s services in a world of close to seven billion people”.

-Achim Steiner, United Nations

Additional Resources:

Stafford Township Garden Club and other local garden clubs

Jersey Friendly Yards

Save Barnegat Bay

Native Plant Society of NJ

NRCS

NJDEP-Division of Fish and Wildlife

Pinelands Preservation Alliance-Native Plant Sale

iNaturalist-app and website

bugguide.com