



**July 8, 2024**

**To convey the crucial ecological role of pollinators, students plant gardens in Hopkinton**

On July 22 and 24, students Shaurya and Suhani Patni, along with community members, will be planting pollinator gardens near two popular town trails in Hopkinton. At the Hughes property, 192 Hayden Rowe, a 200 square-foot plot will feature native plants that attract local, endangered bee species. Near Pratt Field, between 108 and 126 Fruit St., a garden to entice butterflies and moths will be planted next to the pond. There will be approximately 100 flowering plants, including the familiar, like bee balm, and the less well-known, like purple raspberry.

Shaurya explained why pollinator gardens are crucial. "They provide habitat and nutrition for species that have lost their natural resources, especially bees, which we rely on for agriculture. Pollinator gardens promote native diversity, create a beautiful space, increase natural defenses against pests, and foster the growth of other plants in a garden. They're true champions of sustainability and resilience, embodying the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature."

The idea emerged in 2023 as the subject of Shaurya's Eagle Scout project. "After researching ways to enhance local ecosystems and promote biodiversity, I talked about pollinator gardens with local experts, and confirmed a project to create them would be feasible and impactful."

In the spring of 2024, he completed the scout project by adding a pollinator garden at the YMCA in Hopkinton; it now serves to educate youth attending their programs. Wanting to do more, Shaurya also sought public sites in town for additional gardens and to expand awareness in the community. He applied for and received funds through the town's participatory budget initiative. Shaurya and his family enlisted help from town employees and members of Open Space Preservation, Sustainable Green, and Trails committees, as well as expertise from Hopkinton Area Land Trust, Weston Nurseries' Design and Education Manager, Trevor Smith, and other professionals, including Dr. Robert Gegear of UMass Dartmouth. Hundreds of volunteer hours are making the project possible.

The larger value of these gardens is to educate and encourage people to plant similar gardens at home or other facilities. Many more pollinator gardens are needed, replacing portions of lawns or areas now occupied by invasive plants. This aspect reflects Suhani's motivation. "After seeing the impact of creating a small pollinator garden in my backyard, I was all in to create more gardens in my community. I hope they will motivate people to replicate it in their homes."

Community members are being asked to help plant and water the gardens. Planting at Hughes will be July 22, from 5 to 7:30 pm, with a celebration from 7:30 to 8 pm. At Pratt, the planting will be July 24, from 5 to 8:00 pm. July 25 is the rain date. Volunteers can sign up online and only need to bring a shovel and gloves. Anyone is welcome to observe and learn. Volunteers are also needed to help with watering through October and can sign up for a time slot online.

Signage will educate visitors to the gardens about their importance and will point to the project web page for guidance on creating similar gardens. Those instructions, as well as links for signing up to volunteer, are at HopGreen.org.

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