

Pollinator Gardens to Improve the Environment and Health

On September 22 at 11 a.m. there will be a celebration for the foundation of three pollinator gardens in Hopkinton, MA, at Hughes Farm, 192 Hayden Rowe, where one of the gardens is located. Special guest U.S. Congressman James McGovern will attend. The public is invited to share in acknowledging the hundreds of hours of volunteer work to complete the project. These gardens aim to educate the community about the grave issues resulting from loss of pollinator species, encourage more residents and organizations to create their own gardens, and inspire other towns to do the same.

“A pollinator garden provides habitat and nutrition for species that have lost their natural resources, especially bees, which the world relies on for agriculture,” explained Shaurya Patni, a high school student in town who helped drive the project. “According to the Xerces project, a single pollinator garden in New England could impact hundreds of species, including over 100 species of bees, dozens of butterfly and moth species, and a wide variety of other insects, birds, and small mammals. They promote native diversity, create a beautiful space, increase natural defenses against pests, and foster the growth of other plants and flowers. They’re true champions of sustainability and resilience, embodying the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature.”

Patni has long been interested in spearheading efforts to spread awareness across the country about the connection between the ecosystem and human health. “When we eat local foods, it increases our natural immune defenses and leads to better health,” he said. “In the same way, native pollinator species rely on the plants they evolved to exist with. They need the proper environment to thrive.” Non-native plants, including the suburban lawn and invasive species, along with toxins to control them and loss of habitat from human-built structures, mean native species of pollinators and other fauna and flora have experienced dramatically declining populations.

These were some of the things Patni learned after talking with Wayne Mezitt and Trevor Smith at Weston Nurseries, a notable garden center in the state. Patni also met with other figures in the field, including Dr. Robert Gegear of UMass Dartmouth, and as a result, decided to help address the problem with new pollinator gardens.

The first was installed in the spring of 2024 at the MetroWest YMCA facility, where thousands of program participants can enjoy and learn from it. Patni created the garden for his Eagle Scout project and benefited from the help of many scout families who volunteered for the planting. Smith provided advice and plants while YMCA staff constructed fencing and a watering system for the plants until they mature.

Beyond that, Patni envisioned having additional gardens in public spaces and teamed up with the town’s Sustainable Green Committee to help identify locations, secure funding, and manage the project. Patni applied to the town’s participatory budget program, in which residents request funding for projects they initiate. With the Open Space Preservation Commission and other trail and land organizations, they identified

two suitable locations: Hughes Farm, and Pratt Field on Fruit Street. Each site has popular trails and an existing large meadow with native plants. The gardens have an educational sign near the entrances describing issues facing pollinators and ways to address them, including planting similar gardens. Visitors can also see the same plant species as they continue walking past meadows full of wildflowers.

“Community involvement is an essential part of ensuring the gardens fulfill their purpose,” said Smith, who has worked with other communities, most recently Boston where they added plantings to bus stop rooftops. In that vein, Patni and his family worked with Linda Chuss from the sustainability committee to recruit volunteers. “More than 100 volunteers, including many youth in town, signed on for planting and watering,” said Chuss. “All the volunteers are now more aware of the importance of native pollinator plants and have a sense of ownership of the gardens. Our website, HopGreen.org, includes information about the project and how to add a garden to your home or organization’s facility. We’re fortunate to be able to direct people to resources at Weston Nurseries here in town, where Trevor has set up a selection of designs, and the garden center has a section devoted to native plants.”

Patni invited Congressman McGovern to the celebration because the representative is a strong advocate for protecting health and the environment. In 2023, McGovern sponsored U.S. HR5085, “Protect America’s Children from Toxic Pesticides Act.” The Hopkinton Sustainable Green Committee formally endorsed that measure, which calls for banning neurologically harming pesticides and closing federal loopholes permitting the chemical pesticide industry to bypass child pesticide safety review. Patni also warmly recalls visiting the congressman as a child in the Capitol Building.

The town’s public library, which helps people learn in many ways besides reading, plans to add two gardens next year, one for pollinators and another with native plants that do not attract pollinators for people allergic to bees. It is Patni’s vision, and that of the town organizations who participated in the effort, that homeowners, residential complexes, churches, businesses, municipal facilities, including schools – any place with property, especially lawns – will replace at least a portion of their non-native or paved areas with native and pollinator plants, starting with even just one plant.

Patni intends for other towns around the country to replicate what he initiated in Hopkinton. He plans to use AI to model species, talk with additional experts in the field, educate visitors, and share his vision with members of other communities and how they can help fulfill it.

Contact Shaurya Patni - shauryapatni11@gmail.com

4 photos included. For more information, visit <https://www.hopgreen.org/land-water-food-products/lawns-gardens-water/pollinator-gardens>



In July, volunteers from the community helped put in over 100 plants designed to attract butterflies and moths at Hughes Farm on Hayden Rowe in Hopkinton, MA.



Shaurya and Suhani Patni are pleased after the hard work of planting at Hughes Farm was completed in July.



Shaurya Patni waters plants at the MetroWest YMCA pollinator garden in Hopkinton, MA.



Residents of all ages worked hard on a hot night in July removing rocks and planting the pollinator garden at Hughes Farm on Hayden Rowe in Hopkinton, MA.

