

Pollinator & Monarch Friendly Planting

As you may have heard there has been a recent widespread and drastic decline in the population of wild bees, domesticated honeybees, pollinating insects and monarch butterflies. This has been primarily due to the extensive loss of nectar producing plants and milkweeds as a result of the increased use of herbicides throughout Midwest farmlands. Many of our food crops depend upon honeybees and other insects for pollination, while the showy and much-admired monarchs require milkweed plants in order to complete their life cycle.

To help out pollinators and any local migrating monarchs please consider installing a butterfly or pollinator-friendly garden using native prairie plants (preferably not cultivars but true species) and milkweeds and avoid using pesticides when possible. Even adding a few flowering natives to an existing ornamental planting would be of benefit. Native prairie grasses such as big & little bluestem physically support wildflower stems and visually complement any native designed landscape. If you 'discover' any milkweed plants growing wild or in unmanaged areas of your yard please consider allowing the plant(s) to complete their life cycle so it can serve as monarch habitat. Common milkweed is by far the most common of the 5 milkweed species native to Minnesota and is distinguished by its waxy oval-shaped leaves and thick round stem. Russian sage, a nonnative species with showy lavender flowers as well as any kind of clover (native or nonnative) are major attractants for bees and pollinating insects as well.

Whenever possible City landscape maintenance crews leave wild volunteer milkweeds growing when found in planting beds, stormwater ponds or in other non-turf areas. The City also employs various flowers & grasses including milkweeds whenever an opportunity arises for installing native prairie plants on a raingarden or other non-turf landscaping project. City code section 425.15 allows residents to install prairie species as long as any such plants or designed native landscapes are maintained and kept free of noxious weeds. Robbinsdale actively manages numerous raingardens, public plantings, and restored prairies that are predominantly covered with native wildflowers and grasses.

Basically any native prairie flower species can serve as an attractant for bees and insects. Bees often get blamed for stings but most often it is wasps (hornets and yellowjackets) that are the culprits as most bees prefer to leave people alone in their search for plant nectar. For more information about bees and pollinators please visit the University of Minnesota Bee Lab website at <https://www.beelab.umn.edu/> or the website of Heather Holm (author of 2 books on pollinator forage plants & bees) at <https://www.pollinatorsnativeplants.com/>