



The pollinator garden at Aquinas Academy, a private K-12 school in Gibsonia, is a student-initiated project created to establish an educational pollinator habitat on the school grounds. The garden will be used as a tool to increase students' scientific understanding of the importance of pollinators, the factors that are causing the decline of honeybees and other pollinators, and ways that individuals can help protect them.

Phase I of the project was completed in summer 2020 and included extensive soil remediation and planting in an area approximately seven feet by four feet, comprising half the total planned area for the garden. Tenth grade student Liam Ellis took on the physical labor of preparing and fertilizing the ground with compost and mulch and planting a variety of pollinator-friendly plants based on recommendations by Audubon staff at Beechwood Farms. Plants installed in Phase I include milkweed, bee balm, coreopsis, cone flower, Russian sage, tickseed, asters and Anise hyssop. Each plant is labeled with both its scientific name and its common name, with an additional student-made sign explaining what a pollinator garden is, why pollinators are critical, and how to help.

The garden will be doubled in size in 2021 to include additional plants and will be maintained thereafter.



If granted, scholarship funds from the North Area Environmental Council would be used for educational materials such as books to add to the library and for additional plants and materials to expand the garden.

As the student coordinator for the garden, Liam Ellis would also be available to submit an article and photos next summer if the project is selected.

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*Content created for pollinator garden sign installed at Aquinas Academy:*



### Pollinator Garden

A pollinator garden includes plants and flowers that specifically attract pollinators such as bees and butterflies.

*Why are pollinators important?*

- Pollination by bees, butterflies, and other insects is necessary to grow approximately 70% of the fruits, vegetables, nuts, and grains we eat. Without bees, we not only would not have honey, we would have very little food.
- When a bee collects nectar and pollen from the flower of a plant or the blossom of a fruit tree, some pollen from the stamens sticks to the hairs of her body. When she visits the next flower, some of this pollen is transferred to other flowers, allowing fertilization to happen and seeds to be produced.
- Pollinators are also vital to the production of fibers such as cotton, edible oils such as vegetable and olive oil, medicines, and other products.

*Why do pollinators need our help?*

- As more and more land is used for buildings, roads and houses, pollinators are losing habitat and the plants that they rely on to survive.

For example, milkweed is the host plant for the monarch butterfly. Monarch caterpillars feed exclusively on milkweed leaves, and without this flowering plant, they would not be able to develop into butterflies.

- Chemicals used to kill insect pests and weeds are harmful to honeybees and other pollinators.

*How can you help?*

- Avoid using pesticides and weed killer in your yard,
- Keep a water supply such as a small birdbath or shallow dish in your backyard.
- Plant pollinator friendly flowers that are native to Pennsylvania.

*(Summer 2020)*