

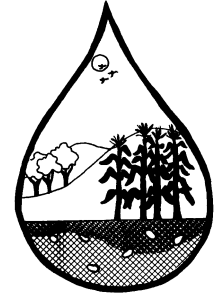
News from the

MERCER COUNTY SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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CLASSROOMS AND SCHOOLYARDS BUZZ WITH EXCITEMENT ABOUT POLLINATORS

Students Improve Habitat for Butterflies and Bees

(HAMILTON) – The end of the school year brought a flutter of activity as students from several local schools created pollinator gardens using plants they started from seeds in the classroom. Their classes were chosen to participate in the Mercer County Soil Conservation District’s “Plants for Pollinators in the Classroom” program in an effort to improve suitable habitat for native pollinators and explore the connection between plants, pollinating animals, and people.

The following schools received free Plants for Pollinators resource kits - including a plant stand with grow lights, seeds, and many teaching resources - from the Mercer County Soil Conservation District: Ben Franklin Elementary School in Lawrenceville, Emily Fisher Charter School in Trenton, Mercer Elementary School at the Mercer County Special Services School District, Princeton High School, and Trenton High School.

“My experience with this kit was amazing,” said first grade teacher Dawn Santello of Ben Franklin Elementary School in Lawrenceville. “There were so many parts of this unit that fit nicely into my first grade curriculum and into our school’s goal of creating a garden in our courtyard.”

An informal poll revealed that a majority of Mrs. Santello’s first graders were afraid of bees before starting the pollinators unit, but after learning about the very important role of bees as pollinators, the fear was replaced by a healthy respect for bees in many students, and eager enthusiasm by others. “This was the best thing I ever learned!” declared Enzert. “The best part was when the plants started to grow,” stated Daniel. And reminding us that even small steps can be very significant, Nicole announced, “I think I might like bees one day.”

While honeybees have been in the spotlight in recent years due to the challenge of Colony Collapse Disorder, scientists and conservationists are hoping to raise awareness that New Jersey is also home to over 200 species of native bees - many of which can be helped with simple steps such as increasing plant diversity in your backyard and avoiding the use of chemical pesticides whenever possible.

“The Department of Agriculture strongly supports the conservation of pollinators to ensure a robust agricultural industry and a sustainable food supply,” said New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Douglas H. Fisher. “The success of many of New Jersey’s most popular and economically important crops such as blueberries, apples, cranberries, cucumbers, squash and pumpkins are dependent upon pollinators.”

The US Department of Agriculture has designated June 18th to 24th as National Pollinator Week. For ideas about how to celebrate National Pollinator Week or to receive a beautiful free pollinator poster, contact the Mercer County Soil Conservation District at (609) 586-9603 or heather1mercer@aol.com.

The following organizations and businesses provided support and/or donations to make the Plants for Pollinators in the Classroom program possible: The Contemporary Club of Trenton, Home Depot of West Windsor, Kale's Nursery and Landscape Service, Mercer County Board of Agriculture, Mercer County Community College Horticulture Club, Terhune Orchards and the West Windsor Lion's Club.

To apply for the MCSCD "Plants for Pollinators" program in 2013, visit <http://www.mercerscd.org/education/pollinators.htm> or call the Mercer County Soil Conservation District at (609) 586-9603.

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Above left and right: Students from Mrs. Santello's first grade class at Ben Franklin Elementary School display posters during a lesson about pollinators in their courtyard garden.