

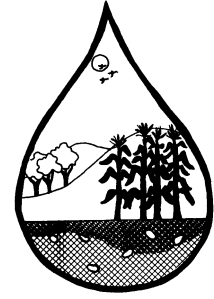
News from the

## MERCER COUNTY SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT

508 Hughes Drive  
Hamilton Square, NJ 08690

[www.mercerscd.org](http://www.mercerscd.org)

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Contact: Heather McNeil-Nazareth (609) 586-9603

E-mail: [heather1mercer@aol.com](mailto:heather1mercer@aol.com)

### STUDENTS CELEBRATE THE BENEFITS OF POLLINATORS

*Improve Habitat for Butterflies and Native Bees*

(HAMILTON) – This spring, local students are taking a close look at the important - but often misunderstood - insects that support our food systems. Thirteen classrooms were chosen to participate in the Mercer County Soil Conservation District’s “Plants for Pollinators in the Classroom” program, which encourages students to explore the connection between plants, pollinating animals and people.

This year’s participants included: Grice Middle School in Hamilton, Bear Tavern School and Toll Gate Grammar School in Hopewell, The Chapin School, Princeton Academy and Stuart Country Day School in Princeton, plus the following seven schools in Trenton: Dunn Middle School, Rivera Learning Community, PJ Hill School, Joseph Stokes School, Cadwalader School, Martin Luther King School, and Mott School.

After growing plants from seed in the classroom, students transplanted their seedlings into the schoolyard, or a community garden, to improve habitat for butterflies, native bees and other pollinators. Participating classrooms received a free Plants for Pollinators resource kit, including a plant stand with grow lights, seeds, and many teaching resources. In an exciting addition to this year’s program, teachers had the option to pair up with a *Garden Pal* volunteer through the Master Gardeners of Mercer County. The Garden Pals generously offered their time and vast gardening experience to enhance the classroom experience.

“My students are loving this experience! It brings so much to their learning in all content areas: reading, math, and writing,” said Dawn Kelley, a teacher at Joseph Stokes Memorial School in Trenton. “Our Garden Pals are also great! They are knowledgeable and great with my kids.”

Many of the students are especially proud to show off their classroom projects this week, June 17<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup>, which has been designated as *National Pollinator Week* by the US Department of Agriculture and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie.

With honeybees declining in recent years due to Colony Collapse Disorder, scientists and conservationists remind us that native bees also provide important pollination services.

According to Rutgers Professor Rachael Winfree, “New Jersey is home to hundreds of species of native bees, and many of these native bees can benefit the home gardener - especially if you follow simple steps, such as increasing plant diversity in your backyard and reducing the use of pesticides when possible.”

“Pollinators are extremely important to the success of many of New Jersey’s most popular and high-value crops such as blueberries, cranberries, cucumbers, squash and pumpkins,” said New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Douglas H. Fisher. “We must take every measure to conserve pollinators to ensure a strong agricultural industry and sustainable food supply.”

For ideas about how to celebrate National Pollinator Week, please visit <http://www.pollinator.org>. To receive a beautiful free pollinator poster (while supplies last), contact the Mercer County Soil Conservation District at (609) 586-9603, and to apply for the 2014 MCSCD “Plants for Pollinators” program, visit <http://www.mercerscd.org/education/pollinators.htm>.

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

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**Photo Caption 1: Above:** Second grade student Jer'mieah Holt measures the growth of seedlings planted by Ms. Dawn Kelley’s class at Joseph Stokes Memorial School in Trenton.



**Photo Caption 2: Above:** Participating classrooms receive a resource kit that includes a plant growing stand, grow lights, seeds, and numerous teaching materials.