

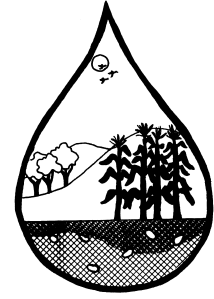
News from the

MERCER COUNTY SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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CELEBRATING POLLINATOR WEEK ACROSS MERCER COUNTY

Girl Scout Partners with Local Mayor to Declare Pollinator Week in Hamilton and Students Explore Pollinator Relationships in Classrooms and Schoolyards

(HAMILTON) – The Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture has officially designated this week, June 16 to 22, 2014, as the eighth annual *National Pollinator Week*. Locally, students, residents and officials are raising awareness about honeybee declines, challenges to native bee populations, and ways to improve pollinator habitats right here in our own backyards.

Hamilton Mayor Kelly Yaede declared June 16 to 22 as *Pollinator Week in the Township of Hamilton* after she was contacted by Megan Reger, a creative and energetic seventh grader conducting her Girl Scout Silver Award Project. On June 6, 2014, Mayor Yaede signed a Pollinator Week proclamation, and then - borrowing from the title of Megan's Silver Award project - the Mayor urged "*all residents to 'Bee' part of the solution to the pollinator problem.*" New Jersey Governor Chris Christie has also designated New Jersey Pollinator Week.

While honeybees have been in the spotlight in recent years due to the challenge of Colony Collapse Disorder, many people are unaware that New Jersey is also home to over 300 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.

"Megan's Silver Award project was impressive because she included more than a simple statement of a problem," said Bill Brash, Director of the Mercer County Soil Conservation District. *"She highlighted solutions that are within the reach of students and residents alike. Then she took actions to improve pollinator habitat, including the construction of nest sites for native bees, and organizing work days in the butterfly garden at the Mercer County Soil Conservation District on Hughes Drive in Hamilton."*

On Saturday, June 14, 2014, Megan conducted an educational presentation for over 50 attendees in the MCSCD butterfly garden in order to kick off Pollinator Week. Visitors learned about bees and pollination through games and scavenger hunts. Earlier this month, she presented her program to the 4th and 5th grade classes at Our Lady of Sorrows School, in Hamilton.

Elsewhere in Mercer County this spring, students from six schools grew pollinator-attracting flowers from seed and created pollinator-friendly gardens on their school grounds. 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 promote hands-on science, improve habitat for native pollinators, and to help children explore the important relationship between plants, pollinating animals, and people.

Participating schools received free *Plants for Pollinators* resource kits; awarded on a competitive basis from the Mercer County Soil Conservation District. The resource kits included a plant stand with grow lights, seeds, a small selection of potted plants, posters and many teaching resources. Some of the schools also received volunteer support when they paired up with a Garden Pal from the Master Gardeners of Mercer County.

Pollinator resource kits were awarded to teachers at the following locations: Antheil Elementary School in Ewing, Franklin Elementary School in Trenton, the Princeton Friends School, the Youth Services Department of the West Windsor Branch of the Mercer County Library, Hightstown High School, and Melvin H. Kreps Middle School in East Windsor.

“My students thoroughly enjoyed the process and loved the planting activities,” said sixth grade teacher MaryAnn Harrison of Melvin H. Kreps Middle School in East Windsor. *“They raced to the plant rack to measure and water. It was a nice opportunity to incorporate gardening into our daily routine. The binder is an invaluable resource that can be used with many sixth grade science lessons”.*

The following organizations and businesses provided support and/or donations to make the Plants for Pollinators in the Classroom program possible: Central Jersey Beekeepers Association, Garden Club of Princeton, Home Depot of West Windsor, Hamilton Grange No. 79, Kale's Nursery and Landscape Service, Ms. Marie Wszolek, Master Gardeners of Mercer County, Mercer County Board of Agriculture, the Mercer County Community College Horticulture Club, Terhune Orchards and the West Windsor Lion's Club.

For more information about the Plants for Pollinators in the Classroom program, and for ideas to celebrate Pollinator Week with your family, visit <http://www.mercerscd.org/education/pollinators.htm> or call the Mercer County Soil Conservation District at (609) 586-9603. Free pollinator posters are available through the MCSCD, while supplies last.

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Photo 1, Above: Girl Scout Megan Reger conducts a pollination demonstration for children in the butterfly garden at the Mercer County Soil Conservation District in Hamilton, New Jersey.



Photo 2, Above: As part of her Silver Award Project, Girl Scout Megan Reger conducted a presentation titled "Bee Part of the Solution to the Pollination Problem" in partnership with the Mercer County Soil Conservation District.



Photo 3, Above: Students from Melvin H. Kreps Middle School in East Windsor start seeds in preparation for their pollinator garden in the spring.



Photo 4, Above: As part of the Plants for Pollinators in the Classroom program, students from Melvin H. Kreps Middle School in East Windsor plant pollinator-attracting plants in one of three new garden beds in the school's courtyard.