

Friday 12.11.20

<http://gcps-communique.com/features-2/2020/12/11/bee-the-change-norcross-cluster-schools-host-pollinators-with-new-gardens?rq=bee>

## ‘BEE the Change’: Norcross Cluster schools host pollinators with new gardens

While we’re experiencing chilly weather now, warm and sunny days will return in the spring. And, the City of Norcross—a certified [Bee City USA](#) affiliate—will be open for pollination by migrating butterflies and birds, busy bees, and beetles, including sites at three Norcross Cluster schools.

One of the initiatives of the [Sustainable Norcross Commission](#) is to educate school communities, residents, and businesses about sustainability practices. A team of community volunteers and business partners have put those practices to work by building pollinator-friendly gardens at [Beaver Ridge ES](#), [Norcross ES](#), and [Summerour MS](#) to help teach students about pollinators and the butterfly life cycle. The gardens are filled with flowering plants that attract pollinators. Newly installed rain barrels ensure the gardens have a ready and sustainable supply of water and teach students about natural resources and how to conserve them. The Bee City gardens include pollinator-friendly plants and trees like Butterfly Milkweed, Blue-stem Goldenrod, Red Buckeye, Coneflower, Black Eyed Susan, and Redbud trees.

**Jackie Petree**, the science specialist at **Norcross ES**, says the school’s garden is an invaluable teaching tool. “Students see actual plant and insect life cycles rather than learning about them through books or pictures. This

allows them to ask questions and develop observation skills,” she says.

And students’ observations show that they are connecting their garden lessons with the world around them. “The garden helps kids understand how living things in our environment act together,” says **Sebastian**, a 5th grader. **Alisha**, a 3rd grader, likes learning how vegetables and flowers grow. “It is important to know how that happens,” she says. 4th grader **Mylah** appreciates the way plants help humans. “They give us food and oxygen. It takes a lot of effort, but it is good for us and the environment,” she says. “The butterflies, bees and birds need things to eat so a garden is good,” says **Mason**, a 1st grader. “We need to give the plants water when there is no rain.”

**Jacquelyn Morgan**, a member of the Sustainable Norcross Commission, wants student and residents to “Bee Sustainable.” While working as a long-term substitute in the Norcross Cluster over the past 15 years, Mrs. Morgan has witnessed the decline in pollinator-friendly gardens in the area. Concerns about the impact prompted her to launch the garden project for the schools. Mrs. Morgan worked with her husband, **Glenn**, to clean out old garden beds, build more raised beds, provide select plants to

support pollinators, and obtain rain barrels from Gwinnett Water Resources.

After more than 450 hours of community service, the project was completed **Dec. 6**. Mrs. Morgan says the many hours of research, clearing and building beds, making plant-a-grams, visiting nurseries, and partnering with various stores to assist the project have been worth it.

Since October, the students have been able to visit the gardens to see butterflies, hummingbirds, bees, and birds. Even in December, butterflies are still at work. “When students visit the garden this winter, most of the flowers will be spent, but not their excitement for what is to come,” she says of the hands-on and visual learning project that brings the life cycle of the butterfly to life for the students. Thanks to **Kim Fritz** of [UGA Extension](#), students will be able to plant pollinator seeds and grow seedlings indoors during the winter months to be planted in the gardens come springtime.

**So, why are pollinators and pollinator-friendly gardens so important?** Most of the world’s flowering plants—about 90%—depend on pollinators to reproduce. Those crucial [pollinators](#) include birds, bees, butterflies, beetles, and small mammals, and they are responsible for bringing us one out of every three bites of food! Pollinators travel from plant to plant, carrying pollen on their bodies and ensuring that plants are fertilized so they can produce flowers, fruit, vegetables, and nuts. Unfortunately, [native pollinators are facing decline](#) due to habitat loss, poor nutrition, and exposure to poisons. One way to reverse those losses is by developing friendly gardens like those housed at the schools. (Families can help the effort by making their own yards a [healthy sanctuary for wildlife](#).)

“We are so excited about our butterfly garden here at Beaver Ridge,” says **Jennifer Atkins**, who teaches K-5 science specials at the school. The Beaver Ridge garden was recently completed so, come spring, her students will get their first opportunities to explore the new space as they learn grade-level AKS curriculum. For

## Pollinator-Friendly Plants

**Herbs:** Lavender, Catmint, Sage, Cilantro, Thyme, Fennel, and Borage

**Perennials:** Crocus, Buttercups, Asters, Hollyhocks, Anemones, Snowdrops, and Geraniums (*These return every year.*)

**Annuals:** Calendula, Sweet Alyssum, Poppies, Sunflowers, Zinnias, Cleome, and Heliotrope (*These are planted each year.*)

Learn more about [pollinator-friendly plants](#) from UGA Extension.

instance, students in 1st grade will collect and graph data on the different pollinators that visit the garden and learn to read a rain gauge, while children in 2nd grade will be able to observe life cycles around the garden. Ms. Atkins notes that her littlest scientists in kindergarten now have the perfect place to compare living and nonliving objects as they observe plants and animals in their very own garden. “I am looking forward to our spring semester when the garden is flourishing and the butterflies are active,” she says.

School gardens also help students develop the skills they need to keep a home garden themselves and introduce children to healthier eating habits as well. “A student may never eat salad at home,” says Ms. Petree, “but if you allow them to pick the lettuce, carrot, or stalk of broccoli they grew, they will tell you it’s the most amazing thing they have ever eaten.”

Mrs. Morgan notes that community members can help boost at-home gardens. She says, “We are taking donations of seeds to give to the students to take home to plant butterfly gardens with their families to provide hand-on learning and more educational awareness.”

## Creating a Healthy Yard for Wildlife

This fall, masks and social distancing have become the norm for student gardeners who have to keep their distance when they spot a carpenter bee or butterfly in their garden. Ms. Petree says they are making it work in this new normal. She's even "Zoomed" a garden visit with online students. And, spring will be a busy time for the school gardens, the gardeners, and the pollinators! Students will plant seeds, identify re-emerging perennials, and watch for and count pollinators. "We will look to see which pollinators like which plants best and discover why," Ms. Petree says. "Students will evaluate the garden to determine what changes need to be made to meet the needs of plants, pollinators, and wildlife." With their results, the students will create and execute garden plans to support their garden visitors.

For all the important work done by visiting pollinators and the students who tend the gardens, having a garden provides something else to the community. "The garden adds an aspect of beauty to our world," says **Sarah**. "My favorite things are the butterflies and bees," says **Elizabeth**, a kindergartner. "I like to sit and watch them."

*Partners in the initiative include **Jacquelyn Morgan** of the Sustainable Norcross Commission, **Glenn Morgan**, [Gardens for Growing Community](#), Victory World Gardening Small Group, school volunteers and Board Member **Louise Radloff**, Norcross Mayor **Craig Newton**, the district's Facilities and Operations Division, **Kim Fritz** of [UGA Extension](#), and local nurseries, including Lowe's, Pikes Nurseries, and Home Depot.*

*(Gardens for Growing Community has an [Environmental Education Center](#) at Summerour as well as the [Team Green Environmental Education Program](#) at **Lilburn MS**.)*

**Did you know?** Honey bees have a sense of smell that is 50 times more powerful than that of a dog!

- Online, find the ["Nurturing Nature with Natives" coloring book](#) about native plants and the state's birds, courtesy of Georgia Audubon.
- *Interested in adding native plants to your yard that attract birds and other pollinators?* Explore [Audubon's native plants database](#) and get tips for creating your bird-friendly habitat.
- Download the free [Audubon Bird Guide app](#) for a guide to more than 800 species of birds.
- Learn how to bring birds, bats, and butterflies to your yard with this [Invitation to a Healthy Yard](#) from Audubon and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- Learn how you can support pollinators from the [Pollinator Partnership](#). Make sure to [register](#) your pollinator garden. Registered gardens in Norcross qualify for a special yard sign!
- Plant your own [butterfly garden](#) at home. Find kid-friendly gardening tips from the [National Garden Bureau](#) and resources about butterflies, Monarch migration, the butterfly life cycle, and more!
- Visit the [Pollinator Spaces Project](#), an initiative of UGA Extension and the Center for Urban Agriculture.