

New Pollinator Pathway School Curriculum Project Launches in Norwalk, CT

By Jonathan Gilbert



Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, formal education and pedagogy have changed. While students' were restricted to learning from home, their educational experiences were confined to digital platforms, and for many, this occurred solely indoors. While several positive aspects can be gained from this new mode of learning, students lacked the ability to interact and gain visceral, hands-on experience, in their digital classrooms. As an undergraduate faculty member teaching Biology & Ecology, I saw a gap that needed to be filled and took the opportunity to share my knowledge with my kids by observing the natural wonders in our backyard. As we examined the communal importance of the host interactions of many plants and pollinators, I felt compelled to gain more insight and share this knowledge with their peers. With the guidance of Pollinator Pathway and members of the Cranbury Elementary school community, we were able design and implement a plan where Norwalk's elementary students plant native pollinator-friendly plants in the classroom and then plant them in a city park, learning about their importance to pollinators and their community.

This spring, all 430 students of Cranbury Elementary germinated a variety of native pollinator plants in their classrooms. As they watched the plants grow, the students engaged with experiential learning of biological and ecological phenomenon, examined different communal organizations and initiatives, and discussed the importance of restoring habitats. On May



24th, Norwalk Pollinator Pathway members assisted 86 representative students from the Cranbury fourth grade in planting 140 pots of plants in Norwalk's Oyster Shell Park. This contribution to this Norwalk public space exceeded expectations by enhancing the curriculum and engaging the students in community affairs. In addition to beautifying our communal spaces, the students increased the ecological resilience by helping build corridors for many native and migrating pollinators.

Reflecting on the efforts made by Cranbury Elementary, I can't help but feel a sense of relief and pride for the community's interest in promoting ecological stability and sharing strategies for achieving this goal with our youth. The underlying importance of responsible land stewardship is vital to our future, and by giving the students ownership, we will help them develop these values in their most formative years. This year was a local success, and I hope this model will be the platform by which other organizations and community members will continue to foster and grow. The idea is simple and proved that a small act can make a big impact. For more information about using the curriculum, contact us through Norwalk Pollinator Pathway partner, the Norwalk River Watershed Association, at info@norwalkriver.org.