

New Program Invites Neighbors of the Old Croton Aqueduct Trail to Plant for Pollinators

By Chet Kerr



Photo: Removing invasives from new OCA pollinator garden site

The Old Croton Aqueduct Trail (the “OCA”) weaves its way from the New Croton Reservoir in northern Westchester through the towns and villages on the eastern shore of the Hudson River to the northern edge of New York City. What was once the Croton Aqueduct bringing fresh water down to the residents of New York City, the OCA today is a historic state park and scenic pathway that connects communities.

The OCA is also now part of the larger Pollinator Pathway Project in Westchester County. Last year the Rivertowns Pollinator Pathway worked with the New York State Parks Department to create new Guidelines for Aqueduct Pollinator Gardens under which landowners who have property adjacent to the OCA can create pollinator-friendly gardens within the State park using native plants. These gardens must be contiguous to the landowner’s property and must be composed of native pollen or nectar-producing plants drawn from “New York Flora Atlas”. The idea of this partnership is to combine the vision of a Pollinator Pathway with the actual pathway the OCA cuts through the communities between Yonkers and Croton. As this Project grows, it will encourage and, hopefully, inspire people to think about planting natives that are providing a supportive environment for pollinators to thrive.

This new effort is already making an impact and creating a very real and visual statement about the benefits of a vibrant and varied Pollinator Pathway throughout the Rivertowns. Last summer, Augie Brosnahan, a member of the OCA staff, created a new pollinator garden in Dobbs Ferry near the old Keeper’s House. This garden is “active beyond belief” with insects and birds according to Steve Oakes, the Historic Park Manager for the OCA. “Park patrons often stand there for 20 minutes at a time, entranced by all of the activity.”

Separately, the Village of Hastings created a new pollinator garden, partly on Village land and partly on the OCA, near Five Corners in Hastings. The Village planted seven native trees and volunteers added approximately 500 native perennials in the new garden. The goal is to create a low maintenance pollinator meadow that will stand as a showcase for hikers and other users along the OCA.

Last month, the Village of Irvington's Green Policy Task Force took this idea of creating an actual Pollinator Pathway one step further and created a new pollinator garden along the OCA in downtown Irvington. Working with the Greater Irvington Land Trust and The O'Hara Nature Center, volunteers removed long-standing invasives and other non-native plants and planted a new garden of native perennials. The planting layout was designed by Peter Strom, a horticulturist who works with the Village on projects at the O'Hara Nature Center and within the wider Irvington Woods. "We put in some white wood aster, 'Bunny Blue' sedge, Christmas fern, blunt mountain mint, eastern blue star, tufted hairgrass and cardinal flower." These plants were chosen to provide a succession of bloom from late April through September and October.

The long-term goal of this partnership between the Pollinator Pathway Project and the State Park system is to inspire other residents who live along the OCA to follow suit. Using the backbone of the OCA for this project turns a natural pathway into a vibrant and very visual Pollinator Pathway that supports not only pollinators but the overall health of the community.

Photo: Planting new native plants in the OCA pollinator garden.



For more information about the Old Croton Aqueduct, including history, walks, tours and volunteer events, visit <https://aqueduct.org/>