

Newsday

Llife

A bee stops by a native coneflower.

Making a beeline for EFFORTS BLOOM TO DRAW POLLINATORS TO LI GARDENS **E2**

SPRING

act**2** | An ice skater embraces the sport after decades away **E17**

CRAIG RUTTLE

In this issue

On the first day of spring, we bring you a story about how to make your home garden and container planters more friendly to pollinators.

In Act 2, meet a Long Islander who is competing as a figure skater after a decades-long break from the sport.

Make sure to check out today's Faith and Seniors calendars for virtual and in-person events.

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COVERSTORY

PLANTING *with purpose*

Groups offer guidance, support for gardening that sustains pollinators

BY JESSICA DAMIANO
Special to Newsday

Every time Kathryn Coley stepped into her Port Washington garden last summer, she was greeted by bees and butterflies fluttering about on her anise hyssop, purple coneflowers and other plants, “much to my grandson’s delight,” she said. But that wasn’t always the case.

Before installing native plants, she found there wasn’t much noticeable insect activity on her property.

“The garden had ivy and periwinkle ground cover, overgrown pine shrubs and a thorn-covered Japanese barberry,” she said. “I cut them back as much as I could . . . then enriched the soil and weeded” before planting a selection of native plants.

And the insects moved in.



ANTHONY MARINELLO



ON THE COVER. A bee alights on a coneflower at Washington Square Park in Manhattan. The coneflower (*Echinacea*) is a native species.

A patio planter belonging to Anthony Marinello of West Hempstead includes such natives as purple pitcher plant, round-leaved sundews, sphagnum moss, rushes and Southern blue flag iris.



RANDEE DADDONA



JANA HOGAN

Garden signs spread the word about the Pollinator Pathway.

LEARN MORE

■ The Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County's **2022 Spring Gardening School** will be held virtually via Zoom on March 26, from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., featuring a keynote address from New York Times gardening writer Margaret Roach, plus nine speakers presenting on year-round gardening topics. Choose the "Leaf" option (\$50 for keynote plus three programs — your choice of one from each session) or "Bloom" (\$65 for keynote plus all nine programs). Recordings will be available to registrants to view offline until June 1. Program selections include "Non-stop Plants: A Garden for 365 Days" (keynote address), "Why do the How-to's," "Grow What you Love," "Native Plant 'Lawn,'" "Four-Season Garden," "Pollinator Pathway," "Uncommon Edibles," "Invasive Nightmares," "Olmsted's Legacy" and "Herbs & Spice." For details, visit bit.ly/CCE-Suffolk 2022brochure; to register, visit bit.ly/CCE-Suffolk 2022springschool.

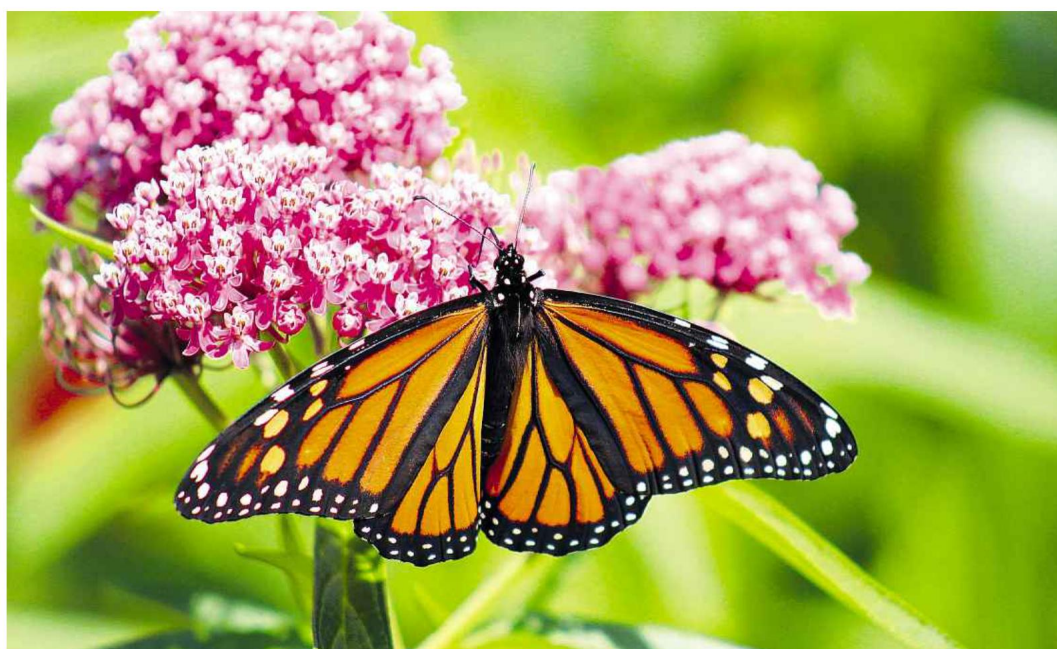
■ For more information about the **Pollinator Pathway** and to learn how you can participate (and order a medallion sign for your garden) visit pollinator-pathway.org.

■ Find inspirational photos, plant suggestions and more resources at rewildlongisland.org.

■ Learn about local wildlife conservation, public programs, events and community projects at seatuck.org.

■ **Resilient LI**, a virtual "symposium on invasive and native species for Long Island's future," will be hosted via Zoom by the Long Island Native Plant Initiative and Long Island Invasive Species Management Area from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on April 7 (\$75; \$30 for students, with scholarships available upon request; free for state agencies). Register at bit.ly/ResilientLI2022.

— JESSICA DAMIANO



CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION / ALICE RAIMONDO

A monarch butterfly seeks nectar from a native milkweed plant during its migration to Mexico.

"One of the most dramatic results of these pollinator visits was the appearance of tiny blue berries on a tree near the driveway," she said. "I've lived here for 40 years and do not recall seeing these berries before."

As the planting season gets underway, spring is the perfect

time to learn about the importance of protecting essential pollinators. On Long Island, several groups and organizations are devoted to helping home gardeners select and incorporate plants that will attract them.

Coley is a board member of the Port Washington-based

pollinator-advocacy group ReWild Long Island, which works with residents to "rewild" their gardens. The term refers to shrinking or eliminating the presence of turfgrasses and non-native plants in favor of native plants that will feed and attract pollinators.

Alicia Whitaker of Westhampton is part of a Suffolk County task force that will craft a plan to make public spaces friendlier to pollinators.

Last spring, Coley enlisted the help of a sustainability-focused landscaper to remove most of the invasive plants in her garden and put in shrubs that lured pollinators and made those tiny blue berries possible.

But the group "encourages people to take the conversion one step at a time to reduce cost and anxiety," she said. "Just one flower that feeds one bee helps."

A GROWING MOVEMENT

More than 50 households in the Port Washington-Manhasset area of Nassau County have "rewilded" their gardens by incorporating native, pollinator-friendly plants, according to Raju Rajan, the organization's president. "And we've helped more than 150 people with tips on design and with plants from our online sale, where we get over 100 species of [native] plants from

See COVER STORY on E4



John Turner, a senior conservation policy advocate who cofounded the Long Island Pine Barrens Society, advises planting a variety of native species to draw different insects.

Push to plant for pollinators

COVER STORY from E2

wholesale nurseries and deliver them locally," he said.

"It's important for people to realize that small changes can make big impacts," Rajan said. "Rewilding does not require extensive consulting. It is not an all-or-nothing effort where you're either rewilded or not. People can start at a very low cost on a small plot in their garden with as few as five plants and then grow gradually from there."

Fueled by the findings of Douglas Tallamy, the University of Delaware professor of entomology who discovered that native insects only recognize native plants as food, the

pollinator-friendly movement is becoming mainstream. And home gardeners, organizations and even municipalities are recognizing the importance of pollinators — and strategically planting to attract them.

It was a webinar presented by Tallamy in 2020 about productive native species that inspired Suffolk County Legis. Kara Hahn (D-Setauket) to "be part of a solution to be able to support pollinators here locally," she said. She introduced a bill to establish a Pollinator Pathway Task Force in the county.

The first Pollinator Pathway was conceived in 2007 by Seattle artist and designer Sarah Bergmann and has since

inspired a global movement to enlist local communities to establish pollinator-friendly gardening practices in public and private spaces.

After the Suffolk County bill was approved late last year, Hahn began tapping 21 local agency representatives and environmental experts to serve on the task force.

Alicia Whitaker, a Cornell Cooperative Extension-Suffolk master gardener and immediate past president of the Horticultural Alliance of the Hamptons, is among those experts. Whitaker, of Westhampton, said the Pollinator Pathway Task Force will "develop a plan to support pollinator species along roadways and in open

green spaces in order to maintain a healthy ecosystem in Suffolk County, which the Department of Public Works and the Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation will jointly implement in the coming years."

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

As a public-private partnership, Whitaker said, the initiative includes representatives from local garden clubs because they "are in contact with homeowners, who have a vital role to play in creating a network of habitats for pollinators." Additional public agencies throughout the county may become involved, as well, she said.

"My personal hope is that we make an enormous impact on the planting and maintenance practices of county parks and roadways, and that our insights and recommendations are communicated to the public so that more people understand the importance of pollinators and want to help them," she said. "We all can make a difference in our own gardens and neighborhoods."

Mina Vescera, nursery and landscape specialist for CCE-Suffolk, another task force appointee, said she gained an understanding of the importance of native bees while

See COVER STORY on E6



Native species in the garden of Anthony Marinello, who will present "Native Plant 'Lawn'" at the CCE-Suffolk Spring Gardening School.

ANTHONY MARINELLO



Anise hyssop planted outside "rewilder" Kathryn Coley's Port Washington home helps attract pollinators to her garden.

KATHRYN COLEY

6 STEPS TO SUPPORT POLLINATORS AT HOME

As home gardeners prepare to plant their spring gardens, John Turner, senior conservation policy advocate for Seatuck Environmental Association in Islip, recommends keeping pollinators front-of-mind by implementing the following steps to support them:

1 GO NATIVE

"The yards of most Long Islanders do not and cannot support pollinating insects or wildlife in general since the grass, flowers, shrubs and trees commonly found there — like hostas, peonies, azaleas and arborvitae — are non-native, and most produce no pollen, nectar, leaves or seeds of benefit to pollinators and other wildlife," said Turner. "As a result, most home gardens are 'biological deserts,'" he said. Native species, on the other hand, "support hundreds of different types of beneficial insects."

Turner recommends planting such wildflowers as asters, goldenrods and blazing stars; shrubs like elderberry, sweet pepperbush, highbush blueberries; and trees such as oaks, hickories and birches.

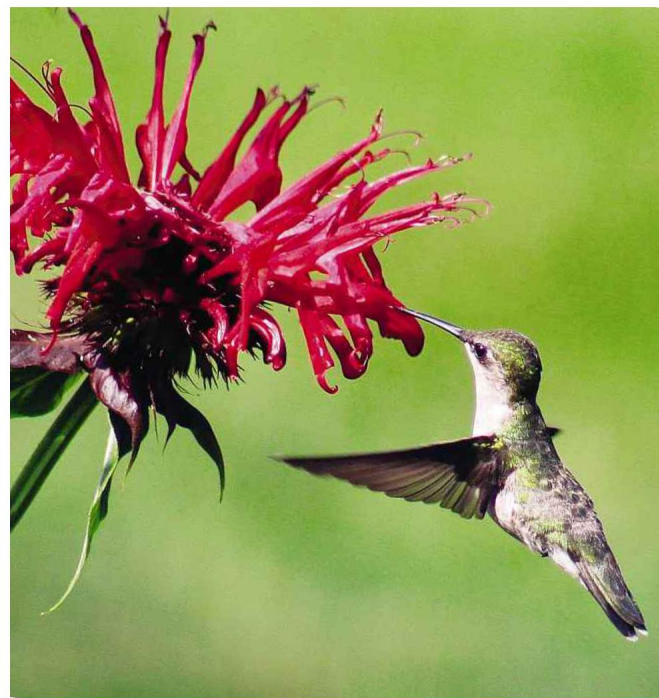
2 PUT AWAY YOUR SPRAY CAN

"It is tempting to turn to the easy fix of chemicals to control garden pests, but the problem is these chemicals work too well," Turner said. "Remember, pesticides, herbicides and other 'cides' are all poisons, some of which have broad and deadly impacts to a large number of species."

Instead, he recommends researching other, "more benign options" to control pests. By doing so, "you'll allow the wanted species to flourish."

3 LEAVE THE LEAVES, SAVE THE STUBBLE

"Layers of fallen leaves and standing stem stubble in your garden beds and throughout your yard sustain many species, especially overwintering insects under leaves and in hollow stems," Turner said.



CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION / ALICE RAIMONDO

A hummingbird visits a native bee balm flower.

He recommends forgoing the fall cleanup.

4 BUILD 'BEE HOTELS'

"Many bees, wasps and other pollinating insects can benefit from 'bee hotels' placed around your property," said Turner, who recommends involving the whole family. "A great project is to engage your children in researching, constructing and installing small bee hotels [that will] help some of the several hundred native bee species, like mason bees, which, unlike the European honeybee, nest solitarily."

The project doesn't have to be elaborate, Turner said. Small "hotels" made of a dozen bamboo stalks fastened together or a vertical 4-by-4 post drilled extensively with holes can be effective, too.

DIY instructions for more intricate models are available at nationalgeographic.org/media/build-your-own-bee-hotel/.

5 ADJUST YOUR INSECT ATTITUDE

"Let's face it," Turner said, "insects generally don't poll well with too many of us." They're seen as "unwanted, unnecessary, dangerous or downright icky." To change our perceptions,

Turner recommends standing waist-deep in a field of wildflowers during the summer and "marveling at the frenzy of activity as bees, butterflies and so many other insects secure the food they need to survive."

Your apprehension, he said, "will turn to admiration for these hardworking animals," which "help to sustain human life and generally sustain life on the planet."

6 SUPPORT CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS

Xerces Society, xerces.org, "is unique among organizations with its mission to protect invertebrates, which, of course, includes all insects," Turner said.

Other organizations that promote pollinator-protection strategies include: **National Audubon Society**, audubon.org, and its local chapter affiliates; **National Wildlife Federation**, nwf.org; **American Bird Conservancy**, abcbirds.org; and **Bat Conservation International**, batcon.org.

On Long Island, he suggests supporting **Seatuck Environmental Association**, seatuck.org, and **Long Island Native Plant Initiative**, linpi.org.

— JESSICA DAMIANO



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COVERSTORY

A native approach

COVER STORY from E4

writing her thesis about cantaloupes as a graduate student at the University of Rhode Island-Kingston. “I was floored by the fact that it takes at least eight visits from a bee to pollinate” a cantaloupe, she said.

Vescera said she would like to see “our collaborative efforts result in a plan of action that supports pollinator habitats across Suffolk County [and] that the task force fosters awareness of the perils of habitat decline and ignites the curiosity of residents to learn more and help the cause.”

“Many ecologists believe that if insects were to disappear, life on Earth would grind to a halt,” said John Turner, senior conservation policy advocate for the Seatuck Environmental Association in Islip. “That’s an experiment we do not want to conduct.”

To help home gardeners understand what they can do to help, Turner, who cofounded the Long Island Pine Barrens Society and authored “Exploring the Other Island: A seasonal guide to nature on Long Island” (Harbor Electronic Publishing, 2017), will present a program about the Pollinator Pathway at the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County’s virtual Spring Gardening School on March 26. (See “Learn more.”)

“Unlike so many other environmental issues, where it’s hard to impossible for an individual to make a difference, each of us individually can take on the pollinator crisis . . . by adopting more pollinator-friendly activities in our yards and gardens,” Turner explained. “It’s a matter of understanding that the current gardening model generally promotes sterile, pollinator-hostile habitats and that gardeners have enormous latent power to change the ways things are.”

Turner recommends homeowners aim to “plant a variety of native wildflowers, since each species attracts its own suite of insects, and to plant them in clumpy fashion and not spread them out.”

There will be eight other programs on a variety of topics offered during Spring Gardening School, including “Invasive Nightmares,” presented by Vescera, and “Native Plant ‘Lawn,’” presented by Anthony Marinello, a Long Island Native Plant Initiative board member and founder of Dropseed Native Landscapes, a native-plant nursery and consulting service based in West Hempstead. The curriculum will be available to an international audience via Zoom.

Once more people learn about “the decline in birds and the insect ‘Armageddon,’” Whitaker said, “they’ll want to get involved.”

‘NON-STOP PLANTS’ KEYNOTE

New York Times gardening writer Margaret Roach, the mastermind behind the popular “A Way to Garden” website, newsletter and podcast, was the first garden editor for Martha Stewart Living Magazine. But before that, in the 1990s, she was Newsday’s fashion and garden editor.

Today, Roach lives in New York’s Hudson Valley, where she has spent the past 30 years cultivating a garden that shows its colors (literally) in all four seasons.

As keynote speaker at this year’s Cornell Cooperative Extension-Suffolk County Spring Gardening School, she will present an inspirational photo tour of her rural Columbia County garden titled, “Non-stop Plants: A Garden for 365 Days.”

Attendees will receive a discount code for 35% off the 2019 revised edition of her book “A Way to Garden: A Hands-On Primer for Every Season” (Timber Press). Roach also authored the corporate-dropout memoir “And I Shall Have Some Peace There: Trading in the Fast Lane for My Own Dirt Road”



ERICA BERGER

Keynote speaker Margaret Roach will present a tour of her upstate garden.

(Grand Central Publishing, 2011) and “The Backyard Parables: Lessons on Gardening, and Life” (Grand Central Publishing, 2013).

In 2018, she was awarded the Massachusetts Horticultural Society’s George Robert White Medal of Honor for her contributions to horticulture.

— JESSICA DAMIANO