

The Lower Merion & Narberth Pollinator Pathway

By Michelle Detwiler

Stop for a moment to consider the importance of your outdoor space—a critical refuge for insects and other animals in a landscape otherwise dominated by the built environment. Regardless of size, your property is the year-round nursery, food source, and housing for countless insect species who might perish without the resources outside your doors. To encourage healthy habitat within our neighborhoods, the Lower Merion Conservancy is partnering with the Narberth Area Garden Club, Friends of West Mill Creek Park, and local civic associations to establish a corridor of pollinator and stream-friendly public and private properties within our local watersheds—a biological pathway of healthy habitat across property lines.



A Black and Gold bumble bee—one of 18 native bumble bees in Pennsylvania—sips on wild bergamot nectar in a Penn Valley garden along the new Pollinator Pathway.

History of the Pathway

The original Pollinator Pathway project began in 2008 in Seattle, Washington. Designer Sarah Bergmann worked with individual homeowners to create a mile-long, 12-foot-wide pathway of pollinator-friendly gardens in city-owned planting strips to connect Seattle University with nearby Nora's Woods. The project was a design challenge to help the planet—to connect the dots between fragmented landscapes and create refuge across property lines in the age of the Anthropocene, the period when human activity has been the leading influence on climate and the environment.

In 2016, an East coast version of the pathway was started when environmentalist Donna Merrill of Wilton, Connecticut created a community land stewardship project. The project offered residents between the neighboring towns of South Salem, NY and Ridgefield, CT free dogwood trees to create connecting pollinator habitat. Since then, 85 towns in the Northeast have adopted the Pollinator Pathway, and ours will be the first in Pennsylvania. We hope you will join us, and here's why...



Many native trees like this flowering dogwood require insects for pollination. Supporting pollinators ensures that birds have food and wild plants reproduce.

Pollinators - Workhorses for Nature

Pollinators are a diverse group of animals—bees, flies, butterflies and moths, wasps, beetles and hummingbirds. By transferring pollen between flowers, they ensure that plants will reproduce so life as we know it can continue. Without native bees—437 species in Pennsylvania—insect-pollinated plants like our beautiful flowering dogwood trees wouldn't produce nutritious berries for migrating birds. They also wouldn't set seed to naturally regenerate woodland remnants and neither would other ecologically valuable species that depend on insect pollination such as Eastern redbud trees, American hollies, blackhaw viburnums, spicebush shrubs, American witchhazel, and native cherry trees.

**Give a
 Membership,
 We Plant a Tree**

Details page 3.

Fall Program Calendar

Pollinator Pathway Kickoff With Pat Sutton

Thursday, October 1
7-8:30 pm on Zoom
Free, pre-registration online is required.

Learn about the Lower Merion and Narberth Pollinator Pathway project in this kickoff event! Master Gardener, Pat Sutton, will discuss how to create a paradise for pollinators in your backyard.

Mushroom Identification Walk

Saturday, October 10
2-4 pm
Lower Merion Conservancy
1301 Rose Glen Road, Gladwyne
Free, Members-only, space limited.

Join the Philadelphia Mycology Club for a mushroom identification walk through Rolling Hill Park.

Register:

www.lmconservancy.org/events

History of Medicinal Plants

Sunday, October 18
3-5 pm
Barnes Arboretum
50 Lapsley Lane, Merion Station
Free, Members-only, space limited.

Learn about the intersection of modern medicine and botany in a two-part program with the Barnes Arboretum! The program will discuss the history of medicinal plants and their influence on curing disease during an in-person tour of the Barnes Arboretum medicinal garden and greenhouses. Program also includes a pre-recorded introduction lecture.

Greening Your Backyard for Water Quality and Wildlife

Thursday, November 12
7-8:30 pm on Zoom
Free, pre-registration online is required.

This workshop will discuss the methods by which our current landscape creates stormwater pollution and will offer solutions for helping to solve this problem through simple landscape changes, the use of rain barrels, native plants, and rain gardens.

Join us at the Lower Merion Conservancy for
NATURE EXPLORERS!
A drop off program for children ages 4-7.

Learn more about the environment through nature play, exploration and adventure!

1st and 3rd Wednesdays
10:30am-Noon
\$25 per session

Members only. Register at LMConservancy.org/Events



Give a Membership, We'll plant a tree.

What better way to say "I care about you" than to give back to the environment that we all share. When you honor someone special by giving them a membership to the Conservancy, you show your passion for the planet without the clutter!

For each gift membership you purchase, we will plant a tree in Rolling Hill Park, and send a tree planting certificate and personal message from you to your loved one.

Gift membership recipients will also receive access to our Members-only in-person events and programs.

Register for a gift membership on our website at www.lmconservancy.org/support or contact Kathleen Hassinger, Director of Development at kat@lmconservancy.org

Pollinators and Watersheds Under Stress

The same roads, driveways, buildings, agricultural fields, expansive lawn areas, non-native species, and landscape chemicals that compromise our watersheds also make travel for pollinators more dangerous and more extensive. Since native bees—which are uniquely efficient at pollinating native plants—only forage approximately 750 meters for pollen and nectar, the goal of the Pathway is to connect properties that are no farther apart to provide locally available, safe floral resources and nesting sites.

Responding to the challenges

Similar approaches can be used to simultaneously improve the health of our watersheds and boost habitat for pollinators. The solutions are simple.

I. Introduce and protect native plants

These long underappreciated trees, shrubs, and perennials are beautiful not only for their seasonal blooms and natural textures but also for the life that they support in our spaces. The science of pollinator ecology teaches us to thank oak trees for hosting hundreds of butterfly and moth species in their early stages, milkweeds for monarchs, tulip trees for tiger swallowtails, and violets for fritillary butterflies.

Introduce native flowering perennials in your space across the seasons. Early spring wildflowers include Virginia bluebells, rue anemone, moss phlox, and golden ragwort. Summer bloomers include perennial sunflowers, black-eyed susans, milkweeds, St. John's wort, liatris, mountain mint, Joe-Pye weed, and bee balm. Goldenrod and aster species are essential for migrating and late season pollinators. Check the Resources tab of our Pollinator Pathway webpage for more recommended plant lists for our region at: www.pollinator-pathway.org/merion-narberth-resources.



Pollinator gardens should include host plants for caterpillars like this spicebush swallowtail butterfly.

Because native plants evolved over thousands of years with local insects, leaf and pollen chemistry is often just right to support the development of young bees as well as moth and butterfly caterpillars—essential bird food for the young hatchlings of chickadees, bluebirds, wrens, and warblers. Plants introduced from other parts of the world can't host native insects and often out-compete native plants, taking increasingly valuable natural ecological real estate.

Pollinator Pathway Kickoff With Pat Sutton

Thursday, October 1
7-8:30 pm

Free, pre-registration is required for Zoom link. Register at:

www.LMConservancy.org/Events



Pollinators of all kinds love New York ironweed, a stately native for moist, sunny areas.

II. Remove introduced invasive species

Did you know that suburban properties are dominated by non-native plant species? We removed valuable habitat to build homes and businesses and never put it back. Invasive plant species also compromise streambank stability and habitat by interfering with the regeneration of important riparian species that otherwise hold soil and reduce polluting runoff through deep root systems. As a start, remove and replace introduced trees, landscaping shrubs, and ground covers as suggested below. Be sure to protect plantings from deer browse!

III. Put the spray away and dead wood matters - Landscape Management for the modern steward

Providing genuine habitat for pollinators requires year-round support.

1. Eliminate chemical use in your space.

Chemicals—herbicides, pesticides, fungicides, road salt, and synthetic fertilizers—directly harm pollinators, pollute the soil where they nest, and often kill the diversity of microscopic life that keeps soils alive. Instead of relying on chemicals, plant a diversity of native plants that will encourage the presence of both predators and prey—a natural ecological balance.

2. Keep fallen leaves around shrubs and trees. While some insects like monarchs are migratory, most pollinators overwinter in our landscapes unbeknownst to us. Queen bumble bees shelter in the soil under leaves before emerging in the spring to start new colonies, and butterfly and moth larvae nestle in cocoons in dead leaves or in the ground. Removing too many leaves can eliminate the first generation of these species in spring.

3. Leave plant stems and dead wood. In gardens where plant stems must be removed, cut them no lower than 18". Similarly, if a tree must be felled, leave a wildlife snag for wood-nesting native bees and other insect life. Remember that cutting plant stems to the ground in winter will eliminate winter homes and nest sites needed by the pollinators we are trying to support with larval host and flowering plants the rest of the year.

Remove these introduced species	Replace with these native plants
Norway maple and Amur cork	Oak, native birch, red maple, blackgum
Crape myrtle	Serviceberry
Japanese maple	Alternate-leaved dogwood or Eastern redbud
Boxwood	Inkberry holly
Privet	Redtwig dogwood, winterberry holly, or bayberry
Burning bush	Blueberry or fragrant sumac
Barberry	Virginia sweetspire
Butterfly bush	Sweet pepperbush
Linden and Siebold viburnum	Arrowwood, witherod, or nannyberry viburnum
Japanese pachysandra, English ivy, and vinca	Golden ragwort, foam flower, barren strawberry, or native strawberry



Native bees come in many sizes! A small bellflower resin bee collects nectar from native American bellflowers. Leaving dead wood in your yard provides nesting and overwintering habitat for this species.

Join the Pathway!

Everyone can participate by avoiding the use of pesticides and lawn chemicals, planting native, pollinator-friendly plants, and providing nesting and wintering habitat. To join the Pathway, add anywhere from one native, pollinator-friendly tree, a pollinator garden, rain/depression garden, meadow/shrub-scape or woodland restoration and then register your space. As more residents register, we will add a map showing our collective progress on the Pathway.

Honoring Nature's Intentions - Benefits of Joining the Pathway

Cooperating to provide pollinator habitat will not only help to preserve our unique biodiversity by saving insect species that birds, amphibians, and other creatures depend on but will also provide the refuge animals need as they move from less hospitable environments during climate change. Planting native plants increases biomass above and below ground, which increases infiltration to mitigate stormwater runoff, which is desperately needed to keep the watersheds healthy in our highly developed community.

Since pollinators indicate the overall health of our ecosystem, their welfare is truly our own. Help build community by joining the pathway, and encourage neighbors in the effort!

Guest writer Michelle Detwiler is a native plant consultant, Pennsylvania Master Naturalist, and head of the Penn Valley Civic Association. She is responsible for bringing the Pollinator Pathway to Pennsylvania and known around Lower Merion and Narberth for her well-attended garden education programs. You can check out her website www.wildaboutnativeplants.com to learn more about planting to support native wildlife.

Thank you newsletter sponsors!



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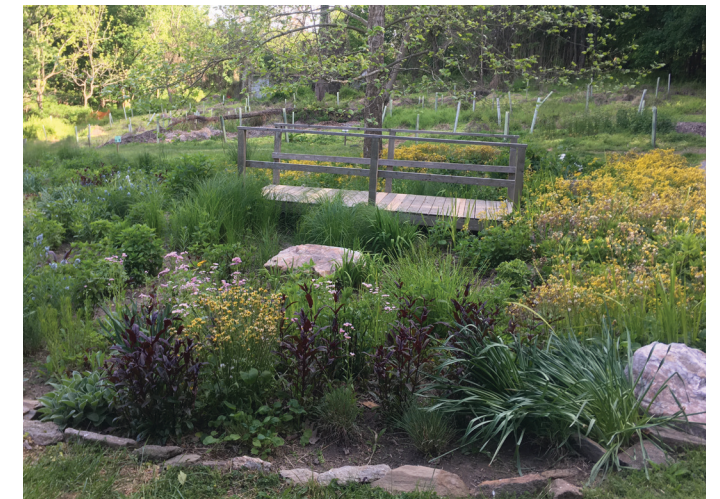
Consider purchasing a 6" Pollinator Pathway yard sign from the Lower Merion Conservancy to show your support for the project.

Joining the Pollinator Pathway is Easy!

- Coordinate with neighbors to create a pathway on your street. Introduce at least one native tree or small pollinator garden on each property.
- Convert at least 70% of your outdoor space to native plantings to support pollinators and reach the minimum threshold required to support thriving songbird populations.
- Reduce your lawn by 50%. Replace all lawn areas not used for recreation or walking paths with more ecologically valuable and stream-smart plantings.
- Register your property on the Pathway at www.pollinator-pathway.org/merion-narberth and consider purchasing a sign to display in your yard.

Rain Garden Starter Guide - Now Available Online

During storms, our swamped streets and surging streams are filled with water from buildings, driveways, sidewalks, and streets. Many properties channel water to streets or directly to storm sewers. This water carries pollutants - including metals and oil from cars, lawn chemicals, road salt, sediment, and general trash - and speeds up soil erosion. Warm summer storms heat streams to unnatural temperatures, lowering dissolved oxygen levels and harming aquatic life.



The established rain garden at the Conservancy.

When our neighborhoods were developed, streams were mostly ignored. Traditional stormwater management features aboveground hardscapes sloped towards belowground pipes that drain into streams. Much of our remaining open space is covered with turf grass, which has thick, shallow roots that limit stormwater absorption and contribute to runoff. As precipitation rates continue to increase, piping stormwater directly from roofs and sump pumps to streets will have progressively negative impacts on our streams and our infrastructure. Stream impairment is systemic, so everyone has a part to play in healing streams, protecting drinking water sources, and improving resiliency to future floods.

Green Street Update



Signs designed by Charlotte Paul.

The **Delmont Avenue Green Street** project is nearing completion. Thanks to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the William Penn Foundation and two years of hard work by the residents of Delmont Avenue, 12 downspout planters, 3 rain gardens, and hundreds of native shrubs and perennials will help slow and filter stormwater runoff before it enters the local waterway.

Much of the stormwater from individual properties could be kept out of streets and sent on a natural path through the ground. Groundwater takes a slower journey than surface water, alleviating pressure on streams and providing steady water flow during dry weather. Groundwater temperature is also cooler than surface water, so having more groundwater to feed streams benefits cold-loving aquatic life.

Rain gardens - depressed areas positioned to take on stormwater from buildings, sidewalks, or driveways - are great tools for handling residential stormwater. They are planted with native plants, whose roots increase water absorption, loosen compacted soil, and reduce erosion. As plants grow, so does their impact. Rain gardens are set below surrounding surface levels - creating a bowl or swale shape - to provide aboveground holding capacity while accounting for spatial limits of suburban yards. Mosquitoes are not an issue: rain gardens are designed to drain within 24-48 hours. In fact, if native plants are used, rain gardens can attract mosquito predators like dragonflies.

In May the Conservancy released a Rain Garden Guide detailing how to make rain gardens and a video to show how they work. Rain gardens can be effective on many properties in our area so if you are interested in creating habitat and protecting streams, consider installing one. Visit <https://lmconservancy.org/rain-garden-guide/> to get started. Email Tom@lmconservancy.org if you have questions.

The Cynwyd Heritage Trail, More Than a Bike Path

By Karen Snetselaar

During the spring and summer of Covid-19, residents of Lower Merion Township and adjacent areas are staying closer to home. One consequence has been increased visits to local parks, where recreation can happen while social distances are maintained. This includes the Cynwyd Heritage Trail, which may be best known as a bicycle path but also includes more than 20 acres of woods, creeks and lawns. The Friends of the Cynwyd Trail coordinates volunteers to help maintain these areas, but the pandemic forced the group to curtail the monthly work days and other events drawing large numbers of volunteers from scout groups, companies, and so on.

Instead, the Friends have been communicating frequently via email and videochats to carry out the trail maintenance activities themselves. Instead of wholesale weeding events, the focus has been on finding and protecting certain

valuable plants discovered in various places on the trail. This began with efforts to “free the may apple” from mugwort and other weeds that threatened it along creekside locations. Some trail workers were surprised and excited to find that many attractive native plants, like may apple, spiderwort and wild raspberry, are holding their own against some of the vigorous invasive species also found on the trail. It turns out that it’s quite satisfying to cut weeds away from a group of sassafras stems, for example, rather than laboriously uprooting weeds from a large area. (It’s a more sustainable practice too, because disturbing the soil by uprooting plants favors the regrowth of invasive species.) The Friends even picked up some contactless weeding help, putting out bins with internet links to instructional videos so free-lance volunteers could help with some of the weed control.

Volunteers were able to provide some trail enhancements even while maintaining social distancing. For example, native shrubs and groundcover plants were transplanted in a

location next to Vine Creek, in collaboration with the Lower Merion Conservancy. The purpose of the planting is to help stabilize the creekbank and provide habitat for animals. Planting instructions were provided via email and flats of plants picked up from a central location. Several overgrown wetland areas were also selectively weeded and restocked with appropriate plants.



Trail volunteer, Bill Halpin, with his bike wheelbarrow!



Freelance volunteers helped the Friends conduct contactless weeding along the trail. The QR codes on the bins linked to instructional videos, making it easy for any visitor to help!



Did you see orange flags along the Cynwyd Heritage Trail this summer? The flags represent the locations of new native plants. Over time, the native plants will fill out and protect the streambanks of Vine Creek from stormwater erosion.



While not native, chicory is not considered invasive along the trail.

The weekly natural history trail walks planned in a pre-Covid world couldn’t happen. Instead, QR-coded signs were placed near various plants so anyone with a cellphone can do their own tour and learn about the wildlife near the trail. For example, some plants on the trail are not native, but they have naturalized here and many have interesting histories. The lovely blue-flowered chicory was brought from Europe because the roots can be used as a coffee substitute and the leaves of some varieties make a tasty salad. Like its relative, dandelion, this plant should not be considered invasive on the trail, where disturbances of various kinds have happened over the years.

With zoos, waterparks, and other traditional family-friendly venues off-limits, young families spent more time walking on the trail and exploring adjacent areas. The Friends put out signs with QR code links to videos designed to help parents engage kids with suggested activities. For example, although there are lots of ideas about where the spiderwort plant gets its name, the most likely one comes from the web-like sticky material produced when a stem of the plant is broken. Try it!



QR codes offered activities for families along the trail, like learning about how spiderwort (pictured) got its name.

The limitations on travel this summer have resulted in many of us becoming interested in things closer to home. It turns out that the more time you spend looking, the more there is to see, and the more you begin to wonder about what you see. Because the Friends had to spend more time thinking about what was most important to accomplish on the trail, we realized that much of the “cleanup” that involves removing last year’s dead plants or plants perceived as “weeds” wasn’t necessarily necessary or even desirable. Instead, the Friends prioritized helping trail users to enjoy the natural world surrounding them as they walked or biked along the trail.

Guest writer Dr. Karen Snetselaar is a Conservancy and Cynwyd Heritage Trail Board Member and former Professor of Biology at Saint Joseph’s University.

Conservancy Receives Grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for Township’s Cynwyd Heritage Trail

The Lower Merion Conservancy has been awarded a \$223,850 grant to make stormwater improvements along Lower Merion Township’s Cynwyd Heritage Trail. The project will restore meadows and vegetation along Vine Creek and will improve wildlife habitat and water quality along the multi-use recreational trail. The project will take place over the next two years.



Sabine Park

On the grounds of the former 1890s Narberth Elementary School, Sabine Park is one of two public green spaces left in Narberth Borough and features many mature trees, a playground, and approximately 1.5 acres of recreation space. Tucked atop the hill at the corner of Sabine and Montgomery Avenues, the park is barely visible from the road, but it continues to be a destination place for hundreds of frequent visitors from Narberth and Lower Merion.

Thanks to Christa Staab, the director of Friends of Sabine Park, and her passion for green space and community goodwill, Sabine Park is getting a boost of native wildflowers! Last spring, the Conservancy and Friends of Sabine Park began installing a native wildflower garden along the park's steep slope along Sabine Avenue. Once a sparse and shallow-rooted grass patch, the slope has become an attraction for visitors and wildlife. Brilliant cardinal flowers, spiderwort, mountain mint, nodding onion, wild ginger and strawberries, asters, and chokeberries provide habitat and food for birds, butterflies and other important pollinators. New plantings in the park help to mitigate rainwater rushing onto Montgomery Avenue and the Gully Run downslope during storms, helping to reduce the destructive impacts of stormwater runoff on roads and waterways. Plans to expand the native wildflower garden are underway this fall and aim to expand on the beauty and function of the converted strip of grass.



Conservancy staff member Amy Chapkovich, volunteer Kristin Nakaishi, and Friends of Sabine Park Director Christa Staab worked to plant new natives plants in the park.

Historic Preservation

English Village Story Map

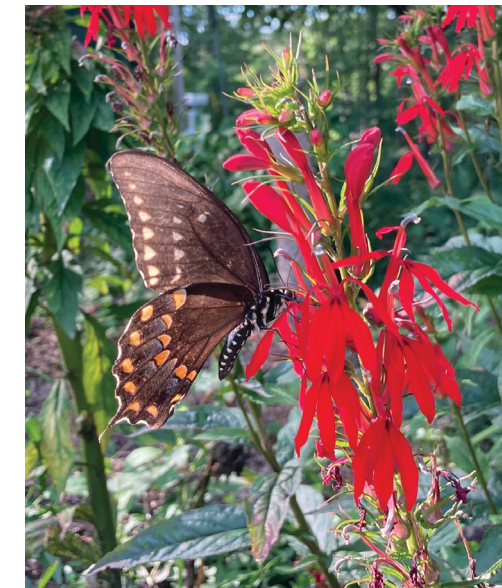
Did you miss out on your summer vacation to Europe? Look no further than Wynnewood's English Village Historic District for a taste of pastoral England! The Conservancy's latest Story Map features a walking tour of this charming country neighborhood in the heart of Lower Merion! Follow along on your smartphone while walking or cycling through the neighborhood or enjoy from your couch!



Revitalizing the Betty Reeves Wildflower Garden

This summer, "going into the office" took on a new meaning for Lower Merion Conservancy staff. While we mainly worked from home and held our meetings through Zoom, we took to Rolling Hill Park one evening every week to weed (physically-distant) in the Betty Reeves Wildflower Garden near the public parking lot.

The Betty Reeves garden is home to numerous varieties of native plants and shrubs that are host to wildlife favorites like hummingbirds, butterflies, beetles and more. Our weekly weeding sessions helped to keep aggressive invasive plants such as Japanese Stiltgrass, Mile a Minute Weed, and Japanese Hops at bay. You will even see a stump of the Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), the favored host of the pesky Spotted Lanternfly in the garden, chopped down by Conservation Coordinator, Tom Clark. You can learn more about controlling this invasive tree and insect in the Spotted Lanternfly Resource Guide on our website.



A swallowtail butterfly lands on a blooming cardinal flower.

To help control the spread of invasive plants, we added a handful of new plantings such as Mountain Mint, Winterberry, and Spiderwort, which will fill out and compete with the invasive plants in years ahead. Native plants have deep root systems and are specially adapted to succeed in our region. When given a chance to fully root, they will literally hold their ground against invasive competitors as the established Blue Flag Iris, Inkberry, and Celandine Poppy already do.



Lane and Brandon Halbert working on the new stone path.

We especially want to thank volunteers Kristin Nakaishi, Kylie Stetler, Brandon Halbert, Lane Halbert, Luke Hamilton, Alicia Forero, Bruce Ludwig, Alan Wood, and Hilarie Johnston for spending time caring for the garden this summer. It would not have bloomed as beautifully without you!

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Learn about the Pollinator Pathway program inside!



**Members-only
Mushroom
Identification Walk
October 10!**

