

Preserving At-risk Wildlife and Biodiversity Through Gardening — Welcome to the Cold Spring Park Pollinator Garden

By Alan Noguee, Board President, Friends of Cold Spring Park



Newly established pollinator garden in Cold Spring Park

As a Newton Conservators' member, you probably know the gloomy biodiversity news: big declines in birds, insects, and many other animals and plants, with one million species — one-quarter of the known total count — on a path to extinction.

But let's talk solutions, including one we can all participate in (in addition to protecting open space in Newton!). Many of us may also belong to wildlife organizations that often do campaigns to protect at-risk charismatic species, like polar bears or pandas or snow leopards or wolves, etc. Great!

But what if there were creatures right in our back yards that

- used to be very common but have only recently become very rare,
- are among the most important group of animals enabling the plants in our local environment to reproduce,
- help form the foundation of the food web that provides for birds, reptiles, amphibians, small mammals, and the larger mammals that feed on them,
- have a local scientist studying changes in their populations and the plants they need to eat, and training citizen scientists like us to assist with his research,

- need beautiful plants that anyone can grow,
- and that have people across Massachusetts participating in a project to save them?



Newly established pollinator garden at the entrance to Cold Spring Park



Bombus fervidus

Meet *Bombus fervidus*, the golden northern bumble bee, and *Bombus vagans*, the half-black bumble bee, and the plants they love. Meet the ten species of butterflies at risk that rely on those plants. And meet Dr. Robert Gegear, the UMass Dartmouth

professor working to keep them from becoming locally extinct.

We have already lost two of 11 bumblebee species in Massachusetts in the last few decades. In addition to *B. fervidus* and *B. vagans*, another species, *B. terricola*, the yellow

banded bumblebee, which inhabits higher elevations in Western Massachusetts, is also at risk.



Bombus vagans,

Dr. Gegear's research on saving these at-risk bees, and the plants they depend on, provides the inspiration for the Cold Spring Park pollinator garden installed last fall right at the park's Beacon Street entrance, in front of the tennis courts. The garden includes 26 native plant species on Dr. Gegear's list of plants to support the

at-risk bees and butterflies. (They will also support more generalist pollinators, too.) It was planted by Eagle Scout DoBi Wollaber and Troop 209 and Friends of Cold Spring Park volunteers, with funding raised by DoBi and from Friends of Cold Spring Park, Green Newton, and Newton Conservators.



Volunteers helping plant the pollinator garden in Cold Spring Park

The garden will take a few years to get established and fill in. The species we planted include three native grasses, several shrubs (meadowsweet, Carolina rose, shrubby St. John's wort, and prairie willow, which is coming in spring), and many perennials. Two redbud trees were previously planted by the city in what is now the pollinator garden. All together, these species will provide the at-risk bees and butterflies with flowers in bloom throughout the season from early spring to late fall.

You can find the specific list of plants at the Cold Spring garden, along with links to descriptions, pictures, and where they can be procured, as well as much more about the garden on new web pages at coldspringpark.org. These pages also include links to Dr. Gegear's research and his plant lists: <https://coldspringpark.org/pollinator-garden-plant-list-and-design/> In the summer, we'll be explaining the garden to Farmers Market visitors and offering a brochure or leaflet. Eventually,

we hope to give away seeds and instructions how to plant them, perhaps setting up a "Little Seed Library" with seeds from the garden.

Some of the plants are familiar and common, like wild geraniums and violets. Others, like downy and hairy wood mint, are rare and endangered in Massachusetts. Many are hard to find at big box stores or even local nurseries. But a growing number of nurseries are starting to supply them, and with increasing demand, even more will surely follow. One new (woman-owned) nursery, Bluestem Natives in Norwell, specializes in carrying these hard-to-find pollinator critical plants.

We hope that you will be inspired by the Cold Spring Park garden to grow some of the same plants, or others on Dr. Gegear's list, in your own yards. Also inspirational is the new pollinator demonstration garden at Newton City Hall, installed with a grant from Newton Conservators, and a toolkit of plant lists and resources on the Conservators' website: <https://newtonconservators.org/pollinator-toolkit/>

Some towns, like Lincoln, have developed an entire action plan to create connected corridors of these plants in open spaces and yards across the entire town. Others have native plant groups that are also planting and promoting Dr. Gegear's plants in the towns in the Mystic-Charles Pollinator Pathways Group, including Cambridge, Somerville, Watertown, Belmont, Waltham, and more. Newton Conservators' board member Samantha Corbin is running a program for the Metrowest Pollinator Task Force selling kits of plants from Dr. Gegear's list throughout the Metrowest region (sorry, that region doesn't include Newton).

Of course, like most native plants, those in the Cold Spring garden also help retain stormwater and carbon in their deep roots, don't need additional fertilizers or pesticides or



Redbud blooms

mowing, need less water, and store more carbon than most familiar non-native garden plants after they are established.

You can learn about the science behind Dr. Gegear's research in this webinar the Conservators sponsored last year <https://youtu.be/Xs60YDw-8FQ>

Let's help beautify Newton, save at-risk species, and make our city more climate resilient by incorporating new native plants in our yards! ♦