

# Supporting wild pollinators at your faith community\*

Wild pollinators — native bees, flies, moths, butterflies, beetles, and more — provide critical life-support services on this planet. Yet they are underappreciated and often overlooked. Faith communities, with their strong mandate to *care for creation*, are great allies in supporting a strong, resilient, biodiverse ecosystem, where native pollinators can flourish. Gardens are very visible to the community and can be a great way to inspire the neighbourhood to do more for our wild pollinators. Faith communities can lead by example and be local champions for the need to protect our native bees, butterflies, and other beneficial insects.



Faith community garden spaces that currently provide colourful, lush landscape and peaceful, contemplative spaces can do double duty and also offer haven and habitat to hard-working and important wild pollinator species. Faith communities are well positioned to demonstrate that gardens can be both beautiful and beneficial!



## Creation is beautiful and diverse

*Canada has hundreds of native bee species. They come in many colours and sizes, practise different ways of life, and play critical life support roles on this planet. Read more about [wild bees in North America](#).*

## Show your support for wild pollinators

*Put up a sign that expresses how much you value the important work wild pollinators do in your faith community. Choose the message that best reflects your space and your appreciation. See [WPP garden signs](#).*

## 1. Identify and protect existing areas that support pollinators

If the grounds of your faith community are large enough to have the following sorts of areas in the back or in a less visible space, leave them as they are, and enhance them by adding more plants that are native to our region:

- **patches of wildflowers** and some plants we consider to be “weeds” offer food and shelter to pollinators
- **long grass** provides shelter, nesting areas, and food for the larvae of beneficial insects
- **bare soil** on flat or sloped ground is a welcome nesting site for solitary bees
- **hedges** supply food, shelter, and nesting sites
- **stone walls or brush piles** offer shelter and overwintering sites

### No sting, no worries

*Wild bees are not aggressive, so it is safe to have them working and nesting in your faith community. In fact, males of all bee species are incapable of stinging.*



### Goldenrods are gold!

*Goldenrods get a bad rap, often blamed for allergies as they bloom during ragweed season. Goldenrod pollen is carried by insects (not blown on the wind like ragweed pollen) and goldenrod flowers are favourites of our native pollinators — they support up to 115 insect species.*

*There are many varieties of native goldenrods: sun-loving, shade-tolerant, slow-growing groundcovers, some that grow in clumps.*

## 2. Plant for season-long flowering

Plants on the grounds of your faith community may already flower abundantly during the summer. But pollinators need food throughout the season, including early spring when they emerge from hibernation, and fall when they are migrating or preparing to overwinter. No matter what you grow at your faith community, you can help pollinators by deliberately planting to provide a continuous succession of blooms.

For best results, plant a diversity of mostly native species, which co-evolved with native insects. Select a wide variety of colours, sizes, and flower shapes, and group them in clusters to make foraging easy for pollinators. Shrubs and trees also provide pollen and nectar, so consider what is already on your property as part of your “bloom time schedule.”

**Flowering periods of native species**

See *Ontario Wildflowers'* [Flowering seasons](#)

**Finding native plants**

For information about obtaining native plants in the Ontario East – Outaouais region, visit the [Resources](#) page on our website.

### 3. Cultivate the shadows and other marginal spaces

Does your faith community have places where it is difficult to incorporate a planting bed — spaces like shady corners, dry spots, moist areas, or oddly shaped nooks? If so, consider filling those spaces with native plant species.

- **shady corners** are great places to grow woodland wildflowers, shrubs, and small trees — some of which bloom early in the season, offering critical nourishment when pollinators start to emerge from hibernation
- **dry spots** are not a problem for many hardy native perennials and flowering herbs that support wild pollinators
- **heavy clay soils** offer conditions where many adaptable and attractive “clay-buster” native plants can thrive
- **moist areas** are welcome environments for numerous resilient and appealing native perennials that attract wild pollinators
- **oddly-shaped nooks** can accommodate a diversity of plants, including flowering ground covers, perennials and shrubs for layers of pollinator habitat, or brush and rock piles for potential nesting and overwintering sites



**Plants for particular conditions and habitats**

[Drought tolerant plants for sun and shade](#)

[Native plants for clay soils](#)

[Wildflowers by habitat](#)



### Go natural

*The grounds around your faith community may already be chemical-free. If not, strive to avoid using chemicals — they can harm pollinators, other beneficial insects, soil organisms, and desirable wildlife. Whenever possible, find alternative ways to solve garden issues and avoid damaging the natural systems at work in your community garden. See [Grow a chemical-free garden](#) and [The secret to a pest- and chemical-free garden](#)*

## 4. Plant the edges

Does your faith community have partial or complete fences? Does it have boundaries that you would like to enhance or define more clearly? If you answer “yes” to either of these questions, consider adding a pollinator strip or hedge to your fence or perimeter.

A pollinator strip or hedge will provide food, shelter, and nesting and overwintering sites for pollinators in a continuous flow all around the faith community grounds. It will enable insects to thrive, to live and travel safely, and to play their roles in supporting creation at your faith community. Everyone will benefit.

**Pollinator strip** – A low-profile, pollinator-friendly planting that adds colour and beauty to the perimeter or fence of the community garden. Start with as little as a 50-cm strip and choose height depending on flower species. Ideally, it would include

- perennials – species native to the region and/or older varieties of cultivated plants and herbs that produce plenty of pollen and nectar
- a variety of green vegetation for use as bee nesting material and food for larvae of other pollinating insects

Make sure to

- combine plants that flower at different times (see Ontario Wildflowers’ [Flowering seasons](#))
- select plants with a variety of flower shapes, sizes, and colours to meet the needs of diverse pollinators
- plant in clusters or drifts to make the flowers easily visible and to make foraging easy for pollinators
- avoid showy “double blooms” that make it difficult for insects to access the flower and that may not provide pollen



### **Wild is better**

*Wild native bees are highly effective pollinators and a viable alternative to non-native, managed honeybees. They are, in fact, better pollinators for many plants than honeybees. See [Wild pollinator habitat benefits agriculture](#).*



**Pollinator hedge** – A more substantial border, preferably with a diversity of native perennial trees, shrubs, canes, and vines that produce fruit, nuts, and seeds. Depending on the shrubs chosen, hedges require 2–4 m in width. The result will be a flowering, attractive edge that offers

- food, shelter, nesting and overwintering sites for pollinators
- a feature that attracts, shelters, and feeds birds that eat garden pests
- privacy and shelter from the wind for gardeners, plants, and insects
- roots that retain soil moisture and store carbon
- additional food harvest potential for community garden members

Make sure to

- plant species that bloom at different times (see [Flowering seasons](#))
- integrate diverse native ground covers, perennials, and grasses for additional layers of pollinator habitat
- avoid over-managing the hedge — leave it relatively natural by pruning different sections on a 3-year rotational cycle; this approach will disturb fewer nesting pollinators and birds and will ensure flowers every season

### **Inspiration from other faith communities**

*Take a look at [Faith & the Common Good – Outdoor Greening Case Studies](#), which profile some wonderful pollinator gardens. Faith community gardeners share details on their local outdoor projects along with the lessons learned and memorable moments!*

**Include *creation care* messages in various faith community activities**

*Let your congregation know what you are doing by providing inspiring messages in your bulletin or during your service. Have an Earth Day service that focuses on the ecosystem and how our native pollinators are crucial for a healthy planet, or involve young children or your youth group in ecological gardening activities to support our wild pollinator insects.*

## **WILD POLLINATOR PARTNERS**

Ontario east — Outaouais

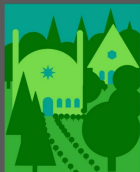
*Supporting wild pollinators,  
empowering people who care*

**Web site:** [wildpollinators-pollinisateurssauvages.ca](http://wildpollinators-pollinisateurssauvages.ca)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/WildPollinators](https://www.facebook.com/WildPollinators)

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\*We thank Faith and the Common Good for adapting this material for use by faith communities.



**Faith & the  
Common Good**

**La foi et le  
bien commun**