

Million Garden Challenge

By the National Pollinator Garden Network

www.millionpollinatorgarden.org

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The National Pollinator Garden Network was recently formed to help establish one million gardens to support pollinator recovery in the United States. Over the next 2 years, The Network will bring together the science and garden capabilities of industry with the outreach of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), to empower a million private citizens and organizations to plant pollinator gardens nationwide.

Founding Nonprofit Partners: American Public Garden Association, National Gardening Association, National Wildlife Federation, and Pollinator Partnership.

Founding Garden Industry Organizations: AmericanHort, American Seed Trade Association, Home Garden Seed Association, and National Garden Bureau.

Gardening and Habitat Planting Partners: National Wildlife Federation, National Garden Clubs, Inc., Keep America Beautiful, American Community Garden Association, National Recreation and Parks Association, Master Gardeners' network, The Garden Club of America, National Garden Association, Monarch Watch, Wild Ones, and the Xerces Society.

Through this unprecedented collaboration of national, regional, and local gardening clubs, the National Pollinator Garden Network (NPGN) will help restore critical pollinator populations in support of the President's Memorandum on "*Creating a Federal Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators.*" The NPGN collectively represents approximately 800,000 gardeners and 10,000 schoolyard gardens, and brings a baseline of 250,000 *registered* pollinator gardens nationwide from across its five main founding organizations. The focus of the NPGN is: *to inspire individuals and community groups, institutions, and the garden industry to create more pollinator habitat through sustainable gardening practices and habitat conservation, and to provide these groups with the tools to be successful.*

NPGN has the potential to mobilize half a million gardeners in the next 12 months by both leveraging existing networks and securing commitments from additional gardening and habitat planting partners. With private sector partnership support, the NPGN can confidently reach the million garden goal by December 2016.

Background:

Recent declines in the number and distribution of pollinating insects such as bees and butterflies has caused significant concern among ecologists and agricultural interests. Some of the decline has been seen in managed bee populations (used in agriculture) and in native bees. Iconic species such as monarch butterflies have also experienced declines. In addition to being important to natural ecosystems across North America, pollinators are also critical to one third of food production and over \$15 billion in agricultural products. While there is increasing evidence of pollinator population declines, the exact numbers are not known. One of the clearest and most dramatic pollinator losses has been seen in the monarch butterfly populations, which have declined by more than 90% over the past two decades.



To better assess and address the decline of pollinators in the United States, President Obama issued a Presidential Memorandum, *“Creating a Federal Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators,”* directing Federal agencies to take steps to protect and restore pollinator populations. Central to President Obama’s message was the call to “develop new public-private partnerships and increased citizen engagement,” with an all-hands-on-deck approach to restoring pollinator health. The Million Garden Challenge is in direct response to this call for action.

There are many ascribed causes for pollinator declines in the United States, but one critical contributing stressor that experts agree upon is the overall loss in the amount and distribution of habitat and food plants. While part of the solution is restoring pollinator habit on large parcels of land, there is a critical role that individual gardens can play in restoring pollinator health. The Million Garden Challenge will encourage the creation of new gardens, which provide the food and habitat needs of pollinators, and the refurbishment of existing gardens with native plants and more plant species that support pollinators. The conservation value of the individual sites should not be underestimated, with just a few square feet being sufficient to support hundreds of pollinating insects. Aggregated together, these individual gardens will provide a significant density of critical habitat in urban and suburban areas for a range of pollinators.



Toward a Million Pollinator Gardens:

In addition to Federal agency responses, there is an opportunity for every citizen to participate in the call to action. Every household, business, and school can provide food and habitat for pollinators. Each year three out of four Americans with homes engage in some form of gardening. Much of what they plant are flower species and shrubs that are not native to the United States and therefore do not provide adequate food and shelter for pollinator species. But, many of America’s gardeners are going beyond simple ornamental flowerbed planting and landscaping to grow food and herbs (40 million people). In addition, more than nine million Americans already self-identify as gardening with wildlife

and habitat benefits in mind. This points to the opportunity for all gardeners across America to go a step further and grow more native plants that are natural food and habitat for pollinators.

A key purpose of launching the Million Garden Challenge is to reach out to America's robust gardening community and to educate and support them in making more native plants available in their gardens—understanding the critical role that such actions can play in re-establishing declining pollinator populations. This can be done through the combined efforts of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other public-private partnerships that collectively provide public education capacity, scientific expertise, knowledge of native plants, and capacity to plant gardens in large numbers.



First: A Core of NGOs with Established Pollinator and Garden Expertise:

Collaboration among hundreds of organizations will be necessary make the Million Garden Challenge a reality. The Challenge has started with a steering group of founding partners including: National Wildlife Federation, American Public Garden Association, National Gardening Association, National Garden Bureau, and Pollinator Partnership, along with cooperating Garden Industry organizations: AmericanHort, American Seed Trade Association, and Home Garden Seed Association. These organizations will comprise the core the National Pollinator Garden Network (NPGN).

These organizations are known for their dedication to public education on pollinators, support for science research, habitat creation, and action. They can likewise help to anchor the Million Garden Challenge in sound science and effective gardening practices, and can help recruit organizations, agencies, and companies that have pollinator garden capability. In addition, The Garden Industry organizations are committed to educating their professionals on pollinator friendly practices and getting the word out to general public gardeners through seed companies and retail venues.

Initial activities will include:

- **Branding-**
Website: www.millionpollinatorgardens.org
 The National Wildlife Federation will host this site on behalf of the National Pollinator Garden Network. It will include a link to the Pollinator Partnership SHARE site for people to register their gardens on a map.
Logo – Design work donated by National Gardening Association.
Template Campaign Language-print and digital tag lines for distribution to Garden Seed and Retail markets, facilitated by ASTA, AmericanHort, The National Garden Bureau, and Home Seed Association.
- **Social Media Plan-** National Wildlife Federation and the National Gardening Association have developed the following recommended hashtag options from which all NPGN partners will choose and then follow for the campaign - with the URL linking them back to www.millionpollinatorgardens.org.

 - **#polliNATION** – fun and witty! Compiles tweets into the general #pollination conversation. Wouldn't need to work into a tweet, mostly would just tag each tweet at the end. Only concern, folks might not realize it's for gardens or a campaign.
 - **#plant4pollinators** – very concrete and tells people exactly what we want them to do. Might not be relevant beyond the gardening communities, those who don't have gardens. Would be best to talk about gardening specific content.
 - **#ThankAPollinator** – good to bring the campaign beyond the physical 1 million gardens and into the social sphere.
 - **#butterflyheroes** – a great way to get kids involved by having them pledge to be a “butterfly hero” by planting a pollinator garden. More than 30,000 families have already promised to participate through this viral social media campaign. (Example of how NWF and each partner will link goals of the million garden challenge to their existing initiatives.)
- **Launch-** In May 2015, in coordination with a broader Administration announcement on their pollinator recovery Strategy, there will be a public media announcement and launch of a nationwide call to action across all NPGN websites, digital media, and publications, such as NWF's *Ranger Rick* magazine. This will be timed to be to show a strong individual action element of the larger plan (effectively crowd sourcing a critical part of the response to the pollinator health challenge).
- **Education and Outreach-** the founding partners of the National Pollinator Garden Network (NPGN) collectively reach millions to promote the urgent need for pollinator gardens. For example, American Public Gardens reaches 75 million visitors through its 570 member public gardens and 8,000 professionals' networks. The National Wildlife Federation reaches 6 million members and supporters.
- **Secure Dedicated Funding for Initiative-** the Network members are non-profit, public interest organizations that rely on financial support from members and donors. The Network and its members will seek financial support from foundations, major donors, and corporate partners to maintain this multi-year campaign.

The recruitment campaign will be in full swing by early summer 2015.

Second: Activating Other Organizations with Gardeners on the Ground:

The Founding partners of the National Pollinator Garden Network will work together to implement a plan that will result in one million pollinator gardens over the next two years. Several of these founding organization are in communication and have relationships with gardeners and organizations that support gardening. We will combine knowledge and expertise on native plants, pollinator science, food and habitat, and distribution, with the on-the-ground capacity of key organizations made up of people who garden.



Target organizations that will be part of this on-the-ground effort will include:

- **National Wildlife Federation Garden for Wildlife/Certified Habitat Program** – The National Wildlife Federation has 40 years of experience in gardening for wildlife and 187,000 certified habitats and 500,000 graders. These include some 175,000 places of residence, 5,000 farms and ranches, 7,000 schools, 1,000 places of worship, community gardens, nature centers, zoos, aquariums and arboretums, in addition to many thousands of acres of public parks. Each year 1.4 million school children and 40,000 educators participate on the Garden for Wildlife program via our school garden/habitat work. In addition, the National Wildlife Federation recently launched its social media “butterfly heroes” campaign, which encouraged kids and families to pledge to plant pollinator gardens— more than 30,000 families signed up within a month.
- **National Garden Association** – has a network of 10,000 gardens it has supported over the years in addition to being a major source of education.
- **National Garden Clubs, Inc.** – has 6,000 garden clubs across the United States and 200,000 active members. Recently the National Garden Clubs has made a special commitment to native plants and habitats.
- **The Garden Club of America** – has 300 clubs and 18,000 members, and has a growing interest in the environment including climate change, native plants, and phenology.
- **Keep America Beautiful** – has beautification and community greening programs in 600 communities across the United States, and each year its members tend to tens of thousands of garden plots in public spaces and on private lands across the country.
- **National Recreation and Park Association** – has found that as many as 50% of the city, county, and town park and recreation agencies in the United States operate accessible community garden programs – there are 1,500 agencies in the NRPA membership that have such programs with a minimum enrolled garden population of 225,000 plots.



- **The American Community Garden Association** – provides support to hundreds of community garden groups across the United States.
- **Master Gardeners Network** – has programs and networks via Extension in all 50 states and a nationwide total of 95,000 expert gardeners, who are advising gardeners in their communities on how to be more effective. They reach millions of gardeners each year and provide novices and experts alike with significant help on a range of subjects including pollinators and native plants.
- **Monarch Watch-** has approximately 10,000 Monarch Way Station habitat gardens nationwide, and a milkweed market for ordering milkweed plugs essential to monarch butterfly breeding.
- **Wild Ones**, a network of approximately 10,000 habitat gardens promoting pollinators and wildlife.
- **Xerces Society for Invertebrate Biology, Bring Back the Pollinators** program, with 17,000 participants.



Taken as a whole, the above list of organizations provide a base of at least one million of America’s most avid and committed gardeners, with further reach via the Master Gardener Network to millions more. The founding partner organizations will establish partnerships with these and other organizations to ensure that the goal of one million pollinator gardens is reached within two years.



Third: Activating Public-Private Partnerships

The founding partners of the National Pollinator Garden Network are working to identify key corporate and high profile institutional partners that have missions that align with the Million Garden Challenge.

Other key corporate partners may include national chains, regional key retail operations, garden centers/nurseries, etc., where pollinator friendly seeds and plants can be purchased.

With resources, The NPGN could identify signature opportunities to create high visibility gardens at key state and local sites, such as sports stadiums, universities, governor mansions/state capitals/city halls, shopping malls, etc.

Six-Month Timeline

April-Early May

- URLs secured by NWF e.g. *millionpollinatorgardens.org* and *milliongardens.org* to finalize the website, which provides information to potential participants, pledge/registration to allow tracking of progress towards the million garden goal, and describes partner activities with links to their resources, including the SHARE map site.
- Aggregate preliminary commitments from Gardening and Habitat Planting organizations.
- Finalize logo designed by the National Gardening Association (available week of April 29.)
- Develop list of key events/campaigns from national organizations where the million garden challenge will be promoted, i.e., May 8 National Public Gardens Day, May-Gardening for Wildlife Month and Be a Butterfly Hero, Pollinator Week, etc.
- Finalize Social Media plan, hashtags finalized.
- Finalize Garden Industry template messaging for distribution to retailers nationally.

May

- Launch campaign through public events across the nation, including potential launch event at the White House, call to action across all NPGN websites/email servers, and through social media. Announcement will be timed to coincide with the Federal Pollinator Health Strategy roll out.
- Leverage Garden Challenge announcement to secure private sector partners and show early wins.

June

- Show momentum by highlighting early wins throughout the country, through small events and social media (constantly monitor and track progress)
- Promote participation in the Challenge throughout National Pollinator Week, including aggressive social media campaign

Summer and Fall

- Continue to raise visibility of the Challenge for fall planting season
- Announce additional corporate and institutional partners, as appropriate

- Coordinate campaign with anticipated U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announcements around Monarchs, I-35 etc. in Fall
- Announce achievement of first 500,000 gardens (anticipated)

Fourth: Sharing Consistent Campaign Messaging:

Proposed Messaging- *To be shared consistently through the NPGN networks and media.*

Take Action for Pollinators!

- 1) **Everyone can help!** - Individuals, schools, community groups, businesses.
- 2) **Any size garden, bigger and better is best** – from window and patio planters, to home gardens, to pathway and roadsides, to acres of prairies and meadows.
- 3) **Support pollinator friendly businesses!** Purchase plants or seeds from nurseries, garden centers, and seed suppliers who offer pollinator-friendly plants and seeds suited to your local area.
- 4) **Watch our Websites for free seeds** - As the challenge moves forward, look for corporate and philanthropic sponsorship of seed and plant resources.
- 5) **Be a Butterfly Hero!** Targeted toward children and families to pledge to take local action and plant milkweed as part of their pollinator garden.
- 6) **Pledge to plant sustainably for lasting impact!** Reduce or eliminate the impact of pesticides on pollinators, conserve water, and provide an overall healthy habitat for pollinators and people. Find tips and lists to help you create gardens that help pollinators in your state or region at NPGN member websites.
- 7) **Count Your Garden on the S.H.A.R.E map** (Simply Having Areas Reserved for the Environment): <http://pollinator.org/SHARE.html>. You can upload a photo of your pollinator garden or landscape as you join in our campaign to reach 1 million sites!
- 8) **Share your Garden on Social Media with #PolliNATIONgarden**

BEE Inspired!

- Parents and teachers, get your kids and students excited about pollinators and gardening by engaging them from seed to table with lessons and activities.
- Visit a public or private garden to learn more about plants and pollinators.
- Experiment with a window box, porch patio containers, one or many garden beds, and observe the results that your efforts have in attracting pollinators by supplying what they need - pollen and nectar with the right plant for the right place.