



## Native Flower Teaching Garden Under Construction

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My husband and I began our beekeeping journey 11 years ago and quickly became fascinated with pollinators. As a retired educator, my passion is providing educational outreach on a variety of topics, showcasing pollinators and pollinator habitats, while highlighting the important role pollinators play in agriculture and healthy ecosystems. Reflecting on opportunities to supplement our programs with engaging hands-on experiences, we began to envision a native flower teaching garden on our property. We wanted to demonstrate firsthand how small changes in our own backyards can have a big impact. So, we immediately broke ground and began phase one of the development of our teaching garden.

During our first year, we were busy establishing our garden and making sure our property supported a healthy ecosystem before opening our garden to the public. We planted both nectar and host pollinator plants with a wide range of bloom times, focusing on keystone varieties and plants native to Southwestern Virginia. We registered our garden as a Bee Friendly Garden and a Monarch Waystation, and we certified our property as Wildlife and Firefly Habitats.

Although most of our energy during our first year was focused on establishing the garden, we did have an opportunity to share this space with several individuals and groups in our area, including



Figure 1: Phase One



Figure 2: Visitors can access plant and insect identification materials found in the kiosk.

members of the Botetourt County Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Committee. In addition to onsite tours, we continue to provide outreach programs in our community, at which we are able to provide information on establishing pollinator habitats.

This year, we have begun phase two of the expansion of our garden. We are working to add more native trees and shrubs and remove non-native invasive plant species on our property. We continue to be inspired through our involvement with Pollinator Partnership, Bee Friendly Gardening, the [Virginia Native Plant Society](#), and the Blue Ridge Wildflower Society. We have been influenced by the work of Douglas W. Tallamy through [Homegrown National Park](#), and his best-selling book entitled *Nature's Best Hope - A New Approach to Conservation that Starts in Your Yard*.

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We continue to look for ways to share our knowledge with others. Over the past couple of years, we have collaborated with a local middle school and its Agriscience classes to provide educational programming. As a result of this collaboration, we have provided consultation on establishing their own native pollinator garden at the school, and we have scheduled a tour of our gardens for later this spring. This summer, we will be providing a workshop at [Carilion Clinic's Morningside Urban Farm](#), where we will be sharing information about keystone plants and strategies for creating a garden that supports a variety of pollinators throughout their lifecycle, including bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds.



*Figure 3: Educational Outreach at Carilion's Urban Farm*

Our vision is that the teaching garden (and our property) will be used by individuals and groups interested in learning more about creating rich, healthy ecosystems. We hope these hands-on experiences will supplement our educational outreach programs and will demonstrate firsthand how small changes can have a big impact in our own backyards.

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