



# How Our Town Created a Pollinator-Friendly Property Maintenance Ordinance (Part 1)

By Bonny McLaughlin Stitt

I've always loved gardening, but it took on a new significance for me after reading Doug Tallamy's book, *Nature's Best Hope*, in the fall of 2022. What had seemed like a selfish hobby suddenly became a meaningful, potentially world-changing project right here in my own backyard in West Fork, Arkansas. I never imagined that this project would eventually catapult me into political involvement in my community!

Prior to reading Tallamy's book, I had begun growing native plants in my yard, without understanding the significance of it. I had not realized that it takes millions of years for insects and plants to develop their unique symbiotic relationship with each other, or that songbirds rely on insect larvae in order to feed and raise their young—those soft little protein packages, in the form of worms and caterpillars, that they can stuff down their baby's throats. I had not understood that most insects require native plants on which to lay their eggs, and that without these plants, there would be no food for the birds to feed their babies. Further, I didn't realize that nesting birds flying over an area with no native plants may see only a foodless desert.

I had heard that honey bee populations were diminishing, but I didn't realize that our native bees, along with a whole host of other native insects, butterflies, and moths, were also in trouble. And I did not understand how much we rely on pollinators—bees, birds, butterflies, and other flying insects—to help us grow our food and other plants.

Rather than trying to stop the inevitable spread of development, Tallamy had the idea of creating what he called a "Homegrown National Park" by inviting homeowners to change the way we garden. This idea really captured my imagination. Since housing developments in the U.S. comprise more than 40 million acres of land, the idea of creating wildlife corridors and pockets of habitat in our own backyards really made sense to me. Why shouldn't we create landscapes that support life, rather than turning our yards into barren wastelands with non-native plants and turf grass lawns? Finally, I felt I had an



*A fellow West Fork gardener turned his front yard into a wildflower meadow*

**POLLINATOR  
PARTNERSHIP**

600 Montgomery Street, Suite 440 San Francisco, CA 94111



opportunity to use my passion for gardening and my ½-acre yard to make a positive impact on the planet.

I began to reimagine my own yard. My husband and I were already growing several vegetable gardens, fruit trees, and some flower beds. But we also have a large area of lawn, and I wanted to take Doug Tallamy's advice and shrink our turf grass to the size of area rugs rather than wall-to-wall carpet. I also wanted to remove the invasive, non-native ground covers, vines, and shrubs that offer nothing to our local insect population and that push out the native plants which sustain so much life.



*Neighbors complained, and the homeowner was visited by a code enforcement officer and issued a citation*

Shortly after reading Doug Tallamy's book that fall, I joined a new West Fork garden club, and I was delighted to discover that several other folks here in town were also interested in supporting pollinators. But I was chagrined to discover that a fellow gardener had already been visited by a code enforcement officer after he turned his front yard into a wildflower meadow. I hoped it was an isolated incident, based on the

uncongenial relationships between this gentleman and some of the town leadership. Little did I know that my newfound gardening dreams would soon be caught in the crossfire between this man and the West Fork City Council.

Just before Christmas 2022, I found out West Fork's mayor was proposing some strict new landscaping guidelines for our town: grass should be kept to a height of 7 inches or shorter; each garden bed should be no larger than 100 square feet; each garden bed would require a distinct border; and worst of all, all garden beds combined should comprise no more than 25% of the total yard (requiring that turf grass cover the remaining 75%). So much for shrinking my lawn. From the video recording of the City Council meeting, it looked as if the council members were prepared to go along with the mayor's proposed revisions, and the city attorney had already agreed to write these changes into West Fork's current ordinance—and to bring it back for a vote at the January meeting.

I knew I needed to act and to act fast.

**(To be continued in next month's issue...)**

**POLLINATOR  
PARTNERSHIP**

600 Montgomery Street, Suite 440 San Francisco, CA 94111