

Pollinator Giving Trees

This week marks the beginning of our second annual “*Pollinator Giving Tree*” community project. The dates are flexible but can be mid-October to late winter.

The theme for this year’s trees is **sunflowers!** While there were thousands of people who added nectar flowers and milkweeds to their yards in 2015, we (and the pollinators that depend on them) actually need many **millions** of gardens planted.

Since a lot of folks have limited or no gardening experience and need assurance they can have success with replacing a portion of lawn with a small flower garden, we’re suggesting they begin with **SUNFLOWERS.**

Most sunflowers are US natives, easy to grow and the inexpensive seed are readily available. As annuals, they sprout, grow, blossom and produce seed in one growing season. Highlighting our *Pollinator Giving Tree* project with a sunflower theme will help promote sunflower pollinator gardens throughout 2016.



Why sunflowers? I was thinking back at the most dramatic story about sunflowers I’d ever read. During the first few days of October, 2007, a monarch enthusiast made a report entitled “*a mile of clustering monarchs in south eastern Kansas.*”

It was near Erie, Kansas that he viewed a 450 acre farm that had been planted with sunflowers late in the season as the first planting had been flooded out. At this peak foraging time in October, those sunflowers were in full bloom and many sunflower heads had 2 to 4 monarchs on them. Conservative estimates for this dreamy scene would be over 200K monarchs and possibly as high as a million.

What other sources could have supplied this much nectar (and pollen for countless other pollinators) to sustain their southward migration had the sunflowers not been there?

It would behoove US to get serious about replacing the billions of nectar plants we’ve destroyed through urbanization, development and herbicide usage.





Of course, exhibiting *Pollinator Giving Trees* before Hanukkah and Christmas can remind our children that "the tree of life" is a symbol belonging to all faiths that have shared their ancient wisdom traditions with the rest of humankind.

The first Christmas nativity scene including plants and animals was constructed by Saint Francis of Assisi, the Patron Saint of Ecology. He is also known as the Ecumenical or Interfaith Saint.

The *Encyclical* issued by Pope Francis this summer (2015) draws heavily on that same sense of deep reverence for the natural world and the social and moral responsibility we have to protect the Earth's resources from depletion and insure a more stable climate for the next generation.

Pollinator Giving Trees would be especially nice in a church, temple, or place of worship. Many beautiful spiritual texts could accompany the little critters on small cards/labels.

Several *Pollinator Giving Trees* were displayed in western NC last year. One was at a state wide community garden conference, two in separate downtown storefront windows and one for a month at the Transylvania County Community Library.

Your mission, should you choose to accept it...

The mission/purpose of the *Pollinator Giving Trees* is threefold:

- (1) to raise the level of awareness of several familiar species of pollinators for students and adults;
- (2) to provide an enjoyable, educational hands-on experience for K- 12 grade classrooms using inexpensive arts & crafts;
- (3) since most everyone loves trees during the holidays, this project offers all a chance to decorate a tree without being tied to religious observances for public school settings.



Paloma is a word in Spanish that translates as "little dove" and is often used to describe the monarch butterflies.

Small decorations could be hand-crafted honey bees, ladybugs, dragonflies, hummingbirds, bats, bumblebees and monarch butterflies and they need not be expensive. Tiny zip bags (postage stamp sized) or clean small condiment holders filled with sunflower seeds would be awesome!

Hopefully in years ahead this idea will become popular. What a pleasant surprise it would be to see trees (especially artificial trees that can be re-used from year-to-year) to be decorated with fuzzy bumblebees, fluffy milkweed seedpods, ornaments stuffed with milkweed floss, sunflowers and other nectar flower creations.

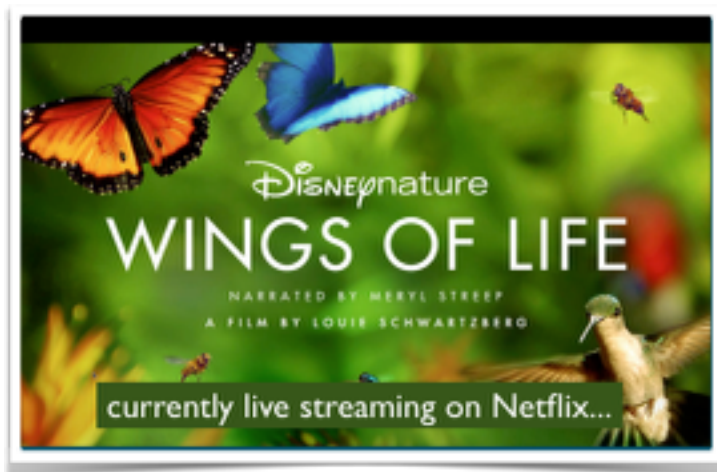
President and Mrs. Carter allowed their Christmas Tree in the White House Blue Room in 1977 to be decorated with angels made out of painted milkweed pods and other natural materials contributed by children from around the country.

To enhance the educational aspect, during the process of creating the decorations, students can listen and learn from a variety of programs about pollinators. A popular new film is called "*Wings of Life*". This DVD (on Netflix) has all the things we look for in a great film—a marvelous script; beautiful musical score, breath taking photography with high resolution slow motion scenes of flower buds bursting into blossom. It features segments on five of our most interesting pollinators: (1) honey bees, (2) bumblebees, (3) bats, (4) hummingbirds and (5) monarchs.



Students may enjoy this activity so much that they choose to do the same for their tree at home during the holidays. This extends the learning experience to younger siblings and may even positively impact parental decisions about the use of herbicides or pesticides around the house and garden.

One popular mantra for the environmental movement has been “we only protect the things we love.” This begs the question: *how are we to expect citizens to protect pollinators if they know nothing about them?*



Many more ideas for decorations are posted at the Facebook page called *Pollinator Giving Trees*. <https://www.facebook.com/Pollinator-Giving-Trees-311563192383595/>

Groups may wish to place a display box of free wildflower and milkweed seed packets next to their *Pollinator Giving Tree* for visitors to pick up, take home and plant in their gardens in the spring.



We invite schools, civic youth groups (scouts, 4H, faith groups, etc) to study the importance of pollinators found in their own backyards and explore the ways pollinators affect local, regional and global food supplies and how they support the food chain for the entire web of life.

If you are planning to create a *Pollinator Giving Tree* and have a neat idea for an easy-to-make craft, please share it with us, along with photos of your own tree, to our Facebook page:
<https://www.facebook.com/MakeWayForMonarchs>

Tell us what you liked best about your project to help spur others along!

Ina Warren.
Co-facilitator, Make Way for Monarchs
www.makewayformonarchs.org





“Save the Monarch” song - available on iTunes by John Hall and Dar Williams

