

The
Lance

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Creating pollinator-friendly spaces



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June 18 to 24 was National Pollinator Week.

I discovered this on a visit to Prairie Originals in East Selkirk. I was there to purchase native plants for three habitat restoration projects along the Seine River and they were hosting a Pollinator Party.

Kelly Leask led visitors on a tour of this unique outdoor growing operation. She shared many interesting facts about native plants and pollinators. There were crafts, displays, and demonstrations. Visitors could even watch leaf-munching caterpillars transform into nectar-slurping butterflies.

I was in my element, surrounded by like-minded people. We all shared a desire to enhance our gardens and landscapes with native plants.

Twenty years ago, I broke with norms regarding urban landscaping. I converted my useless lawn into a vibrant nativescape. Today, my yard is filled with native wildflowers and grasses that benefit pollinators. It has swamp milkweed for monarch caterpillars, golden Alexander for black swallowtails, and little bluestem for skippers. Adult butterflies, bees, and other pollinators enjoy nectar provided by Joe pye, columbine, purple prairie clover, and goldenrod.

Plants must be pollinated to produce seed. Ninety per cent of the world's flowering plants and one-third of human food crops require animal pollinators. These insects, birds, and bats carry pollen between plants as they forage. Native bees, butterflies, and other pollinators that perform this free service are in trouble. They are declining due to



Supplied photo

Kelly Leask led visitors on a fascinating tour of Prairie Originals to celebrate Pollinator Week.

habitat loss, disease, and pesticide use.

The monarch butterfly population has dropped 90 per cent in 20 years. Monarch caterpillars only eat milkweed. Showy milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa*), a native wildflower, is listed as a weed in Manitoba. It used to be common in ditches. In fact, rights-of-way along roads and railways were once important refuges for prairie species that had nowhere else to live. Today, new "ditch mowers" make it too easy to neatly cut roadsides and ditches for safety, weed control, or esthetics. With this technology, even these marginal spaces for prairie plants are disappearing.

I returned home from Prairie Originals convinced that we must do more to help pollinators. As I enjoyed my pollinator-friendly yard, my mind buzzed with ideas to create a "Butterflyway" along the Seine River (<https://davidsuzuki.org/take-action/act-locally/butterflyway/>).

My thoughts were broken when someone drove by yelling "Cut your grass. It looks ugly!"

I smiled. People either get it or they don't. The important thing is that butterflies, bees, and birds love it.

Michele Kading is a community correspondent for St. Vital and the executive director of Save Our Seine.