



May | June 2023

“The keeping of bees is like the direction of sunbeams.”

Henry David Thoreau

Happy June, SEL Supporters!

It has been an unusual spring this year with our fluctuations of hot and cold, dry and wet. These extreme weather patterns seem to be our new normal. It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the frequent, often fraught debates about our climate. But we do have ways to make small, positive changes that can have significant impact. In this month's newsletter we highlight the win-win of **supporting our pollinators**, who are celebrated during National Pollinator Week (June 19-25).

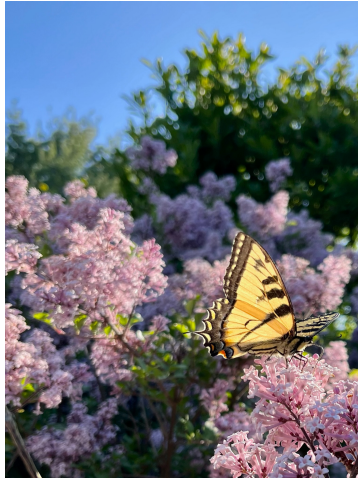


The Mini but Mighty

Most of us know the importance of bees, butterflies, and other pollinators like bats and birds. (But did you know that lemurs are an important pollinator in Madagascar?) More than one-third of our global food is produced with the help from pollinators, and nearly seventy-five percent of all flowering plants rely on them. Without these superheroes, we would not have our morning cup of coffee, those juicy strawberries of summer, or our daily piece of dark chocolate. Climate change, loss of habitat, and unmitigated pesticide use have weakened our pollinator force.

But there are ways we can make a real difference, and they do not require much effort. When thinking of your summer gardens, consider adding more **native species** to your landscape or containers. Native plants serve many purposes, most notably that they are the preferred diet for many insect larvae, but they also tend to be less fussy and water-

thirsty than non-native plants. Area nurseries have abundant choices of native plants, such as amsonia, echinacea, and baptisia. Asclepias (milkweed) is the only food source for monarch caterpillars, and comes in a variety of colors that attract many other butterflies, bees, and hummingbirds.



We can support our pollinators by making **safer choices in weed control** in our yards and gardens. Glyphosate is a commonly used herbicide, but is linked to greater risk of infection and subsequent death in bee colonies. (RoundUp, a popular weed treatment, lists glyphosate as its main active ingredient.) A natural alternative you can try is vinegar or corn meal. Squelch stubborn patio weeds with the boiled water from your lobster or pasta pots. Mulching (preferably natural and undyed) is also an effective way of controlling weeds throughout the growing season, with the added benefit of moisture retention, especially critical during droughts.

Mosquitoes and ticks are a part of the summer landscape, unfortunately. But opting for **less toxic pesticides** in our yards is also a good way to create a healthy environment for our pollinators. Pyrethrin- and pyrethroid-based treatments, while approved by the EPA, are toxic to many pollinators, including honey bees and ladybugs. Some pyrethroids kill pollinators on contact, and remain lethal for days after spraying. Even small residual doses of these toxic chemicals have been found in bee colonies—and in their honey, which we humans love to consume. Rampant pesticide use has been linked to colony collapse disorder, which threatens global food production.

Two non-spray alternatives are **tick tubes** and **mosquito dunks**. The tubes have permethrin-treated cotton that mice and other rodents use to build their nests. This application is specific to ticks that seek shelter on rodents, and will not harm pollinators. Mosquito dunks are slow-releasing tablets made with a bacterium that waterborne mosquito larvae ingest. They are safe to use in any place where standing water may be an enticing spot for reproductive mosquitoes, and harmless to pets, birds, fish, plants, and our beneficial pollinators.



If you prefer to use spray management, there are safer alternatives that do not threaten pollinators' health, including cedar oil, garlic, and other essential oils like lemongrass and peppermint. However, timing for spraying of these alternatives is key in preventing harm to beneficial insects. It is recommended to distribute these before dawn or after dusk while pollinators are not as active.

Summer is upon us, and here in New England we savor that sunshine after a winter's worth of cold and damp. We all love summer's bounty of farmstand fruit and vegetables, as well as the glorious display of garden flowers. We can play a supporting role as nature puts on its annual bonanza of color, taste, and scent.

Resources:

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/garden-centers-and-nurs...>

<https://grownativemass.org/Great-Resources/nurseries-seed>

<https://www.thermacell.com/products/tick-control-tubes>

<https://summitchemical.com/products/mosquito-dunks/>

Homemade Weed Killer Recipe

1 gallon of household vinegar

1 gallon of lemon juice (the cheap bottles)

1 tbsp of vegetable oil

1 tbsp of dish soap

Combine in a large sprayer and shake. Apply early in the morning on a hot day (make sure you don't spray your good plants). By the end of the day the weeds will be brown. This can be repeated several times during the summer.

On Our Radar

From the Town of Essex website:

A **Special Town Meeting** is scheduled for **Monday, June 26, 2023** to begin at **7:30 pm** at **Essex Elementary School, 12 Story St.** The meeting is being held to ratify the approved vote taken under Article 4 (FY24 MERSD school assessment) of the May 1, 2023 Annual Town Meeting exactly as that vote was taken. View the [Warrant](#).

Apple Street Roadbed Project

<https://www.essexma.org/home/pages/apple-street-roadbed-elevation-culvert-replacement-project>

Save Essex Landscape, Inc.

127 Eastern Ave, Suite 236
Gloucester, MA 01930
United States of America

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