

## Mercer County Extension & 4-H Foundation

**Program Area:**

Natural Areas Program

**County:**

Mercer

**Grant Date:**

March 2016

**Grant Amount:**

11000

**Location:**

Aledo, IL 61231



The Mercer County Extension and 4-H Foundation project upgraded an existing perennial garden to a pollinator habitat area. Working with volunteer Master Gardeners and students from a nearby school the project took shape over the spring of 2016 and since then has provided excellent pollinator habitat and educated many on the importance of pollinators.

The project site is located on the Mercer County Fairgrounds in an area that experiences a fair amount of foot traffic. Grant monies were used to install several types of high quality pollinator plants including butterfly and swamp milkweeds, wild blue indigo, and marsh blazing star. Additionally, funds paid for the creation and installation of informative signage.

In May 2016, the Master Gardeners hosted a work day with a dozen volunteers to get all the new plants in the ground. Once the plants were installed, the Master Gardeners placed signs and created a site map that includes a list of plants and their locations. These maps are stored in a mailbox on-site where visitors can grab their own copy for use while at the habitat area.

The pollinator habitat area was completed in time for the Mercer County fair in July 2016, when a Pollinator Celebration attracted 250 people. Visitors toured the project site and learned more about important pollinator species by spending time on the Ms. MariPosa Pollinator Bus. The bus is a mobile resource room and greenhouse run by a private individual that is dedicated to pollinators and the plants upon which they depend.

Last summer, just a few months after installation, the newly installed habitat attracted monarch butterflies with caterpillars making their home among the milkweed and building their chrysalises on the shade structure.

What's New With This Project? During the school year, the site will host 1st through 4th grade classes from four different nearby schools as they learn about pollination. During the summer, a local summer camp plans to bring children out to the habitat area to learn about pollinators. The Grantee has planned additional public planting and clean-up days throughout 2017 and beyond in order to continue to engage the surrounding community.