

Wildflower Planting

Time: 15 min

Maximum: 10 students at a time

Activity Overview

Students will learn about the important relationship plants and pollinator insects share. They will have the opportunity to attract pollinators to Heart Lake through wildflower planting.

*** This activity will be led by a Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) staff member. You will be assisting with the activity. Students will take part in planting wildflowers. ***

Key Message

Students will:

- Learn how to plant a wildflower
- Learn the importance of wildflowers as it is a food source and shelter for pollinators.

Materials

- Trowels
- Flagging tape for boundaries
- Hand washing bucket
- Wildflower trays
- Watering can
- Tarp for backpack drop off and debrief

Setup

- Have all the trowels in the bin near the rain barrel
- Set the planting boundary lines using the flagging tape in the plot so students know where to step.
- Before each group starts, place the individual wildflowers into the plot boundary line, this will help students know where to plant

Takedown

- Keep empty pots in a neat pile near the trowels/other equipment. At the end of each day, please bring the empty wildflowers pots to the trailer
- Ensure all tools and equipment are placed back inside the trailer at the end of the day

Safety

- Have the student's line up in the single file before walking to the wildflower plot. Ensure students are aware of their surroundings; there could be the potential for gopher holes and insects such as bees. Ask students to bring all tools back up to the tent/rain barrel when they've finished planting to avoid losing equipment and preventing a possible tripping hazard.
- Please note, warn students not to go near the surrounding habitat structures, they may be active.

Vocabulary

Native plants: plants that have developed, occur naturally, or existed for many years in an area. In Canada, we usually say a native plant is one that occurs naturally in a particular region prior to European contact. Native plants are adapted to the soil and climate conditions of their region and do the best job of providing food and shelter for native insects, birds and animals!

Pollinators: A pollinator is an animal that moves pollen from one flower to another. The pollen fertilizes egg cells to make seeds (allows the plant to reproduce)

Background Information:

Before flowers can produce, they must be pollinated. Pollination is the transfer of pollen by pollinators, wind, or other means. This process occurs when pollen, which is produced in the plant's male reproductive organ, or stamen, is exposed to the pistil found within the female's reproductive part. Once pollination takes place, seeds begin to develop. Pollination is an important part of a plant's life cycle, from flowering plants to non-flowering ones. Without pollination, most plants could not produce fruit or set seeds.

Examples of pollinators: bees, ants, beetles, butterflies and moths. Birds are also responsible for pollination, especially hummingbirds. Small mammals, such as bats, are pollinators as well.

The color or markings on a flower helps attract and guide insects to them for pollination. Bees are often attracted to bright blue and violet colors. Hummingbirds like red, pink, fuchsia, or purple flowers. Butterflies enjoy bright colors like yellow, orange, pink and red as well as fragrant ones.

Almost 90% of flowering plants rely on animal pollinators. Pollinators produce food for us as well as other local wildlife in the environment. One in every three bites of food we eat are pollinated by pollinators.

What will I be doing? (Procedure)

Before you start your introduction, check with the teacher or chaperone that the entire group is present and ready to start.

Planting instructions

- Brief the students before heading to the planting area. You want to highlight the importance of native plants, habitat structure and water. For example, they provide food, shelter, space and water.
- Highlight the habitat boxes such as bird and bee boxes in the surrounding area. **Safety warning**
- Questions to ask students:
 - Who enjoys eating fruits, vegetables and nuts? Such as apples, berries and squashes. **Comment:** Pollinators help make the delicious foods we enjoy.
 - What are some examples of pollinators? **Answer:** Bees, butterflies, birds and even bats!
 - What would happen if there were no pollinators?
 - Would there be seeds created?
 - What happens when there are no seeds?
 - **Comment:** "Today you are going to help pollinators by planting wildflowers!"
- Have the students place their backpacks on the blue tarp and get them to grab a trowel
- Line the students in a single line and walk them down to the plot.
- Walk students into the planting area and highlight the boundary lines.
- Ask them to stand in front of plant.
- Demonstrate how to plant a wildflower. **Note:** you will be shown how to plant a wildflower.
- Assist the students in planting. **Note:** while one group is planting, another group can listen to the introduction and begin to line up. This helps move the line up along if the next group is ready to go once the plot is empty.
- Check for quality control (TRCA staff will show you what to look for); replant if necessary.
- Once they have planted 1 or 2 plants, have them carry their trowels back to the bin. Ensure they are walking in a straight line. Students may rinse their hands using the two white buckets of water (replace this water using the clean water in the rain barrel throughout the day).

Photo of Activity

