

Riverwood Plantation Pollinator Outdoor Classroom

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ABSTRACT:

Riverwood Plantation is a large community consisting of 3,000 acres and 1,500 homes that highlights nature, family, and a strong sense of community. In May of 2019, the Riverwood Home Owners Association, Georgia Power, and Columbia County Extension approved the Pollinator Garden project and began clearing the proposed site of Bahiagrass, brambles, and saplings. The 4,500 square foot space was an underutilized right of way located between residential developments and adjacent to Greenbrier elementary, middle, and high schools. Locating the garden centrally in the community was key to successful educational efforts on the importance of pollinators, beneficial insects, and proper plant selection. Once cleared, the garden began to take shape as Master Gardener Extension Volunteers added donated plants from local business and grant funding. The garden has become a hands-on outdoor classroom that engages its local population, challenges visitors to develop a better understanding of pollinators and instills a strong sense of community pride. The impact to the community can be measured by its involvement in the garden. The garden serves as a Great Georgia Pollinator Census site and a Certified Monarch Watch Waystation. Each year between 3 and 5 educational programs on pollinator conservation are held with an average of 38 attendees annually. Additionally, the garden has received over \$12,000.00 in in-kind donations from local businesses and homeowners and has received over \$32,000 in support from the Riverwood Home Owners Association. The UGA Extension office and the Master Gardener Extension Volunteers all take pride in the Riverwood pollinator garden by being dedicated to the ever-changing opportunities that are presented to us daily. We hope to see you in the garden!

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVE

- Design and install pollinator garden and outdoor classroom in the Riverwood neighborhood
- Host hands-on programs to increase participant knowledge of pollinators, beneficial insects, and proper plant selection

ACTIVITIES

2019 Activities:

- Hosted over 35 families for the UGA Great Pollinator Count
- Designated as Certified Monarch Watch Waystation
- Hosted five educational programs with 56 attendees

2020 Activities:

- Hosted over 20 families for UGA Great Pollinator Count
- Designated as Certified Monarch Watch Waystation
- Hosted three educational programs with 21 attendees*

*Due to COVID-19 restrictions, in 2020, the garden has only been able to provide 3 educational opportunities reaching 21 attendees(12 adults and 9 youths).

RESULTS

In May of 2019, the Riverwood Home Owners Association, Georgia Power, and Columbia County Extension began clearing the proposed garden, a 4,500 square foot space located between residential developments and adjacent to Greenbrier schools. Once cleared, Master Gardener Extension Volunteers added plants donated from local business and supplies procured with grant funding from Monarch Watch, Augusta Area Master Gardeners, Plant America, and Georgia Association of Conservation Districts. Plant selections were made by referring to publications produced by UGA extension and the Xerces Society. Criteria used for plant selection included their native range, time of year for flowering, growth pattern, and preferred pollinator species. To allow for continuing communication, Master Gardener Project Leader, Kelly Dzurny, created a Facebook page to ensure community partners were kept up-to-date on educational opportunities related to the pollinator garden.

IMPACT STATEMENT:

The Riverwood pollinator garden began January 2019. The pollinator garden was designed to include a 4,500 square foot location in Riverwood Plantation, a large community consisting of 3000 acres that highlights nature, family, and a strong sense of community. The garden is located between residential developments and adjacent to Greenbrier elementary, middle, and high schools. With the goal of educating the community on the importance of pollinators, beneficial insects, and proper plant selection, the location of the garden was key to the success. However, the location did not come without challenges.

Columbia County ranks number one in the state of Georgia ornamental horticulture, or the production of flowers and landscape plants with a Georgia farm gate value of \$93,615,743. There is a tremendous demand on the agricultural agent to serve many people in an area as vast as horticulture. Mr. Williams composed a seven member Extension Leadership System Team that consists of green industry professionals, county leaders, master gardeners, and homeowners. Special emphasis was desired for educational programming in homeowner agriculture pertaining to pollinator protection as well as plantings to attract pollinators.

With the goal of educating the community on the importance of pollinators, beneficial insects, and proper plant selection, the location of the garden was key to the success. After collaborating with the Riverwood Home Owners Association and Georgia Power for approval, the space for the garden was selected and clearing began of the established Bahiagrass, brambles, and saplings in May 2019. The Agriculture and Natural Resources agent, Tripp Williams, started with a hand-sketched plan and the garden began to take shape as Master Gardener volunteers added donated plants from local business

and supplies procured from grant funding. The transformation of the area piqued the interest of the community and drew in community volunteers and the Greenbrier school system.

In 2019, the garden was host to over 35 families that participated in the Great Pollinator Count, and it received the designation of being a certified Monarch Watch Waystation. To continue the community outreach, Master Gardener team leader Kelly Dzurny created a Facebook page to ensure the community and the schools were kept up-to-date on educational opportunities related to the pollinator garden. The garden provided five educational programs in 2019 where attendees enjoyed presentations on types of pollinators, life cycles of pollinators, larvae and butterfly identification, native plants to attract pollinators, and building native nesting boxes. The garden has provided a unique opportunity for the community. It has become a hands-on outdoor classroom designed to provide the opportunity for both adults and youth to develop a better understanding of our pollinators and their importance to the world. The impact to the community can be measured by the community's involvement in the garden. The garden has received over \$12,000 in in-kind donations from local businesses and homeowners. The Riverwood Home Owners Association has shown their appreciation and approved several enhancements. They include the purchase of a John Deere 3025E tractor with front-end loader to help with the construction and maintenance of the garden(\$18,750), install of a water tap for irrigation(\$1200), installation of irrigation drip system(\$5,000), and extended the asphalt multi-use trails to include the garden area(\$7,000).

EVALUATION:

All educational programs were evaluated using voluntary pre- and post- program surveys. Participants were asked to agree or disagree with the following statements prior to and after the program:

- 1) It is important to be able to identify pollinators
- 2) Pollinator conservation is essential for protecting the environment
- 3) Pesticides have a negative impact on pollinator health.

Data from the evaluations can be reviewed in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Knowledge Change of Program Participants

