

“Neighbours and Nature Ensemble”:

First of its Kind in Ottawa

What do retired MTN teachers do when they no longer have a classroom in which to raise Monarchs?

They create butterfly gardens and start educating their community!

This is exactly what Mary Ash, Joan Harvey, Johanna Cutts, and Kate Harrigan have done. “Neighbours and Nature Ensemble”, a bilingual name chosen from community suggestions, and reflective of the community spirit and involvement, is the first of its kind within the City of Ottawa whereby a private citizen’s group has constructed a garden on city property.

The newly constructed Monarch Waystation adheres to the standards laid out by Monarch Watch. It contains native plants, both host (milkweeds: for eggs and caterpillars to live on), as well as nectar (flowering / perching plants: for adult butterflies). The garden is a self-contained unit specifically designed for the Monarch, but has attracted other butterflies, moths, hummingbirds and pollinators, especially bees. A grant for the plants was obtained through the TD Friends of the Environment, and with assistance from the local councilor, they became aware of, and received, an additional grant through the City of Ottawa to cover costs of soil preparation, soil, mulch, and rain barrel accessories. A local nursery offered to subsidize their plants and soil and neighbours, even children, pitched in to help in many ways.



The site for the garden was a former Boy Scout / Girl Guide campfire circle, abandoned for many years, and was the perfect spot. A bench at the entrance to the garden offers passers-by a spot to rest as they observe the goings on, take in the aroma, or listen to the hum of busy bees; and it is anticipated that students at nearby Terry Fox Elementary School will utilize the garden when teaching habitat, and other science units. Monarchs depend on a unique partnership between the

United States, Canada and Mexico for their survival...we “share” the butterflies; a problem in any country will break the necessary chain upon which their existence is based. Pesticides, herbicides, genetically modified crops, urban expansion, deforestation in the overwintering sites in the mountains of Mexico, all have devastating effects on this tiny migratory insect whose present numbers are the lowest on record. These MTN’ers were hoping that others would take the initiative to develop similar gardens in their yards. As it turned out, several neighbours came forward to ask about creating waystations, and at the grand opening in July, attended by about 100 people, small milkweed seedlings were distributed to get people started. A new seniors residence has shown interest in having a butterfly garden onsite, and the local councilor has requested that Mary and Joan assist him in creating such a garden in a seniors’ park. Due to liability issues, Monarch Teacher Network – Ottawa adopted the part of the park containing the garden to facilitate the process.

The gals were overwhelmed with the resulting bonding of their neighbourhood during and after the garden construction. There were neighbours helping neighbours, moreover, neighbours *meeting* neighbours, and uniting for a local cause. One neighbour offered to be the “resident photographer”; another volunteered his water until the rain barrel could be set up in his yard; many came to spread soil, mulch, and to plant. The garden became a focal point in the area, a gathering place, a destination for morning walks; and everywhere people talked about “the garden”. Although the garden didn’t attract many butterflies this summer, there were hundreds of bees and other pollinators, and hummingbirds that made it their home. What a superb start! It’s been said that “When a butterfly flaps its wings in one part of the world, it can cause a hurricane in another”, well it’s amazing how a little butterfly has certainly created a stir in this neighbourhood! Now we can hardly wait for the snow to melt and for the 2nd season to begin!



-Mary Ash

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