In its first year, more than 1,160 pollinator gardens were registered with the Plant for Pollinators Challenge.

Healthy Pollinators…

From bees to butterflies to beetles, pollinators are a beautiful and diverse group of animals that many plants rely on in order to produce seeds and fruit. A healthy population of pollinators is vital to the health of our communities, enhancing the growth of plants that supply us with food and a livable planet. Despite their importance, pollinators are struggling to maintain their populations in the face of habitat loss and degradation.

Committed to helping pollinators thrive, the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden launched a community engagement campaign to increase urban pollinator habitat in Greater Cincinnati. 2019 marked the first year of the Plant for Pollinators Challenge, sponsored by Simple Truth. The challenge empowers people to plant and register pollinator gardens at their homes, schools, businesses, parks, and other spaces. The resulting increase in pollinator habitat not only supports pollinators as they do their job to keep our environment healthy. It also adds color, beauty and vibrancy to our landscapes, strengthens the performance of our gardens and agriculture, enables people to connect with nature and each other, and gives people the confidence to carry out other conservation actions.

And growing pollinator-friendly plants is a great way to build a better home for wildlife beyond pollinators. The plants themselves provide a safe place for animals to live and hide from predators, and can be a food source for many reptiles, birds and mammals, while many others rely heavily on pollinating insects as a primary food source.

…Healthy Planet
Fostering a Conservation Mindset

“It's a small, but concrete thing I can do to help when I feel overwhelmed by all the bad things happening to our environment.”

Unfortunately, for many people, plants and insects are just part of the background, something not worth paying attention to. The Plant for Pollinators Challenge encourages people to really think about what plants they grow in their landscapes and to take a closer look at the critters that visit them. That tangible result is inspiring. It can be difficult for us to see the result of our actions, for example, when we bring a reusable bag to the store. But when we grow pollinator-friendly plants, we can see the difference. In our own backyards, we start to notice species of bees, butterflies, and moths we’ve never seen before. We begin to look a little closer. Plants and insects are no longer just a part of the background. We start paying attention to the details in nature and develop a stronger relationship with the environment. It becomes easier to visualize where we fit into the big picture. That personal connection and affirmation that our actions actually do make a difference inspires us to want to do more to conserve nature.

“The idea of making sure that I had even more pollinator plants, particularly a host plant hadn’t come to my mind before. This program just made it all fit perfectly and for such critical ‘critters’.”
We’ve been able to involve our children and teach them the importance of pollinators... I’ve personally gotten up close with them and pointed out different bees and used a magnifier to show them the pollen on their legs and bodies. It is amazing being able to share this with them and they love it.

“As a little girl, I would sit on my Grandma’s porch and watch the birds, bees and butterflies, and till this day, it’s still one of my favorite things to do. Knowing that I’m helping other creatures survive and the bonus of seeing their beauty brings me joy.”

We love providing habitat for pollinators. One of the highlights for us is having children in the neighborhood stop to notice and enjoy the butterflies and hummingbirds.

“As a homeschooling family, we really enjoy watching the butterfly life cycle happening in our own backyard!”

“I love sitting on the porch and watching all of the creatures who visit. And my son and I watch the monarchs as they grow from eggs to caterpillars to butterflies.”

“I grew up watching hummingbirds eating breakfast with my grandfather and they remind me of him and those treasured moments.”
At first, creating a pollinator-friendly garden can seem like a daunting task. Thankfully, the Zoo has taken a lot of the guesswork out of the process. The Zoo’s Horticulture team has over 25 years of plant trialing experience. They have tested and evaluated different plant species to determine which plants grow and look best and benefit pollinators most in the Cincinnati area, and compiled a list of the best plants for pollinators. The list contains both nectar plants, those that provide a sugary food source for pollinators, and host plants, those essential to butterfly reproduction on which eggs are laid and caterpillars feed. The plants are sorted by blooming season so gardeners will know what to plant in order to have colorful blooms year-round and provide a consistent food source for pollinators.

### Zoo’s Best Plants for Pollinators

**Spring - Blooming**
- Flowering cherries
- Crabapple
- Serviceberries
- Cornelian cherry dogwood
- Redbud
- Red maple
- Blackberries
- Hollies
- Crossvine
- Spirea Vanhouttei
- Lilacs
- Spirea bush
- Trumpet honeysuckle
- Cucurbit
- Snowdrops
- Winter aconite
- Baptisia
- Hellebores
- Catmint
- Pulmonaria/Lungwort
- Virginia bluebells
- Violas

**Summer - Blooming**
- Linden
- Oak
- Abelia grandiflora
- Ardisia
- Butterfly bush (low-seed varieties)
- Bottlebrush buckeye
- Buttonbush
- Diervilla
- Panicle hydrangea
- St. John’s Wort “Sunburst”
- Coneflower (single blooming)
- Latriss
- Bee balm
- Ornamental onion “Millenium”
- Joe Pye weed
- Milkweed
- Russian sage
- Penta
- Salvia
- Zinnia
- Sunflowers
- Tall verbena
- Dill, Fennel, Thyme, Nints, Lavender

**Fall - Blooming**
- Seven sons tower
- Bluebeard
- Chaste tree
- Anemone
- Aster
- Goldenrod
- Chrysanthemum “Sheffield pink”
- Perennial sunflowers
- Sedum
- Ironweed
- Native grasses
- Dahlia mystic series
- Lantana
- Turkscap
- Salvia
- Scarlet milkweed

**Plants for Pollinators**

**Tall plants**
- Good for bees
- Good for hummingbirds
- Good for butterflies
- Host plant for caterpillars
An overarching goal of the Plant for Pollinators Challenge was to build confidence in people who may not have experience with gardening and provide them with the resources and support they need to be successful. When it came to choosing plants for the recommended list, the Horticulture team selected plants that were hardy and best suited to Cincinnati growing conditions. And the website provides guidelines and tips for planting and maintaining a garden (cincinnatizoo.org/plant-for-pollinators). You don’t need to be a master gardener or have a super-green thumb to grow these pollinator-friendly plants. You don’t need to have a yard either, just a few potted plants on a balcony or a window box can provide for pollinators.

Making sure people can actually find the recommended plants to purchase is also important. Fortunately, the Zoo’s Horticulture team had already established a program to work with local growers and 20 local garden centers to produce and sell a Zoo’s Best Plants for Pollinators series. This allows customers to purchase plants that are great for pollinators while affording the ability to seek professional guidance when looking for certain plant sizes or growing conditions.

“I enjoy plants and gardens, even though my space is limited to porch pots and a small walkway. Making sure some of what I plant is good for pollinators just makes sense.”
Success and Reach of the Program

Gardens were registered in 24 different states
Covering up to 68 acres of pollinator habitat
Nearly 3 million plants in registered gardens
97% of registered gardeners plan to maintain or grow their garden bigger and better in 2020

In its first year, more than 1,160 pollinator gardens were registered with the Plant for Pollinators Challenge

Not only did the Zoo more than double the original goal of registering 500 gardens in the first year of the challenge, people were successful with their gardens and plan to maintain or grow them bigger and better in 2020. This is encouraging news, and it shows that the program is sustainable and can work for new and seasoned gardeners alike.
Promotions and Partnerships

The Zoo presented the challenge at 55 events both on and off-site. These events included the Pollinator Carnival, Tree Carnival, and the first annual Monarch Festival on Zoo grounds. The Zoo also hosted native plant sales at Bowyer Farm in Warren County to make hard-to-find native plants more accessible to people. The Zoo's teen volunteers helped connect guests at a Plant for Pollinators station on Zoo grounds, and the Zoo also shared the Challenge through social media, TV and radio. The challenge had significant additional reach thanks to 50 partnering organizations. Partnering garden centers, landscape companies, universities, conservation organizations, and other local groups promoted the challenge to their audiences at more than 100 events.

Ammon Nursery
Audubon Society of Ohio
Benken Floral Home & Garden
Bloomin Garden Centre
Blooms & Berries Farm Market
Boone County Arboretum
Campbell County Cooperative Extension Office
Christ the King Lutheran Church
Cincinnati Flower Growers Association
Cincinnati State Technical and Community College Landscape Horticulture Programs
City of Cincinnati
Civic Garden Center
Clifton Town Meeting
Delhi Flower & Garden Center
Denny McKeown's Blooming Garden Centre & Landscaping
Diefenbacher Greenhouses
Federated Garden Clubs of Cincinnati and Vicinity
Gaiser Bee Company
Glacier Break Farm
Gorman Heritage Farm
Green City Resources
Green Umbrella
Greenfield Plant Farm
Holscher & Hackman Garden Center
Keep Cincinnati Beautiful
Kendrick & O’Dell Landscaping
Kennedy Heights Community Council
Knollwood Garden Center
Liberty Heritage Nursery Farm
Mt. Adams Beautification Association
Ohio Association of Garden Clubs, Region 4
Ohio River Foundation
Ohio State University Extension
Osmia Bee Company
Our Land Organics
Oxbow Inc
Pipkin’s Market
Plant Cincinnati
Pleasant Ridge Community Council
Pollinator Plant Design
Spring Grove Village Community Council
Surroundings Inc.
The Stanley M. and Dorothy Rowe Arboretum
The Wilds
University of Cincinnati
Village Gardeners of Glendale
Wayne Wilkin’s Backyard Bees
Western Hills Garden Club
White Oak Gardens
Wimberg Landscaping
Continuing into the Future

Building on the amazing success of the first year, the Zoo will expand the Plant for Pollinators Challenge in 2020 by increasing the reach of the program and making the experience even easier for beginner gardeners with a goal of registering an additional 500 gardens. The Zoo intends to bring on more partnering organizations to spread the word about the Challenge to new audiences. The Zoo’s Best Plants for Pollinators series will expand both locally and into the Dayton and Northern Kentucky markets to give consumers more options for purchasing pollinator-friendly plants. And to increase the success and confidence of new gardeners, the Zoo will offer additional information on the website to help with garden planning including suggested garden designs and details on recommended plants such as size and sun requirements. The accumulation of all these actions will serve to increase pollinator habitat, creating a healthy ecosystem while strengthening our social community, gardens, and agriculture in Greater Cincinnati and beyond.