

The Native Green Community Garden at Riverside Park

By Cristina Cabrera

The Native Green Community Garden is located at Riverside Park in the neighborhood of Olneyville in the City of Providence, Rhode Island. The land where the community garden sits on is part of Riverside Park, a brownfield with the Woonasquatucket River flowing through it, both of which are under recovery from industrial pollution. Riverside Park is situated behind the Atlantic Mills, an old textile mill which was recently purchased by the Providence Redevelopment Authority. The Native Green Community Garden and most of Riverside Park are currently owned by the City of Providence. Both parkland, community garden, and mill should be rematriated to its original Caretakers, the Narragansett Indian People, to heal and restore the balance of Mother Earth.



Broad-toothed mountain mint – one of our favorite plants!

After securing funding from private foundation donors, we cleaned up existing ground-level beds. Our Site Assessment Plan took into consideration the overall Park Plan, the Flood Plan and Topographic Plan of the area. After the Site Assessment Plan, we developed a Planting Design Plan that incorporated Native Pollinator plants of our Eco#59 Region; and that took into consideration insect pollinator needs and what they are most attracted to, insect diversity, plant leaf structure, flowering/blooming season, leaf and flower color, plant height, plant spread, plant watering and soil moisture needs, plant pollinator value, site drainage and grading, plant light requirements and sun exposure, and the plants original habitat. Four beds were completely re-done with new soil mulch and native pollinator plants from Region Eco 59. One garden bed was restored as it already had mature pollinator plants which had been planted by community gardeners five to seven years ago.

The overall park already includes pollinator plants as well as the Woonasquatucket river with its multi-level and multi-layered canopy/vegetation from perennial plants and small shrubs to trees that provide shelter for pollinators, birds, and other wildlife. The established veggie, fruit, herb and cut flower garden beds serve as additional food and shelter sources for pollinators and wildlife.



The garden was planted in two stages: in Summer 2016 by local community volunteers and in Spring 2022 by local Mayan-owned DMC Landscaping Company: <https://www.dmclandscapingri.com/>

The garden has been extremely successful in attracting a variety of pollinators! The visitors include Short-tongued bees and long-tongued bees; Green Metallic bees, Masked bees, Andrenid bees, bumblebees, miner bees, Epeoline Cuckoo bees, large-leaf cutting bees, black bees, Honeybees, hover flies, and bee flies, Cuckoo bees, Halictid bees, Sphecid wasps, Eumenine wasps, bee flies, Tachinid flies, beetles: Wedge-shaped beetles, butterflies: Pearl Crescent butterflies, black swallow butterfly; moths, wasps, skippers, hummingbird moths.

Mountain mint has been one of our favorite plants because it attracts so many insects and pollinators. Broad-leaved mountain mint is especially beautiful, and our cats love it! (left)

The garden is maintained by community gardeners (watering only), Narragansett Tribal members and local DMC Landscaping when heavy lifting is required.

Some of the greatest challenges have been the relationship with the park maintenance organization who comes into our garden to access our water source in order to run their Summer Bike Camp program, and vandalism to some of our garden beds, fence and gates. It can also be difficult to navigate the City/Park relationship.

Some of the greatest rewards of the garden have been the amazing numbers and diversity of pollinators attracted, as well as additional birds and wildlife! We have also been teaching our garden kitties to respect wildlife!

Native Green Community Garden Plant List

Golden Alexanders

Slender Mountain Mint

Appalachian Mountain Mint

Broad-leaved Mountain Mint

Virginia Mountain Mint

Blue Vervain

Showy Goldenrod

Wild Bergamot

Hyssopleaf Thoroughwort

Great Blue Lobelia

Helen's Flower

Bottle gentian

New England Aster

Zizia aurea

Pycnanthemum tenuifolium

Pycnanthemum flexuosum

Pycnanthemum muticum

Pycnanthemum virginianum

Verbena hastata

Solidago speciosa

Monarda fistulosa

Eupatorium hyssopifolium

Lobelia siphilitica

Helenium autumnale

Gentiana andrewsii

Symphyotrichum novae-angliae

Appalachian Mountain Mint (photo right)

"Unlike other members of the mint family, Appalachian mountain mint grows slowly by underground rhizomes. It forms a clumping pattern on erect stems with fragrant narrow green foliage 2 to 3 feet tall and 1 to 3 feet wide. Plant in the middle of a border in a sensory, pollinator, or native garden and enjoy all the wildlife it will bring to the landscape. The light green leaves contrast nicely with purple leaved plants. Because of its strong upright appearance plan to plant shorter plants in front."

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/pycnanthemum-flexuosum/>

