

The Betsy and Jesse Fink  
FAMILY FOUNDATION

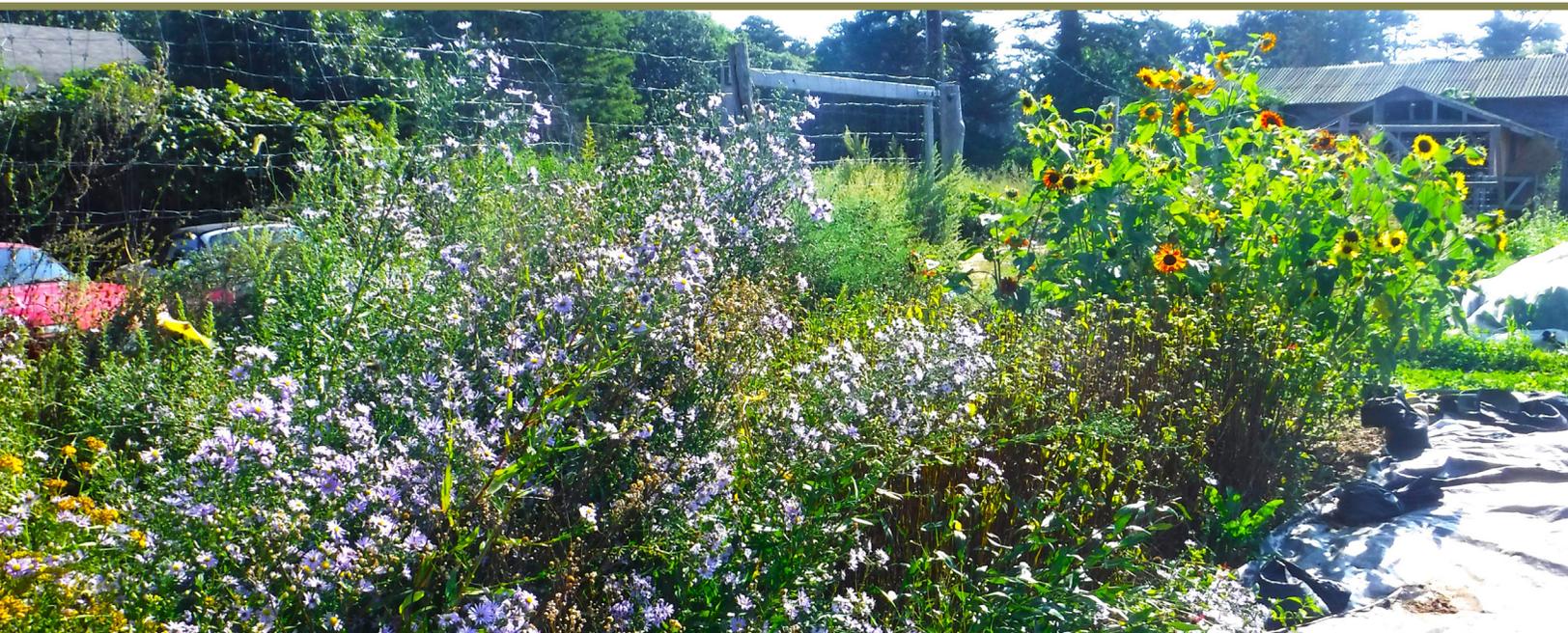
# Martha's Vineyard Pollinator Pathways: a Partnership of Farms and Insects

## BACKGROUND AND METHODS

**Critical to both agriculture and the natural environment, pollinators of many kinds have shown alarming declines in diversity and abundance over recent decades. How can local communities respond?**

A three-year pilot project developed by the Betsy and Jesse Fink Family Foundation, Martha's Vineyard Pollinator Pathways brought together the scientific expertise of BiodiversityWorks and Pollinator Ecologist Molly Jacobson of SUNY's College of Environmental Science and Forestry with the commitment of eight Island farms to regenerative farming practices. The project assessed the roles farms are already playing in supporting pollinators – and it developed actionable recommendations for how farms could do even more to support insect populations.

Beginning with the 2022 growing season, test plots were established on eight farms. Nine flowering species were planted in designated plots designed to appeal to different pollinator groups. On 261 site visits over the next three years, researchers meticulously logged arthropods visiting flowers inside the test plots, and in adjacent areas of the farms. Photographs of more than 2,200 insects were entered into the iNaturalist "community science" platform, with each record noting what flower was being visited; detailed written notes recorded thousands of other visitors, along with plant and weather conditions at the times of the visits; and specimens were collected to facilitate difficult identifications.





## RESULTS

Project results suggest that farms offer highly productive habitat for a wide range of pollinators, with about 300 species observed during the course of the project. Representatives of ten taxonomic orders were found, with five orders (Hymenoptera, Diptera, Lepidoptera, Coleoptera, and Hemiptera) predominating.

While common species accounted for the vast majority of project observations, a number of rare species or species previously unrecorded on Martha's Vineyard were documented. Most significant may have been three new bee species for the Vineyard: ***Megachile inimica***, ***Protandrena compositarum***, and ***Andrena bisalicis*** were among the 50 bee species found.

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While a huge diversity of plants were visited by insects at least occasionally, a few species emerged as particularly important to pollinators. In the project plots, two species of **goldenrod**, a **native aster** species, and spotted **beebalm** were especially successful.

Outside the plots, **chicory**, **Queen Anne's lace**, and flowering herbs including **thyme**, **cilantro**, **dill**, and **fennel** supported notable numbers of insects.

While the effects of our small test plots were often subtle, our plantings proved successful at boosting bee diversity locally at participating farms and at attracting some of the uncommon, specialized bee species that were a particular focus of the project.





## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Goldenrod, goldenrod, goldenrod!

Both inside and outside our test plots, flowers in the Vineyard's two goldenrod genera were wildly popular with all kinds of flower-visiting arthropods. Planting as much goldenrod as possible, and including multiple species with different flowering periods, is the single most powerful method we identified for supporting pollinators.

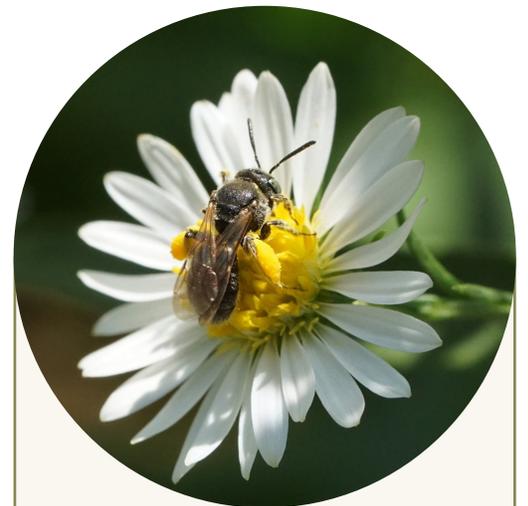
Goldenrods are late-season flowers, so planting a diversity of other flower species can maximize the effectiveness of pollinator plantings, offering "something for everybody" across the full season and avoiding excessive competition for resources among different types of pollinators. Native species such as butterfly weed are especially helpful, but many non-native herbs and ornamentals can also help support pollinators.

Planting pollinator flowers in single-species blocks may maximize their attractiveness to pollinators while also preventing more aggressive species from crowding out other plants.

Avoid over-managing: untidy gardens and edges offer great pollinator habitat! Many common "weeds" help support insects, and the structural complexity of unmanaged areas offer habitat for insects to hide and reproduce.

TO VIEW THE FULL REPORT VISIT:

[tinyurl.com/MV-Pollinator-Pathways](https://tinyurl.com/MV-Pollinator-Pathways)



### YOU CAN HELP!

While this project focused specifically on farms, most of our recommendations are valid in other settings such as yards or ornamental municipal plantings. Plant native, plant diversity, and plant for a full season of blooms; even a few individual plants can make a difference, offering accessible resources to bees, wasps, butterflies, or other insects.



MARTHA'S VINEYARD   
**ATLAS OF LIFE**

To learn more about our work cataloging the biodiversity on Martha's Vineyard, check out the Martha's Vineyard Atlas of Life at:

[mval.biodiversityworksmv.org](https://mval.biodiversityworksmv.org)