Garden party

UW-Eau Claire News

After months of research, planning and community outreach, a group of UW-Eau Claire students and community volunteers will gather today in downtown Eau Claire to plant a pollinator habitat in the Phoenix Community Gardens.

During the event, titled Planting Fiesta, students in the Civic Agency, Environmental Stewardship class will work with community group members including Outing Opossums, Hool Hooters and the Eau Claire Gardening Club, and others to create a habitat that will support pollinating animals and the plants and trees that are vital to the Chippewa Valley’s ecosystem.

“It is important for all citizens, regardless of where they live, to support the pollinating animals and the plants that are vital to our environment,” said Eau Claire said. “It is important to get outside, experience nature and become environmental stewards of our own backyards.”

The 13 undergraduate students in the class are partnering with community agencies to create educational materials and to offer community-wide events, such as Planting Fiesta, to encourage people in the area to create and monitor pollinator habitats and the plants and trees that are vital to our environment, Cronje said.

If You Go

- What: Planting Fiesta, an event to create a habitat for pollinators
- When: 1 to 4 p.m., Sunday
- Where: Phoenix Community Gardens
- Cost: Free
- Information: facebook.com/PartnershipsForPollinators

Students hope the habitat they create in Phoenix Community Gardens will become one of many established and maintained by individuals and groups in the area, and the data serves as a reference in monitoring the population of native pollinators.

Research shows that pollinating animals — including bees, birds, butterflies and beetles — are vital to the ecosystem and support wildlife, provide a healthy watershed and pollinate food crops and flower gardens, Cronje said.

“Yet in many places, pollinator species are in crisis due to habitat loss, use of pesticides and other assaults, such as viruses and mites,” Cronje said.

Education effort

In 2010, Beaver Creek Reserve, one of the class’s community partners, worked with volunteers to collect and identify native bee pollinators from the Canoe State Natural Area. The study was the beginning of the tracking of pollinators in the area, and the data serves as a reference in monitoring the population of native pollinators.

To support these efforts, the UW-Eau Claire class is preparing multimedia materials, including online videos, to educate community members about pollinator habitats. The materials will be available in English and in Spanish.

Among the educational materials created by the students are pollinator kits, which will include information that will help citizens understand how they can best help pollinators.

The positive response from people and organizations in Phoenix to the student project is surprising and inspiring, said Blake Weimerskirch, a philosophy major from Plymouth, Minn.

“I realize now what a small group of students can accomplish,” Weimerskirch said. “We made things happen that I would not have guessed we could make happen when we started.”

Interactions with community members and other organizations helped students feel more connected to the Eau Claire community and the region, several students said.

“I grew up in Eau Claire but never felt part of the community until I did now,” said John Schoen, a biology, ecology and environmental biology major. “I am realizing now how cool it is to be a citizen who is contributing something to my community and not just a bystander watching what others are doing.”

In Brief