

# Honors course to create sustainable habitat in community garden

*Students, city members will be planting fruits, vegetables, flowers at event*

By Taylor Kuether  
CHIEF COPY EDITOR

A few university honors students are about to get green thumbs.

Professor Ruth Cronje's honors course "Civic Agency: Environmental Stewardship" is hosting a rescheduled Planting Fiesta at 5:30 p.m. Monday at the Eau Claire Community Gardens

across from Phoenix Park after their initial date was rained out.

The students and community members in attendance will be planting flowers, fruits and vegetables donated by private citizens and purchased with a gift from the Eau Claire Garden Club.

The event will also include live music and pizza. Once the planting

is complete, a local Girl Scout troop will take over caring for the garden through watering and weeding, Cronje said.

But the Planting Fiesta isn't just a gardening getaway — the goal is to create a pollinator habitat.

Cronje, an associate professor of scientific and technical writing in the English department, and her students researched pollinators (which include bees, butterflies, bats, beetles and other insects), as well as the science behind them and the threats to them, in hopes of creating a pollinator habitat to benefit a more sustainable city.

Cronje said she picked pollination as the focus of the course this semester because she was already an avid gardener and pollination was something she wanted to learn more about.

"Three-quarters of our food and fiber crops require pollinators," Cronje said. "A lot of our food supply depends upon pollinators, a lot of our agricultural sector economy depends upon pollinators, so this is actually pretty important, it's a big deal," she said.



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Foodlums, a student organization, worked with the Student Office of Sustainability to bring honeybee hives to campus, located behind Phillips Science Hall.

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*Event's goal is to create a pollinator habitat*

The Planting Fiesta isn't the first stride taken toward improving pollination in the community. Last year, the campus sustainable food organization Foodlums worked with the Student Office of Sustainability to bring honeybee hives to campus, where they have since resided behind Phillips Science Hall.

"If we didn't have bees, we wouldn't have pollination. If we didn't have pollination, we wouldn't have flowers, we wouldn't have two-thirds of the fruits and vegetables that we consume on a daily basis," said junior Ellen Sorenson, vice president of Foodlums and the primary caretaker of the bees. "We wouldn't have the colorful world that we have today."

Sorenson said she supports the class's goal of creating a pollinator habitat.

"The pollinator class, by researching native plants and researching its native pollinators," she said. "They're being very sustainable in the fact that they want to increase the amount of native pollinators."

Sorenson said it's more sustainable to have native populations and native species because plants and their pollinators have evolved together.

"They have a wonderful relationship together," Sorenson said. "The plant has a specific pollinator that pollinates that plant, that's why they give out certain colors."

Aside from contributing to a sustainable community, Cronje said the students are

learning valuable life skills through the course.

"We want them to learn how to function effectively in their communities to promote some sort of social change," Cronje said.

Junior Laurelyn Wieseman, a student in the course, said she and her classmates learned about important civic engagement practices such as house meetings, power-mapping, and one-to-one conversations with community members.

Wieseman also noted another goal of the course: to produce, publish, and distribute technical yet accessible information about pollinator stewardship.

"Although our class has been studying pollinators this whole semester, our goal is not to go out

and instruct citizens about pollinators, but rather to empower citizens to go out, get excited, and promote pollinator stewardship themselves," Wieseman said.

Wieseman said the class compiled technical reports on such topics as pesticides, how to create a simple and useful habitat for pollinators in your own backyard, and the overarching importance of biodiversity, as well as integrated pest management, a holistic alternative to pesticide use.

"People, especially students, need a reason to get in touch with nature," Wieseman said. "(This) is just one really fun and rewarding way to engage yourself with the greater Eau Claire community and biotic community."