

**Time to spread the gardening gospel.** Birds, bees, and other bugs that help pollinate our world are in decline. If every one of us does just one small thing to help, the rewards will be huge. In the next nine pages, we get a backyard education courtesy of a few of the city's most passionate gardeners, birders, beekeepers, and store owners **By Sarah Brown**

# The Birds and the Bees

(and how to fill your garden with them)





## All Aflutter

David Cybulski and Colleen O'Connell oversee a dreamy garden filled with butterfly- and bee-friendly flowers. And every summer, they open their Maitland Garden of Hope to the public to share their passion for wildlife-friendly gardening

**They knew it was meant to be** from their first meeting eight years ago at a coffee shop. “We both had chocolate labs. We both loved gardening. David brought a picture of his backyard pond to show me on our first date. The rest is history,” says Colleen O'Connell with a laugh. David echoes the sentiment: “It was instant chemistry.” A beautiful relationship developed quickly, as did a breathtaking garden. Two years after they first met, they married and Colleen moved in with David. They began expanding the garden on their 1.5-acre lot, adding a network of more than a dozen linked plots that include dedicated wildflower, butterfly, and pollinator gardens.

As they survey the flamboyant zinnia garden from the comfort of their shady “Gin and tonic bench” — the perfect spot from which to enjoy a cold drink while looking out over the wider gardens — eastern tiger swallowtails float by, a spectacular hummingbird hawk-moth whizzes through, and drifts of birds flit from the tree-tops, sweeping low over the flowerbeds to nab insects. Suddenly Colleen jumps up. “A monarch!” she shouts. The butterfly skims over the scene, alighting just briefly on each milkweed along its path. “It’s laying eggs,” explains Colleen delightedly, turning over a leaf to show one tiny white egg glued to the underside.

Listening to Colleen, a retired elementary schoolteacher, describe the life cycle of this endangered butterfly while chasing it around the garden, it’s easy to imagine what an engaging teacher she must have been. Both she and David describe themselves as lifelong learners. “We never call ourselves experts,” says David. “We learn so much from our garden but also from everyone who comes to visit. We both believe that you don’t ‘own’ a garden — it’s there to be shared.” And share they do: about 600 people visited the Maitland Garden of Hope last summer. While David has designed a map for those who prefer a self-guided tour, the couple offers a 90-minute tour-and-talk for those looking for a more in-depth experience.

Colleen has typed up a list of host and nectar plants to hand out to butterfly lovers. (The host plant is where they lay their eggs; the nectar plants are their favourite feeding stops.) The caterpillars eat one kind of plant (or a few in the same family), so the butterflies lay their eggs on those specific plants. Want more painted lady butterflies? Plant some hollyhocks for the caterpillars, while zinnias, cosmos, and spirea are favourite nectar plants for this species. Looking to add the majesty of eastern black swallowtails? The caterpillars love to munch on Queen Anne’s lace, as well as dill and parsley, but the butterflies prefer to sip on beebalm, phlox, and meadow rue. “The simplest thing to do,” says David, “is just observe. If you see lots of butterflies or bees on a particular plant, figure out what it is and plant more.”

Their property is a certified Monarch Waystation, planted with four types of milkweed and a variety of the nectar plants the

butterflies prefer. Sometimes the butterflies and other insects eschew the flowers for the platter of treats the couple put out on a pedestal every day — orange slices and a big dish filled with a mixture of rotting bananas, molasses, flat beer, and sugar. A few trays filled with damp sand encourage the butterflies to stop for a drink, while the ponds and small fountains bring in the birds. The mix of flowers is also chosen to encourage honeybees — Colleen trained as a beekeeper and owns two hives that are located off the property (having hives onsite is a liability with so many visitors to their gardens each summer). Sustainably harvested, last summer her hives produced 225 pounds of goldenrod and wildflower honey, which the couple bottle and give to friends.

They’re also entrepreneurial, spreading their environmental message through speaking engagements and teaming up with local nurseries such as Whitehouse Perennials, which sponsors their spectacular daylily garden. Their garden tourism initiative with the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville has seen more than a dozen public and private gardens become part of the 1000 Islands and Rideau Canal Garden Trail (a garden network that attracts hundreds of visitors each summer). When visitors stop by Maitland Garden of Hope, they get an inspirational tour through a garden with beds ranging from subtle to dramatic and a crash course in the area’s flora and fauna. It’s all free, though Colleen and David do accept donations for Our Kenyan Kids, a Brockville-based charity that supports poor and sick young people in Kenya. Fittingly, their donations were recently used to build a greenhouse, which provides food to children living at an orphanage.

In all that they do, Colleen and David share boundless enthusiasm and hope. They credit their garden with opening up a whole world for them that goes well beyond the joy of nature. They have developed an extended network of friends — fellow gardeners who are as well-informed and engaged about the environment as they are. They dine together, trade notes and stories, and encourage one another’s passions. And then the couple pays it forward to the wider audience of would-be gardeners who stop by to see their wondrous backyard. “Our message is not from a book — it’s a message of optimism that comes from our experience,” says Colleen. Adds David: “Every person can make a difference for the birds and butterflies and honeybees. Our reward comes from sharing our garden but also from inspiring people to take more of an interest in their own gardens and the environment.”

**Maitland Garden of Hope is part of the 1000 Islands and Rideau Canal Garden Trail. Guided and self-guided tours are available from June through August; Colleen and David also host an annual open house on August 29 (rain date August 30). For information see [maitlandgardenofhope.ca](http://maitlandgardenofhope.ca).**



**Top left:** The owner of an old farm was about to throw this 100-year-old gate into the trash. Colleen and David rescued it and set it up at the entrance to their native woodland walk

**Top middle:** The little man with the fiddle is called *The Lonely Minstrel* and is one of nine sculptures by Colleen scattered throughout the gardens

**Top right:** The daylily sculpture, which was purchased at Whitehouse Perennials near Almonte, anchors the colourful daylily garden

**Middle left:** The couple secured this dramatic sculpture by artist Steve Henderson by welding it to a wrought-iron base and submerging it in the pond

**Middle right:** At the back of the property, a quiet zen garden beckons visitors to sit down and contemplate nature — or perhaps do a bit of therapeutic gravel raking





**Top left:** Colleen and David have planted hundreds of colourful lilies, which are often visited by hummingbirds

**Top right:** An eastern tiger swallowtail perches on *Crocosmia* 'Lucifer', a flowering plant that belongs to the iris family

**Middle right:** Commonly known as false sunflower, *Heliopsis helianthoides* 'Summer Nights' adds a dramatic dash of yellow to the garden

**Bottom right:** The cheerful zinnia bed attracts all manner of butterflies, as well as native bees and honeybees

**Bottom left:** The scented beebalm entices the unusual hummingbird moth as well as a host of dramatic butterflies including swallowtails and monarchs



**Top left:** One of the few flowers in their garden not aimed at charming the birds or bees is this poisonous angel's trumpet, which is planted for ornamental purposes only

**Top centre:** The *Veronica* 'Hocus Pocus' boasts showy purple flowers when it's in bloom

**Top right:** Black snakeroot (foreground) is highly fragrant and an important pollinator. When in bloom, it boasts dramatic spikes of white flowers. Behind it, the tall seed pods of the white baneberry will become a food source for birds when they ripen

**Bottom right:** This climbing 'Arabella' clematis, which blooms throughout the summer, is not attractive to rabbits and deer, but hummingbirds like it

**Middle left and bottom left:** These orienpet lilies (hybrid lilies that are a cross between oriental and trumpet lilies) add colour and drama while attracting hummingbirds



## Take the Tour

Explore the 1000 Islands and Rideau Canal Garden Trail

**What:** The 1000 Islands and Rideau Canal Garden Trail, a garden tourism initiative run by The United Counties of Leeds and Grenville, takes in more than a dozen public and private gardens in the two counties. The majority are located in a stretch along the St. Lawrence that extends from Gananoque in the west through Brockville, Maitland, Prescott, and Johnstown. More are being added each year.

**When:** Most of the gardens are open from June through August, though some have seasons that begin in May or last through October. Consult the website to learn more about the gardens, plan your route, and pre-book visits. [leedsgrenville.com/en/visit/thingstodo/Garden-Trail.asp](http://leedsgrenville.com/en/visit/thingstodo/Garden-Trail.asp).

**Stock Up:** Located near Burritts Rapids, Rideau Woodland Ramble is a seven-acre display garden and plant nursery that forms part of the trail. Owners David Dunn and Rob Caron will likely stock all the bird-, bee-, and butterfly-friendly flowers and shrubs that you've discovered while touring. Their staff can also give advice on what will thrive where. [rideauwoodlandramble.com](http://rideauwoodlandramble.com).

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARC FOWLER