

## LOCAL NEWS

# Solano County nonprofits debut Mare Island pollination garden

The 3,000-square foot garden is hosting an installation event on Saturday to help spark voluntary community interest in its upkeep, in addition to inspiring residents to do the same in their homes.



Vilma Aquino, the co-founder of the Vallejo People's Garden, left, and Mare Island Co. Facilities Manager Baldomero Flores with the help of several other organizations are creating a pollinating garden in front of the Global Center for Success to help the dwindling population of Monarch butterflies. (Chris Riley/Times-Herald)



Solano County nonprofits dedicated to environmental sustainability and conservation have unveiled a community garden to help bolster hurting monarch butterfly numbers across the western United States.

Where the garden now stands was once a space previously left untended and formally referred to as the Pollinator Pathway Garden. Located at the Global Center for Success, the Mare Island Garden is the product of a year-long collaboration among various entities across the county.

The groups involved with the garden include A Plus Tree, Caliground Troops, the Global Center for Success, the Mare Island Company, the Monarch Milkweed Project, the Solano Resource Conservation District, the Solano County Water Agency, the Vallejo Project, the Solano Community Foundation, and Sustainable Solano.

Organizers at the 3,000-square-foot garden are holding planting demonstrations — the second of two on Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. — and encouraging community members to replicate the project on their own lawns.

The garden is open to the public and will rely on volunteers for hand-watering to eliminate the use of plastic, drip-irrigation techniques, and it will operate using water-catching basins instead of installing gutters. Organizers are also hoping to hold classes about gardening in the future.

Vilma Aquino, co-founder of the Vallejo People's Garden, conceived the project after learning about the monarch's declining population.

"That sparked kind of an interest in me because I know if there's a decrease in their population, what about all the other insects and wildlife?" she said. "We need pollinators in order to yield good food."

When Aquino contacted Sustainable Solano, Nicole Newell said she initially had doubts about the project's feasibility. The program manager for sustainable landscaping said the nonprofit typically converts smaller, residential backyards on a

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Newell said that conversations with Aquino revealed an overlapping goal of educating the community, persuading Sustainable Solano to commit to its [first large-scale project](#) centered primarily around native plants, such as milkweed, and pollinators.

“Just the installation is education in itself because most people that come to these events have a huge knowledge on plants and pollinators, and so just by meeting other people and talking to them, you start learning about the different plants, and then you learn how to kind of properly plant,” Newell said.

Solano County is a hot spot for monarchs to roost through the winter, a process known as overwintering. Monarchs breed during the summer in the Midwest and eastern North America and travel south to Mexico and along the western coast of the U.S. during the fall.

These butterflies overwinter in eucalyptus and redwood trees in Solano County near St. Peter’s Chapel and off Highway 29 and the I-80. They rely on native plants to lay eggs; when the plants flower, they become food. Using native plants also goes beyond butterflies and establishes a diverse ecosystem of organisms, including hummingbirds, bees and hoverflies.

“The monarchs are the supermodel pollinators, but ... this is going to support a ton of pollinators, not just the monarchs,” Newell said.

The monarch butterfly’s numbers have declined in annual counts over the years — a result of [overwintering habitat loss](#) from practices such as illegal logging in Mexico and municipal and commercial development in California.

According to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, monarchs are [poised to be named](#) under the federal Endangered Species Act next year. [Less than 2,000](#) were counted in a fall 2020 Xerces Society Western Monarch Count.

But this past fall, scientists involved in the count identified more than 330,000 butterflies — a 90% decline compared to the low millions of butterflies seen in the ‘80s.

“I’m hopeful because through education, there are a lot more people who are trying to help increase the population,” Aquino said. “And with further outreach, we can do our part so that they don’t become extinct.”

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