



A honey bee pollinates a cherry tree last April in Akron. Revised city rules will make it easier for local gardeners to cultivate certain pollinator-friendly plants that were previously considered noxious weeds. JEFF LANGE/AKRON BEACON JOURNAL

Bees, butterflies rejoice

Akron revises noxious weeds list to allow pollinator-friendly plants

Abbey Marshall
Akron Beacon Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Akron's backyard beekeepers and gardeners are buzzing with excitement from a recent update in city code removing some plants from Akron's noxious weeds list.

The amended ordinance, passed on Monday by Akron City Council, allows local gardeners to grow plants previously banned on private property, such as milkweed and goldenrod, that are vital to thriving pollinator populations.

Previous code was 'unscientific,' harmed pollinator populations

The effort had been years in the making for experts like Michele Colopy, the executive director of LEAD for Pollinators, an organization aimed to educate and advocate for the health and sustainability of native pollinators.

"This is one small part of bringing this community into land sustainability practice so we can do things like urban farming," Colopy said. "As science discovers more and more, it's difficult and a slow process to modernize these things, but it's vital we support our monarchs and our native pollinators and our native plants."

Colopy and two others spoke during a public comment session at the March 14 council meeting to advocate for what they said was a much-needed update: the previous ordinance was "outdated" and "unscientific."

"The list that Akron has is sort of a



A Monarch butterfly spreads its wings as clusters of butterflies gather for a rest in Ohio in September 2020 during their annual 3,000-mile migration from Canada to Mexico. MIKE CARDEW/AKRON BEACON JOURNAL

hodgepodge of plants; it makes no sense to a biologist, an ecologist or a beekeeper," Randy Mitchell, a biology professor at the University of Akron, said at the meeting. "A lot of the plants that are on the list are native plants of Ohio and that's part of our natural heritage. We want to be encouraging the wonderful plants we've got here."

Previous code disallowed plants such as field daisies, goldenrod, dandelions, milkweed and more. The new ordinance

aligns city policy with state guidance, which is more fluid and regularly updated to reflect scientific findings. Now, many of the plants — except for harmful ones like poison ivy and poison oak — are allowed in residents' yards.

Akron is along the eastern route of monarch butterflies on their annual migration from Mexico to Canada and

See WEEDS, Page 3B

Weeds

Continued from Page 1B

is often a final food source for the butterflies before they head North across Lake Erie. Other pollinators, such as honeybees, also rely on the nectar of milkweed and other plants.

"These pollinators that are supported by these plants are important; they help us make food, they make our gardens successful, they give us enormous beauty and a great deal of enjoyment," Mitchell said. "They're important parts of a healthy, natural ecosystem."

New ordinance will allow small businesses to grow

The previous restrictions were not only harmful to the environment, advocates say, but also to local businesses including Emily Mueller's.

"In fact, people actually seek out goldenrod honey," said Mueller, a trustee for the Summit County Beekeepers Association, at last Monday's council meeting. Mueller also owns and operates Mueller Honeybee Rescue in Akron. "Small businesses like my own beekeepers are thriving on the honey sales from these specific flowers that are actually on your list."

A step toward modernizing more city code

Ward 1 Council Member Nancy Holland, who assumed office last summer, said Colopy approached her the night she was sworn into her position. The two worked with other city officials, departments and advocates over the past year to draft the legislative language that was adopted Monday night.

While Colopy sees this as a major win for urban agriculture and environmental protection, Holland feels the move is a step toward an even

greater fight: modernizing city code.

"This is a dramatic cultural shift," Holland said. "This represents a moment where the city is embracing the idea that we are something more than an industrial city."

There are more things going on than that. This is a step toward having our laws actually truly and plainly reflect our values."

Reporter Abbey Marshall is a corps member with Report for America,

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