



Dear Neighbor,

Many of us are aware of the plight of the Monarch and bee populations declining globally, but may not realize how our own practices may be affecting this worrisome situation or how small changes in those practices can make a big difference. Two years ago there was a noticeable loss of butterflies visiting gardens in Portland. That summer, a local biologist wrote an editorial in the *Portland Press Herald* voicing concerns about the visible drop in the diversity of our butterfly population, except for the hardy Cabbage Whites in our area. Last summer proved the same or worse.

**Bees are also declining in Maine with a 60.5% loss of bee colonies since April 2014, primarily due to loss of habitat, pesticides and climate issues.** Because of extensive chemically treated lawns and weed free landscapes, bees are also suffering from starvation. White Clover, a common plant found in all lawns years ago has virtually been eliminated by herbicides. Bees like clover, which is also a natural source of nitrogen that feeds your lawn. Native weeds and flowers feed bees and other pollinators.

Mary Cerullo, Executive Director of Friends of Casco Bay stated in a recent presentation that “We thought serious detrimental environmental effects on the ocean would be something the next generation would have to deal with, but instead we are realizing it is happening now.” Storm water runoff testing by Friends of Casco Bay and Maine Board of Pesticides detected a number of commonly used pesticides at many sites around Casco Bay. Excess nitrogen from lawn fertilizers can cause algae bloom, reducing oxygen in the water and increasing acidity; **61% of storm drains in Portland run DIRECTLY into Casco Bay.** There are many documented scientific studies that show the damaging effects from pesticides in vulnerable populations like young children and people with compromised autoimmune systems. Our pets that walk on treated lawns absorb chemicals through their paws or from chewing on grass.

How can you help? **Strategically reduce or eliminate the use of commercial synthetic fertilizers and lawn pesticides.** Create a small natural habitat somewhere in your yard where you can allow some weeds to grow, leaving brush and fallen leaves to harbor insect life. Add native flowers to your landscape. Use organic compost for fertilizer if needed (it has been proven that lawns over 10 years old do not need to be fertilized, just reseeded). If your lawn is out of balance, have your soil tested by the Maine Cooperative Extension Office. Grubs can effectively be controlled with alternatives such as Nematodes and Milky Spore, which do not contain harmful broad spectrum insecticides. Check with your garden center to make sure they are growing plants from non-pesticide treated seeds and seedlings and are not using systemic pesticides like Neonicotinoids, which spread the insecticide throughout the entire plant, including nectar and pollen. **Consider using organic lawn care professionals and check any products that your landscapers or gardeners are using to make sure they are not applying synthetic pesticides or anything harmful to pollinators.**

Show your support of a “pesticide free and pollinator safe” yard by purchasing and displaying a yard sign from Beyond Pesticides, Friends of Casco Bay, Bees, Bays and Backyards, or download one for free from Portland Pollinator Partnerships. Please help spread the word about healthy lawn choices and visit [www.portlandpollinators.org](http://www.portlandpollinators.org) for more information and resources.

Sincerely,