

PRESS



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SONOMA VALLEY GIRL SCOUTS, GRAPE GROWERS AND WINERIES JOIN TOGETHER TO SUPPORT “BEE PATCHES” OF FORAGE FOR POLLINATORS

The non-profit North Coast Resource Conservation & Development Council (NCRC&DC) is planting “Bee Patches” of forage for pollinators working with Sonoma Valley Girl Scouts, wineries, grape growers, and other farmers to create habitat in Sonoma Valley for struggling bees and other pollinators. Eighty percent of the world’s flowering plants are animal pollinated, and wildlife ecosystems are vitally dependent on pollinating partners. Honeybees, other pollinators and pollination services represent a critical component of healthy wildlife ecosystems and sustainable agriculture, with honeybees pollinating an estimated \$15 billion of agricultural crops annually in the United States. Direct and indirect value could total \$30 billion annually. Scientists and farmers alike are increasingly recognizing the importance of honeybees and native pollinators, and the reality that they are at risk. Our bees are disappearing, and one important action to help bees is to create forage habitat where they can feed and nourish their colonies. This spring, new habitat “Bee Patches” will be planted through a partnership with six Girl Scout troops and five local wineries, grape growers and farmers in the Sonoma Valley. The Girl Scouts will plan and design their “Bee Patch” and do the planting, then follow-up throughout the year on how well this bee forage planting effort works! Critical elements in the Troops’ plans include multi-season forage opportunities, water, undisturbed ground for wild bee nesting, and safety from pesticide exposure. The NCRC&DC will be evaluating these factors as well as the patch esthetics and ease of maintenance, ultimately donating \$500 to the troop with the best “Bee Patch.” Each participating troop will receive a \$100 donation for planting a patch.

Specialty seed mixes developed by LeBallister Seed Company to support bee forage will be used in plantings along with perennial plants selected for their bee pollen production as well as beauty and ease of care. In previous years, LeBallister has reported selling over 1,300 pounds of Bee Forage Seed, and the NCRC&DC hopes this expands. Multi-season blooming species contained in the seed are critical to ensuring forage habitat to nourish bees throughout the year.

Tish Ward, a local Sonoma Valley farmer and a Board member of the NCRC&DC, is working with the Girl Scouts in planting “Bee Patches” of forage habitat in Sonoma Valley agricultural fields. She reports that the Scout troops have participated in an educational session learning first-hand about bees from Joan Weir, a long-time beekeeper and the Council’s Pollinator Conservationist, and pollinator habitat plantings from Master Gardeners Cheryl Varetto and Glenda Klaucke. Ward says, “The bees need help, and the Girl Scouts have long supported pollinator protection activities as one of their badge activities. The Girl Scouts have always been great about helping good causes—they are terrific to work with, and we know ‘Bee

Patches' will succeed in our valley." Oona Padgett, NCRC&DC Conservationist directing the "Bee Patches" program, adds that "by participating in the Bee Patch Project, Junior Girl Scouts will have fulfilled the requirements for the following badges: Gardener, Animal Habitats and Flowers. Older scouts may achieve Animal Helpers Badge for Cadettes and Voice for Animals Badge for Seniors."

The Planting Schedule is as follows (Note: these dates are subject to change, and contact Oona Padgett for confirmation):

- Girl Scouts Cadette Troop 10141 (12-13 years old) Tuesday April 28th 3:30-6:30 p.m. Bedrock Vineyard owned by Joel Peterson, farmed by: Diane Kenworthy, Sunbreak Vineyard Services
- Girl Scouts Senior Troop 10878 (14-15 years old) Wednesday April 29, 5:00-7:00 Benziger Insectary Garden
- Girl Scouts Troop 10240 (11 years old) Friday May 1st, Thursday May 7th, and Friday May 8th. Arrowood Vineyards and Winery, after school from 3:00-6:00
- Girl Scouts Daisy Troop 10879 (7 years old) Thursday, May 14 time TBD Field of Greens Farm, Owner Ron Lawson
- Girl Scout Brownies Troop 10095 (9-10) Sunday May 17th 10:00-1:00 Beltane Ranch
- Girl Scouts Senior Troop 10063 (14-16 years old) Sunday May 31st 10:00-1:00 Bedrock Vineyard owned by Joel Peterson, Farmed by: Diane Kenworthy, Sunbreak Vineyard Services

The Patches will be evaluated by the NCRC&DC after planting, and the donation awards will be presented at a dinner/awards night for "Best Project" as part of the celebration of National Pollinator Week sometime in the week of June 15th through the 21st, 2015.

Funding for these habitat plantings with youth groups in the Sonoma Valley is provided by the Clif Bar Family Foundation. The NCRC&DC is a local 501(c)3 non-profit organization working in Marin, Sonoma, Mendocino, and Lake Counties. The NCRC&DC's overall goal is to protect water, soil, and air resources while enhancing sustainable communities. The all-volunteer NCRC&DC works to protect pollinator habitat, conserve water with "Rain Catchers in Your School," promote new and expanding small agricultural entrepreneurship, and encourage use of biochar for improving soil health.