From Backyard Gardens to Community Impact: How Pollinator Academy Is Growing a Pollinator-Friendly Brazoria County

Kimberly Mayer, CEA, CPTM
County Extension Agent – Horticulture
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Brazoria County

When you hear the word *pollinator*, you probably picture a honey bee buzzing from flower to flower. While that image is familiar, pollinators are much more diverse, and protecting them is something every gardener can do. Whether you have a large property, a small backyard, or a few containers on a patio, you can make a difference.

That simple idea inspired **Pollinator Academy**, a new educational program hosted by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension in Brazoria County.

The inaugural academy welcomed gardeners, homeowners, Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists, and nature enthusiasts who all shared one goal: learning practical, research-based ways to support pollinators and create healthier landscapes.

Throughout the day, participants discovered that helping pollinators does not have to be complicated. Small changes, such as planting a wider variety of flowering plants, providing blooms throughout the seasons, reducing unnecessary pesticide use, and adding a simple water source, can have a meaningful impact.

Figure 1 (left) Brazoria County Master Gardeners and Horticulture Agent Kimberly Mayer pose for a photo at the first annual Pollinator Academy.

Figure 2 (right) Brazoria County Master Gardeners JoAnne Knodel and Heather Brewer teach participants how to propagate native plants.

One of the biggest takeaways was that every landscape matters. A single pollinator garden provides food and shelter for beneficial insects, but when dozens or even hundreds of homeowners make similar changes, those individual gardens become connected habitat corridors. Together, they allow pollinators to move safely throughout an entire community.

Learning was not limited to the classroom. Participants explored interactive exhibits, visited educational displays, gathered ideas for designing pollinator-friendly gardens, and connected with local organizations dedicated to conservation. The goal was not simply to share information. It was to give attendees the confidence to head home and put their new knowledge into action.

Many participants were surprised to learn that honey bees are only one small part of the story. Native bees, butterflies, moths, beetles, flies, wasps, and even hummingbirds all contribute to pollination. Each species has unique habitat needs, which is why diverse plantings and healthy landscapes are so important.

Expert speakers also highlighted the vital role pollinators play in both natural ecosystems and agriculture. From wildflowers to fruits and vegetables, pollinators help support the plants that feed wildlife, beautify our communities, and contribute to our food supply.

Figure 13 Master Gardeners hand out Pollinator Academy tote bags full of resources.

The best part? Pollinator conservation does not require perfection. It simply starts with one small step.

Whether that first step is planting your first native wildflower, replacing part of your lawn with blooming plants, or leaving a small area of your landscape a little more natural, every action contributes to a healthier future for pollinators.

We look forward to welcoming even more community members to future Pollinator Academy programs as we continue building a county where both people and pollinators can thrive. For more information on Pollinator Academy, you can reach Kimberly Mayer at **kimberly.mayer@ag.tamu.edu**