

UI Extension supports pollinator garden at the Parma Research and Extension Center

AT A GLANCE

After 100 years of the establishment of the Parma Research and Extension Center, U of I faculty, Extension educator, master gardeners and staff established the first pollinator garden.

The Situation

Idaho's native pollinator species directly benefit the public, home gardeners, flowering plants and agricultural operations throughout the state. Pollinator species (butterflies, moths, beetles, flies and primarily bees) need habitat, adequate nectar resources and dedicated spaces for their continued sustainability and success as native Idaho species. The Parma Research and Extension Center received a recent upgrade, including a brand-new 9,600ft square Idaho Center for Plant and Soil Health building in 2024. This vital research facility supports research in scientific fields such as plant pathology, nematology, pomology, microbiology and entomology. It is estimated that more than 1/3 of every bite of food humans consume is due to the essential services of native and managed pollinators. Insects and agricultural operations rely on each other for pollination services; without this critical service, Idaho's agricultural systems would see a direct decrease in yield and income. Pollinator species, especially bees, are critical for the future of Idaho's agriculture. Idaho has approximately 720 wild bees and also depends on managed bees such as leafcutter bees, bumble bees and honey bees.



Planting day at Parma conducted by Canyon County master gardeners and UI Extension specialist. Photo by Brad Stokes.

Our Response

Armando Falcon (research and Extension specialist) and Brad Stokes (Extension educator for Canyon County) received a UI Extension Innovative Grant in 2025 to establish a pollinator garden at the Parma Research and Extension Center. The new garden aims to provide native flowering plants, nectar resources and habitat to Idaho's pollinator species. The renovation began in April of 2025 along U of I Lane in Parma. This area was previously overgrown with introduced grasses, non-native shrubs/trees and rocks. Armando and Brad planned a clean-up workshop day to seek Canyon County master gardener volunteers to help with the renovation with their expertise. U of I Parma staff, graduate students, summer interns and

volunteers from the Idaho Botanical Garden were also invited to take on this considerable task. Heavy equipment was used to remove 5+ cubic yards of rocks, trees (stumps remained), shrubs, grasses and the obsolete irrigation system. Armando and Brad planned, designed and selected over 130 pollinator-specific plants from three local Idaho nurseries for planting in May of 2025. Planting took place on May 21. A new drip irrigation system was also installed on this day for water-efficient irrigation. Mulch and compost were added in mid-June to provide essential organic nutrients for the plants, as well as reduce weed pressure and conserve water. An 800ft square space was left unmulched to provide nesting areas for soil nesting pollinators. Bee hotels were also installed to provide nesting places for cavity-nesting bees and wasps. Additionally, tree stumps were drilled with different diameters (0.25 to 0.33 inches) to increase the nesting habitat of cavity-nesters. Armando partnered with Gooding Farms, who kindly donated hop poles to line the edge of the garden area, increasing the aesthetics of the garden area and highlighting the connection between agriculture and pollinator-friendly spaces. A bird bath with shallow rocks was also added to the pollinator garden. The rocks allow pollinator species to land and provide much-needed access to water.

Program Outcomes

The newly installed 4,250ft square University of Idaho Parma Research and Extension Center's pollinator garden helps commemorate the 100th anniversary of this vitally important and agriculturally centered research facility provided by University of Idaho. It also provides a much-needed aesthetically pleasing space for the public, passersby, agricultural operations, staff, graduate students, interns and faculty to enjoy, meet and celebrate Idaho's native pollinator species during visits to the research facility. The pollinator garden lies

directly along U of I Lane in Parma, a highly trafficked and visible area to the public, increasing the visibility of Idaho's pollinator species and commitment by University of Idaho Extension faculty and the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.

The Future

UI Extension specialist and educator plan to install educational signs and plant identification tags in the garden for public visibility and education, as well as highlighting the project during annual Parma field days. A ribbon-cutting ceremony will be held in 2025 for the newly installed pollinator garden. Youth and adult educational events and master gardeners will tour the new pollinator garden in the future for educational outreach regarding pollinators and their importance. Volunteers from local schools (e.g., Parma, Notus and Wilder) will also be invited to help with the maintenance of the garden and participate in outreach events. The garden area could expand in the future, as new volunteers and cooperators join and support this great project.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

- University of Idaho Parma research staff and farm manager
- Canyon County master gardeners
- University of Idaho graduate students and summer interns
- Mike Thoronton
- Gooding Farms
- Idaho Botanical Garden
- Draggin' Wing Nursery
- Franze Witte Nursery
- Edwards Greenhouse and Flowershop

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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