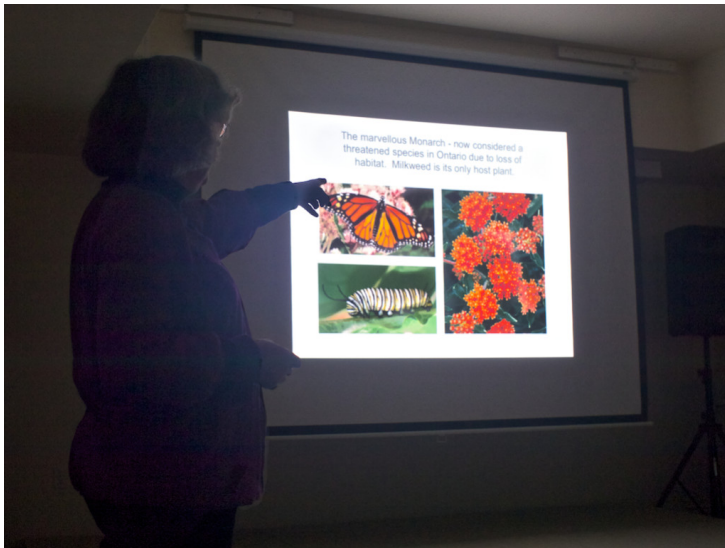


Pollinators take centre stage at the Bancroft Horticultural Society



By Harold Eastman

For every three bites of food you eat, says Peterborough horticulturalist Cathy Dueck, thank bees for one of them. Dueck was the featured speaker at the September 23rd meeting of the Bancroft Horticultural Society, and her statistic about bees indicates how important they are to the food chain that supports us. Bees pollinate 70 of the top 100 crops humans depend on for food. If we lose bees we lose those crops. And we are losing bees, says Dueck, at an unprecedented rate. One of the main causes is the disappearance of habitats that support bees. That's the reason she's come to the Horticultural Society: to encourage members to create bee-friendly gardens. Dueck, who is manager of Peterborough's Ecology Park, began her presentation on bees with a quick overview. While honeybees are the ones we're most familiar with in Ontario, the province is home to many other varieties. Not all are social and not all nest in hives. Many solitary species work alone and dig nests in the ground. How do we make them at feel at home in our gardens? Dueck shared some key tips: Plant a wide variety of flower types, with blooms ranging from spring through fall. Keep some soil unmulched for underground egg laying. Assemble nest sites for solitary bees by drilling 1/8 to 3/8" diameter holes in blocks of wood, or by gathering bunches of hollow stems. Distribute the blocks or bunches throughout your garden. Avoid sterile hybrid flowers with no nectar or pollen. Chose varieties with blossoms in the colours bees seem to prefer: blue, purple and yellow. Provide dry, warm sites. Watch bees and see which flowers they prefer in which seasons in your area. Plant accordingly. Society members also heard from Dueck about how to plant gardens that attract butterflies as well. These insects may not be as crucial to the food chain as bees, but their survival is also being threatened and we would be poorer for the loss of the beauty they bring to our world. Once again, Dueck offered suggestions for attracting these winged gems to a garden. Among the most interesting: Provide tree cover to the north and west to protect butterflies from wind. Create shallow depressions that hold a small amount of water; pie plates work. Occasionally leave out half an orange. Some butterflies like to sip the juice. Leave some garden debris for egg laying. Dueck closed her presentation by suggesting that members think of their gardens not only in terms of human enjoyment, but also as places that are welcoming to the insects that provide us with nourishment and pleasure. After a refreshment break that buzzed with conversation (pun intended), members reconvened to handle a few items of business and to present trophies for the Vegetable of the Year (Potato) and for the best floral interpretation of the theme "Bringing In the Harvest." The next meeting of the Society takes place at 7.00 pm, Tuesday, October 28 in the downstairs meeting room of the Bancroft Train Station. The evening will feature a silent auction of plants and garden decor, as well as annual awards and the election of officers. For more information on the Bancroft Horticultural Society, visit the society web site: www.bancrofthorticulturalsociety.com