

## West Toronto Neighbours Unite to Create Butterfly Habitat

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**Toronto** – West Toronto neighbours are coming together to increase habitat for swallowtail butterflies. Project Swallowtail is a collaborative effort to connect communities street by street and empower neighbours to restore nature in the city by planting native plants, including the trees and shrubs that host the caterpillars of swallowtail butterflies. The project boasts more than 300 participants, including 35 Block Ambassadors, ‘super-volunteers’ who head local teams of friends and neighbours.

“Through this neighbourhood network, residents are joining forces to enhance pollinator habitat on their balconies and decks, in their gardens and local parks,” says Ryan Godfrey from WWF-Canada. “In doing so, they are also taking action on two of the most pressing issues we face: climate change and biodiversity loss.”

By adding caterpillar host plants to backyards and parks, and educating neighbours on pollinator-friendly garden maintenance, Project Swallowtail hopes to create a huge habitat patch that will also incorporate High Park and the lakeshore. Connected greenspaces filled with a diversity of native plants will allow individual swallowtail butterflies to move through all stages of their lifecycle (from egg to worm-like caterpillar to pupa to winged adult), and populations to thrive.

“Project Swallowtail is an invitation to connect with nature, as well as with people in your neighbourhood,” says Kathleen Law from Pollinator Partnership Canada. “We were able to create a rich community space, even though we were meeting on Zoom for the first time because of the pandemic. Everyone is enthusiastic about planting native plants and seeing butterflies, but just as rewarding is the feeling that we are working together to help nature.”

Project Swallowtail has partnered with Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests (LEAF), a Toronto-based organization, to help project participants plant native tree and shrubs for less. LEAF’s subsidized Backyard Tree Planting Program is funded in part by the City of Toronto.

“Native trees and shrubs provide excellent habitat, with some species offering up hundreds of flowers to pollinators on just one plant. We are thrilled to collaborate with Project Swallowtail in their important efforts to help residents return native plants to the urban landscape,” says Janet McKay, Executive Director of LEAF.

In addition to their popular tree planting programs, LEAF also offers native shrubs available for delivery. Shrubs can be purchased as a bundle (four shrubs and delivery for \$100) or individually.

For more information on the program, visit [www.yourleaf.org/project-swallowtail](http://www.yourleaf.org/project-swallowtail).

### **QUICK FACTS:**

- Project Swallowtail is supported by partner organizations Pollinator Partnership Canada, WWF-Canada, Parkdale and Toronto Horticultural Societies, David Suzuki Foundation, High Park Stewards, the City of Toronto and North American Native Plant Society.
- There are eight species of swallowtails in Ontario, including seven in Toronto.
  - Some of which are common and very recognizable, such as the eastern tiger and black swallowtails.
  - Others, such as the zebra swallowtail, whose caterpillars rely on the uncommon pawpaw tree, are rarely seen
- Both as adults and caterpillars, swallowtails are some of our most colourful and beautiful insects.
- Most swallowtail butterflies lay their eggs on a small number of native plants. Example: the spicebush swallowtail lays eggs on spicebush, sassafras and tulip tree. These plants are referred to as “larval host plants.”
- Gardeners often spot black swallowtail caterpillars on their dill and parsley plants. Its native larval host plant is Golden Alexander, a spring-blooming, sun-loving wildflower.
- Residents that plant through the LEAF Backyard Tree Planting Program receive a one-on-one consultation with a certified arborist, full planting service, tree care resources and follow-up care advice for only \$150 to \$220 per tree, around half of what service like this would typically cost.

- Do-It-Yourself Tree Planting Program is also available through LEAF for \$100 - \$170 per tree
- Native shrubs costs \$30, plus delivery, or purchase a bundle of four shrubs for only \$100 including delivery

## **MEDIA CONTACTS:**

### **LEAF:**

Janet McKay, Executive Director,

Phone: 416-413-9244, ext. 17 Cell: 647-883-5777

[janet@yourleaf.org](mailto:janet@yourleaf.org)

### **Project Swallowtail:**

Kathleen Law, Integrated Conservation Manager

Pollinator Partnership Canada

Phone: 416-838-6373

[kl@pollinator.org](mailto:kl@pollinator.org)