

Rutgers Class Teaches the 2 B's of Gardening: Attracting Bees and Butterflies

Learn About This and Over 30 Other Topics on March 20!

By Greg Saitz

When producers of the TV show *CSI: Las Vegas* wanted to know if there were any good places outside the city to find butterflies, they called Rick Mikula.

When Dolly Parton needed someone to design a butterfly garden for her amusement park, Dollywood, she called Rick Mikula.

And when Rutgers University's [Office of Continuing Professional Education](#) needed an instructor to teach a class on attracting butterflies to gardens, they called Rick Mikula.

"I do it 24/7," Mikula said. "I don't know if I sleep anymore because I dream about my job."

What started out as a hobby some 30 years ago has turned into an obsession for Mikula, who travels the world to work on all things butterfly. He even came up with the concept of releasing butterflies at weddings and funerals. It's no wonder he's called "the butterfly guy."



Rick Mikula, the "butterfly guy"
Photo courtesy of Rick Mikula

His talk on butterflies is just one of more than 30 workshops being offered at the one-day **34th Annual Home Gardeners School**, hosted by the Rutgers NJAES [Office of Continuing Professional Education](#). The Saturday program, scheduled for March 20, costs only \$49 for early birds who register by March 5 (fee is \$60 after March 5).

Creating butterfly-friendly gardens in New Jersey is important, Mikula said, because habitats for the fluttering insects are being threatened and destroyed. "People have to create butterfly havens right in their own gardens to give them what they need to survive," said Mikula, who has a moth named after him – the *Manduca Mikula* – after a friend discovered it in Argentina.

Butterflies love most herbs and Monarch butterflies – one of about 150 types found in the Garden State – thrive on milkweed, he said. During the Rutgers course, Mikula also will discuss the types of shade plants, such as purple coneflowers, that attract butterflies.

But butterflies aren't the only winged pollinators that add value to a garden. Bees play an important role as well, said Tim Schuler, the state apiarist with the New Jersey Department of Agriculture.

Photo courtesy of Chris Anderson



Tim Schuler shows students hives at the beekeeping class.

“There’s been a huge decline in pollinators – not just honeybees – in the last 40 years,” said Schuler, who also will teach a session on attracting bees at the [Home Gardeners School](#).

Although he’ll try to convince gardeners to also become beekeepers (he teaches a 3-day [beekeeping course](#) at Rutgers for those interested in taking up the hobby), Schuler said there are things property owners can do short of that to provide habitat for native pollinators. One idea is to leave blocks of wood outside that have been drilled with rows of 3/8-inch holes for solitary bees. Homeowners can also attract bees using mint, Russian sage and other plants that bloom at times when other vegetation isn’t flowering.

“One of the problems we find – not just in New Jersey but around the country – is several times a year there’s a lack of food sources for honeybees,” he said. “So planting plants that bloom in the late summer when there’s very little nectar around would be beneficial to honeybees without people even becoming beekeepers.”

Attracting Butterflies and Attracting Bees are just two workshops being offered at this year’s Home Gardeners School. To see a complete list of all 36 workshops available – from establishing your lawn and growing organic berries, to wine appreciation and designing great container gardens – please visit www.cpe.rutgers.edu/hgs. For more information or to register, contact the Rutgers NJAES Office of Continuing Professional Education at 732-932-9271.



Photo courtesy of Chris Anderson

Tim gives beekeeping students a close-up view of bees from one of his hives.