

Rethinking Our Role in the Fight for Racial and Environmental Justice

By Deepika Saksena and Juliet Cain

From its beginnings, the environmental movement has been largely segregated, with groups like this one run by and for communities that are largely wealthy and white, and out of touch with groups working on environmental issues affecting indigenous, black, brown, and poor/working class communities. The Pollinator Pathway, as you all know, is a decentralized, grassroots movement. For all of its participants, in addition to our knowledge of plants/shrubs/trees, our power is in our ability to connect with diverse groups. We can and should aim for true Environmental Justice that acknowledges the intersections of race, class, and the environment. As we continue our work encouraging each other to plant native plants, not to use pesticides, and rethink our lawns, we should also ask everyone to rethink broader societal imbalances. This may not be easy. It may require us to confront uncomfortable truths about our own lives, it may require us to make sacrifices, and it will take effort. But we can do this together.

We cannot focus on saving the pollinators when our neighbors are being senselessly killed by police or are struggling to feed their children. We cannot stay silent on issues like these that are directly affecting people's lives. We should stand in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, and similar movements fighting for justice and equality. We must join with these movements to help end systemic racism and bring justice for George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and all the others whose lives have been cut short because of it. We need to critically examine the underlying causes of these injustices, and question what role(s) we, as individuals and community members, play in them, and how we, the Pollinator Pathway, might bring our knowledge and passion into a wider, more diverse, communities.

Deepika Saksena is a co-founder of the Darien Pollinator Pathway. She is an accredited organic land care professional certified by CT NOFA and is on the board of the Darien Nature Center. She is an environmentalist with a special interest in organic gardening and farming. She has an ever-evolving organic native garden that she started in 2010 to provide a native habitat for the birds, butterflies and other pollinators; which has now expanded to her work with the Pollinator Pathway in Darien. She practices near zero-garbage and is actively involved in efforts to reduce the use of disposable single use items. She is also actively involved in promoting poison free food production and a poison free environment.

Juliet Cain is also an accredited organic land care professional certified by CT NOFA. She is currently Co-chair of the Conservation Committee of the Garden Club of Darien and Zone (CT and RI) Representative for the Conservation Committee of the Garden Club of America; she is Co-chair of BYO Darien, the group which proposed and oversaw passage of an ordinance to eliminate plastic bags in Darien; with Deepika Saksena, Co-chair of the Darien Pollinator Pathway, she is seeking to reduce pesticide use in Darien and restore pollinator habitat through native plantings. She maintains an organic and mostly native plant garden at home in Darien.