

HIGH LINE HORTICULTURE CELEBRATION 2025



NATURE IN THE CITY



More info at:
[thehighline.org/
natureinthecity](https://thehighline.org/natureinthecity)





New York City is the most densely populated and heavily developed city in the United States, yet even here, the tenacious spirit of nature persists. Thanks to parks, gardens, and green spaces like the High Line creating a more harmonious balance of natural and man-made environments, native birds, insects, and pollinators can still find important habitats and sustenance. These green spaces also improve the climate resiliency of cities, cool and clean the air, and support humans with the physical and mental health benefits of having access to nature.

As a naturalistic garden maintained through sustainable practices and one that provides many ecological benefits, the High Line demonstrates how cities can creatively achieve that balance. Built upon an elevated rail track, the High Line creates an approximately 1.5-mile corridor of living landscapes and important wildlife habitats—including the cooling canopy of more than 1,340 trees—that weaves through the commercial and residential buildings of Manhattan's West Side.

Learn more about the complex—and beautiful—ways our park, naturalistic gardens, and sustainable practices support nature in the city in this exhibition and via signage throughout the park.



Ecological benefits all year long.

The High Line's carefully cultivated gardens are more than just a beautiful space; they are a vital year-round haven, providing critical shelter and nourishment for urban wildlife. This multi-faceted support is evident in the complete life cycle played out within the park's boundaries—observe, for instance, the fascinating presence of baby bees overwintering in the safety of pithy stems, who later emerge and thrive on the park's diverse blooms, ensuring the cycle continues.



A LIFELINE FOR NEW YORK

Why have a purely ornamental garden when you can cultivate one that also strategically supports wildlife, people, and the environment at large? With more than 720 species of plants—half of which are native to the US and 160+ of which are native to New York’s five boroughs—the High Line is the West Side’s lifeline to nature and wildlife.

As a green corridor of important habitats, the High Line sustains a thriving ecosystem of plants and animals, including 33 species of bees and many of the 400 birds that visit or call the city home. Beyond its impact on wildlife, the High Line’s gardens help mitigate climate change-related issues, like the urban heat island effect, excessive stormwater, and poor air quality. To top it all off, green spaces like the High Line are critical for human health and well-being, especially for people who live in urban spaces.

Biodiversity

Noun

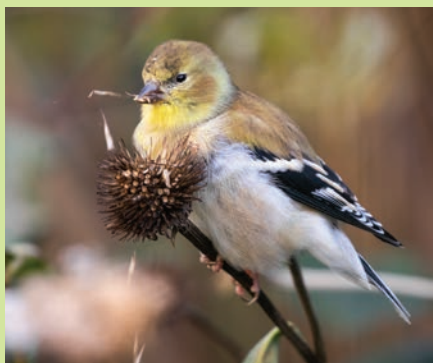
Baɪəʊdaɪˈvɜːrsəti

Biodiversity—short for biological diversity—refers to the variety of all life on earth, and the variability of living organisms in a specific place. Biodiversity can be measured by the number of species in a given location, and is a key indicator of an ecosystem’s health and resilience. Strong ecosystems have rich and complex biodiversity, which enables them to better resist disease and adapt to changing environments.

Biodiversity & balance: From the tiniest microorganism to a towering magnolia tree, from a hummingbird to a lady beetle, nature assigns each and every living thing a crucial job to do in the web of interconnected and interdependent processes that sustain life. When one species is struggling or absent from an ecosystem, the well-being and survival of all others is threatened. In urban areas, corridors of green space like the High Line provide the habitats that nurture and support the rich biodiversity that sustains healthy ecosystems and environments.



Illustrations by Jiaqi Wang



BIRDS

Avian visitors to the High Line make their home in attractive nesting habitats like the Thicket's forest of dogwoods, redbuds, hollies, witch hazels, and sassafras trees (at 21st Street), while feasting on a year-round menu of berries and seeds offered by bottlebrush buckeye, holly, and rose shrubs. This reliable supply of shelter and nourishment from our four-season gardens are an invitation to the more than 400 species of resident and visiting birds in New York City.

A 2017 study conducted by the American Museum of Natural History identified 33 species of bees on the High Line. Unlike widely known honeybees, which are not indigenous to North America and reside in hives with a queen, most of the bees on the High Line were determined to be solitary native varieties that build their nests in the ground, cavities, and hollow plant stems. Only our native bumblebees live in social nests, repurposing existing cavities, usually in the ground, with a queen bee and around 50 workers. Our diverse selection of native flowering plants, water sources, and habitat options make our naturalistic gardens particularly attractive to native pollinators such as these, bolstering an ecosystem in accordance with nature's design.

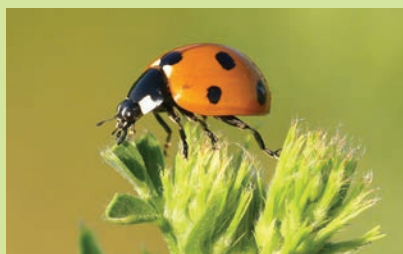


POLLINATORS

Pollinators can't resist the bountiful blossoms of the High Line's four-season gardens. More than 33 species of bees—as well as other pollinators and niche insects—inhabit our gardens, which bloom year-round to provide reliable sources of nectar, nourishment, and shelter. Because our pollinator pals choose to overwinter here, the High Line does not cut back its gardens in the fall, and is careful to leave the plants providing their food and shelter until the spring.

BENEFICIAL INSECTS

Insects are the essential workers of healthy ecosystems and the foundation of the food chain. They pollinate food-producing plants, cycle nutrients back into the soil, and serve as nourishment for birds. These hard working bees and other insects love nesting in the High Line's nurturing habitats. The dense leaf litter of our tree canopy provides a welcome home for lady beetles and aphid lions, which hunt and devour sap-sucking aphids that can transmit diseases to plants.



Urban green spaces like the High Line—that feature diverse plant communities including many native plants—restore to cities the ecological systems that protect the environment and create climate resiliency. Through a combination of physical and biological processes, the High Line’s 1,340+ trees, 150,000+ plants, and soil work together to absorb heat, cool temperatures, improve air quality, slow flooding, and filter stormwater.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT



REDUCING URBAN HEAT

The gray birch and serviceberry trees of the Gansevoort Woodland and the Flyover’s shady grove of big leaf magnolias are among the more than 1,340 trees that form the High Line’s tree canopy. These hard-working trees cast cooling shade and block the sun from warming the earth. Through the process of transpiration, plants also release cooling water vapor into the air, while other moisture enters the air when water evaporates off of leaf surfaces and soil.

The combination of these processes, through which plants work together to cool the air, is known as evapotranspiration. As a result, on average the urban heat island effect is reduced by 7.2°F (and up to 8.1°F!) along the High Line, compared to the surrounding neighborhoods, according to a recent study by Climate Central.

HEALTH & MENTAL WELL-BEING



SUPPORTING HUMAN HEALTH

Access to green space is an important determinant of health, and the High Line's serene and tranquil natural environments offer New York's city-dwellers a garden oasis where they can experience the substantial physical and mental health benefits human beings derive from nature. Studies show that just a short visit to a park soothes stress, boosts mood, relieves anxiety and depression, lowers blood pressure and cortisol levels, mitigates feelings of loneliness, and promotes a sense of well-being.

Visitors to the High Line can find quiet among the noise-buffering gray birches of the Gansevoort Woodland, soak in the Sundeck's calming views of the Hudson River, inhale the cooler, clean air, meditate among the undulating blossoms, and restorative scents of the Thicket's woodland forest, or get their hearts pumping with a stroll through the park's approximately 1.5 miles of stunning garden zones.

CLIMATE RESILIENCE

MANAGING STORMWATER

Impervious surfaces like pavement and concrete cannot absorb water. As storms become more severe, managing stormwater run-off is a growing challenge for cities. Trees, plants, and soil are natural stormwater mitigation and filtration systems. Tree canopies block water from reaching the ground, while their roots create canals that enable soil to drink up more of the run-off that can cause flooding and damage.

The High Line forms a green roof over the West Side, absorbing rain water through a multilayered drainage system. Rain that falls on our concrete pathways slips through the gaps in the planks and must migrate through the soil in the planting beds before it can reach the storm drain. This allows the soil, plant roots, and the drainage mat to absorb as much water as possible before sending the excess to the drain. This greatly reduces the stormwater that escapes the High Line and conserves water in our gardens.



IMPROVING AIR QUALITY

Working together, trees and plants form nature's own air conditioning systems. Not only do they cool the air, but they clean it by hungrily consuming carbon dioxide. According to a 2017 study from Columbia University, the High Line's tree canopy sequestered 1.3 tons of atmospheric carbon annually. Since then, the High Line has been steadily revving up its carbon capture, nearly doubling the number of trees in the park. A subsequent 2023 study revealed New York's trees and plants absorb 40% of the city's CO₂ emissions.

CREATING CLIMATE RESILIENCE

The elevated nature of the High Line means our native and ornamental plants must thrive in challenging conditions—exposed to temperature swings, wind, and fluctuations in moisture that are more extreme than at street level. And all in primarily 18 inches of soil! For this reason, the High Line's gardens are an excellent lab for finding resilient plants that will do well as climate change creates more unpredictability and weather extremes, all while making a net positive environmental impact. Our horticulturists also minimize inputs: Our gardens' beautiful displays are done without pesticides or chemical fertilizers—primarily using compost!—or excessive watering, removing those negative environmental impacts that can come with conventional commercial landcare.

PHOTOGRAPH OUR WILDLIFE!

One of the most prominent and welcome species on the High Line is the shutterbug—human beings who find the High Line’s vibrant gardens the ideal habitat for stunning nature and wildlife photography. Shutterbugs can be both native and migratory—some traveling far distances over land and sea to reach the High Line—to help us pollinate the world with beautiful visuals of the High Line’s busy ecosystems.

If you’re a shutterbug, please post your photos of our birds, bees, plants, and insects to social media and tag [@highlinenyc](#) [#ISpyOnTheHighLine](#) on Instagram, Twitter (X), Facebook, or TikTok. We may share them here on the High Line or on our social channels!

Bonus points for posting High Line wildlife to iNaturalist, which open sources wildlife sightings.

[Click here to download the iNaturalist app.](#)





WALK ON THE WILD SIDE: THE ECOSYSTEMS OF THE PARK

The High Line transports visitors through approximately 1.5 miles of distinct garden zones that echo the native ecosystems of Manhattan Island—vast grasslands, coastal wetlands, thickets of woody shrubs, and shady woodland forests. These vibrant communities of plants, insects, birds, and pollinators thrive in authentic environments and support each other by being linked together on the High Line.

Urban ecology

Noun

'ʒ:rbən i'kɒlədʒi

Urban ecology is the science and study of how living things—people, plants, and animals—relate and interact with each other and their physical surroundings in cities and urban environments. An urban ecosystem includes the community of people, plants and animals that live in cities, but also the built environment of buildings, bridges, roads, sewers, and other structures that impact natural environments and influence how organisms behave.



Woodland

A woodland is a low-density forest populated by trees and woody shrubs and characterized by the wider spacing of trees. This allows sunlight to reach the earth and support a healthy understory—the shrubs and vines beneath a tree canopy that provide habitats for wildlife. The High Line features several of these important ecosystems, miniature forests thriving above New York’s West Side. Mockingbirds and sparrows flock to the Gansevoort Woodland’s serviceberry and gray birch trees, where bees, beetles, flower flies, and butterflies sip from the blooms of Amethyst Falls American wisteria. Beneath the Flyover’s canopy of big leaf magnolias, sassafras, and serviceberry trees, a thriving understory of flowering plants is abuzz with pollinators, including a wide variety of long-tongued bees.



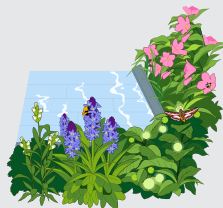
Grassland

Grasslands are wide, open spaces of undulating prairie grasses and herbaceous plants like wildflowers, devoid of trees and woody shrubs. Location determines whether a grassland is a prairie, steppe, or savannah—as well as whether toothy predators are on the roam. You won’t encounter any lions on the Chelsea Grasslands or the Meadow Walk, but you will be dazzled by the stunning variety of grasses and flowering shrubs and perennials—like our iconic coneflowers and rattlesnake master. Not only do they provide the High Line with four seasons of vibrant color, they serve up a year-round supply of nourishing seeds and nectar to buzzing populations of hummingbirds, native bees, and other pollinators. In an urban area like New York, the five grassland zones of the High Line are efficient engines of climate resiliency, absorbing copious amounts of carbon, heat, and stormwater.



Woodland edge

As denser forest gives way to more open spaces, many species of wildlife make their home in the thickets of woody shrubs and shade-tolerant grasses at the woodland’s edge. Suburban living often abuts these habitats, but they’re not often found in urban environments like New York. The High Line emulates these fascinating ecosystems throughout the park. At the Chelsea Thicket, the tasty red berries of the dogwood trees attract robins, blue jays, and other avian visitors in summer and fall, while low-grow aromatic sumac hosts moth and butterfly larvae—which feed on the shrub’s citrusy fruit. Shrub thickets present ideal nesting locations for a variety of birds. We’ve spotted robins, mockingbirds, and mourning doves nurturing their next generations here. The Woodland Edge features early blooming witch hazel and native chokecherry, which attracts bees, beetles, butterflies, and the lunate zale moth.



Wetland

A manmade water feature on the High Line’s Sundeck provides a friendly watering hole for thirsty insects and a splash pad for humans looking to cool their heels (and toes) on a summer day. It also creates wetland conditions where moisture-loving plants like swamp milkweed, blue flag iris, and swamp rose mallow flourish. During the hot and dry summer months, bees, butterflies, and other insects seeking a water source on New York’s urban heat island are drawn to this wetland. The buttonbush—hugely popular with pollinators and almost all varieties of butterflies—is also the host plant for North America’s largest moths.

WOODLAND



Amelanchier laevis

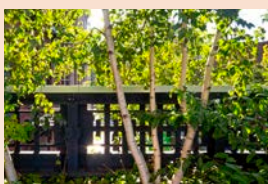
Allegheny serviceberry, juneberry

BLOOM TIME: MAR–APR

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE: Supports birds

ON THE PARK: Gansevoort–13th Streets, 20th–22nd Streets, 25th–27th Streets

Native to Eastern North America, including NYC



Betula populifolia 'Whitespire'

Whitespire grey birch

BLOOM TIME: APR

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE: Supports birds, urban cooling

ON THE PARK: Gansevoort–13th Streets, 21st–22nd Streets, 30th Street, Moynihan Connector

Native to Eastern North America, including NYC



Eurybia divaricata

'Eastern Star'

white wood aster

BLOOM TIME: AUG–SEP

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE: Supports butterflies and other pollinators

ON THE PARK: Little West 12th Streets, 18th–19th Streets

Native to Eastern North America, including NYC



Sesleria autumnalis

autumn moorgrass

BLOOM TIME: SEP–OCT

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE: Supports pollinators

ON THE PARK: Gansevoort–13th Streets, 19th Street, 30th Street



Stachys officinalis 'Hummelo'

Hummelo hedge nettle

BLOOM TIME: JUL–SEP

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE: Supports pollinators

ON THE PARK: Gansevoort–13th Streets, 14th–15th Streets



Carex bromoides

brome-like sedge

BLOOM TIME: APR–MAY

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE: Supports birds, butterflies, and moths

ON THE PARK: 18–22nd Streets, Moynihan Connector

Native to Eastern North America, including New York



Cercis canadensis

eastern redbud

BLOOM TIME: APR

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE: Supports birds and bees

ON THE PARK: 21st–22nd Streets

Native to Eastern North America



Ilex opaca

American holly

BLOOM TIME: MAY

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE: Supports birds

ON THE PARK: 21st–22nd Streets

Native to Eastern and central US, including New York



Syringa x laciniata

cutleaf lilac

BLOOM TIME: APR–MAY

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE: Supports butterflies

ON THE PARK: 21st–22nd Streets

WOODLAND EDGE



Aronia melanocarpa 'Viking'

Black chokeberry

BLOOM TIME: MAY

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Supports birds and
bumblebees

ON THE PARK: 13th–14th
Streets

Native to North America



Calycanthus floridus

Carolina allspice

BLOOM TIME: APR

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Supports pollinators
and insects

ON THE PARK:
13th Street, 26th Street

Native to Southeastern US



Heuchera villosa 'Brownies'

"Brownies" hairy alumroot

BLOOM TIME: AUG–SEP

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Supports pollinators,
especially native bees

ON THE PARK: 13th Street

Native to Eastern US



Prunus virginiana

chokecherry

BLOOM TIME: APR–JUL

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Supports butterflies,
moths, birds

ON THE PARK: 13th Street

*Native to Central and
Eastern US*

WETLAND



Cephalanthus occidentalis
'sugar shack'

Sugar Shack buttonbush

BLOOM TIME: JUN–JUL

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Supports native bees

ON THE PARK:

14th–15th Streets

*Native to eastern, southern,
and southwest US and
Canada*



Chelone glabra

white turtlehead

BLOOM TIME: AUG–OCT

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Supports native bees

ON THE PARK:

14th–15th Streets

*Native to eastern North
America, including Canada
and NY*



Hibiscus moscheutos
subsp. *palustris*

swamp rose mallow

BLOOM TIME: JUL–SEP

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Supports butterflies and

other pollinators

ON THE PARK:

14th–15th Streets

*Native to eastern North
America, including NYC*



Pontederia cordata

pickerelweed

BLOOM TIME: JUL–SEP

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Supports native bees

ON THE PARK:

14th–15th Streets

*Native to eastern North
America*

GRASSLAND



Amorpha canescens

leadplant

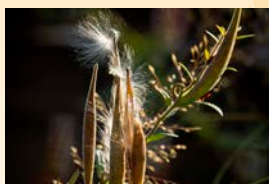
BLOOM TIME: MAY–JUN

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Blooms support pollinators
in summer, erosion control,
drought tolerance, nitrogen
fixation

ON THE PARK: Little West
12th–13th Streets, 14th–15th
Streets, 17th–18th Streets,
26th–28th Streets

Native to North America



Asclepias tuberosa

butterfly milkweed

BLOOM TIME: JUL–SEP

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Supports pollinators

ON THE PARK: 18th–19th Streets, 28th Street, Interim Walkway

Native to eastern and southwestern North America, including NYC



Panicum virgatum

‘Shenandoah’

Shenandoah red switch grass

BLOOM TIME: AUG–OCT

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Supports birds, butterflies, and pollinators

ON THE PARK: 17th–20th Streets

Native to North America, including Canada, Mexico and NYC



Schizachyrium scoparium

‘The Blues’

The Blues little bluestem

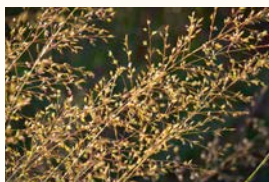
BLOOM TIME: AUG–OCT

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Supports birds, butterflies, and native bees

ON THE PARK: 18th–19th Streets, 30th Street and 11th Ave

Native to most of Canada and the US, except the West Coast



Sporobolus heterolepis

prairie dropseed

BLOOM TIME: AUG–OCT

ECOLOGICAL

SIGNIFICANCE: Supports songbirds and pollinators, drought tolerant

ON THE PARK: 18th–20th Streets, 27th–29th Streets

Native to North America



Solidago speciosa

showy goldenrod

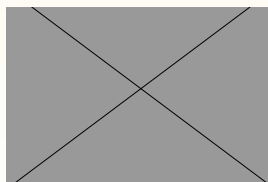
BLOOM TIME: JUL–SEP

ECOLOGICAL

SIGNIFICANCE: Supports pollinators, especially native bees

ON THE PARK: 17th–20th Streets

Native to central and eastern US, including NYC



Echinacea purpurea

purple coneflower

BLOOM TIME: JUN–AUG

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Blooms support pollinators in summer, seeds support birds in winter

ON THE PARK: Little West 12th, 15th, 27th–30th Streets

Native to North America



Coreopsis tripteris

tall tickseed

BLOOM TIME: JUL–SEP

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Blooms support pollinators in summer, seeds support birds in winter

ON THE PARK: 27th–30th Streets

Native to eastern North America



Amsonia hubrichtii

threadleaf bluestar

BLOOM TIME: MAY–JUN

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Blooms support pollinators in spring

ON THE PARK: Gansevoort–15th Streets, 18th–20th Streets, 28th–30th Streets

Native to Arkansas and Oklahoma



Veronicastrum virginicum

Culver's root

BLOOM TIME: MAY–AUG

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Blooms support pollinators

ON THE PARK: 17th–20th Streets

Native to North America

THE HIGH LINE'S HIDDEN WORLD

The High Line's naturalistic gardens were *inspired* by the self-seeded landscape that had sprouted up on the rail track, but are *wild by design*—the result of painstaking planning, care, and cultivation by our expert horticulture team.



CREATING SUSTAINABLE, CLIMATE-RESILIENT GARDENS

Mindful of how plants behave in the High Line's unique growing conditions, Friends of the High Line's horticulture team creates sustainable and climate-resilient gardens by planting a diverse selection of plants. Our horticulturists incorporate native and drought-resistant plants that perform important ecological functions like attracting beneficial insects or “fixing nitrogen” by converting atmospheric nitrogen into plant food. They also do a great job managing noxious, weedy plants and use Integrated Pest Management—a chemical-free, environmentally sound method of pest prevention and control—to safeguard our gardens and visitors from unwelcome critters.





SAVING SEEDS & PROPAGATING PLANTS

By collecting and saving seeds from our gardens, Friends of the High Line's horticulture team can propagate our own plants on site. This reduces our carbon footprint, allows us to grow rare plants that are difficult to source, and supports ecotypes—plants that have adapted to the High Line. We share these seeds with horticulture professionals across New York City and collect rainwater at 34th Street to water the plants we're propagating.



USING ADVANCED IRRIGATION TECHNOLOGY

The High Line's green-roof drainage system helps to capture and hold stormwater. Moisture and precipitation sensors in our plant beds that are connected to our web-based irrigation controllers, relay real-time data to our horticulture team, meaning watering can be targeted and limited to only what's necessary.

MAINTAINING BIODIVERSITY

As stewards of a complex ecosystem of plants, insects, pollinators, birds, and people, the High Line's horticulture team cultivates and protects the park's vibrant biodiversity with ecological horticultural practices. Chemical insecticides and herbicides are never used, plant selection favors native species—like the milkweeds that support Monarch butterflies—and thoughtful tree pruning allows rain and sunlight to nourish our understory.

Plants providing habitats and food sources for birds and insects are allowed to overwinter, and are left undisturbed until Spring Cutback. The Cutback debris from the park is returned to the planting beds as compost to enrich soil biodiversity. The beauty and experience of the park—and our mentoring of the next generation of horticulturists—ensures our ecosystem attracts and maintains a healthy population of human beings.





POWER OUR PARK—DONATE TODAY!

Founded in 1999, Friends of the High Line fought for the High Line's preservation and transformation, and now serves as the nonprofit conservancy that runs this extraordinary park. In addition to operating and maintaining the park, Friends of the High Line raises nearly 100% of the High Line's annual budget from the generous support of our members and friends like you.

Do you love and enjoy this special place?

Make a contribution—at whatever level you can—and help us ensure our gardens continue to thrive and provide ecological benefits to New York City year after year.



click here to
donate at:
[thehighline.org/
nature25](https://thehighline.org/nature25)

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