



Creating a Pollinator-Friendly Garden

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Pollinators have been called “nature’s crop dusters” ... without them we would be missing many of our favorite flowers and wildflowers. There are a number of ways to attract pollinators and keep them working for you but they are happiest in natural settings that resemble the floral landscapes which attract them in the first place. We tend to think of pollinators as being only bees but butterflies, moths and birds are all contributing to the job.

The Bumblebee population is declining. Many gardeners are going out of their way to attract Mason bees because they are incredible cross-pollinators, gathering pollen and nectar on the same visit. (Do not confuse them with Carpenter bees ... Mason bees are a different species and are gentle and friendly.) Arriving early in the season, they are invaluable for pollinating fruit trees. They are not interested in eating your house! Very sociable, (they never come alone), Mason bees are happiest living in special houses, readily available at garden supply stores/catalogs.

A few simple additions to your gardening could increase the number of pollinator visitors:

Garden in the sun. Even late into the fall, you will find bees hanging onto flowers and sunning themselves.

Cultivate native plants. Natives are four times more attractive to native bees than anything else.

Plant in clumps. Clusters of one pollinator-friendly plant will draw more visitors.

Aim for extended bloom. Have at least 3 species blooming in each season.

Select flowers in bright colors. Vary the shapes of the flowers to accommodate different pollinators.

Choose common plants and heirloom varieties which are proven sources of nectar and pollen.

Provide ground cover and shade as well as shallow dishes of water.

Help your vegetable garden attract pollinators by planting flowering herbs.

Do not use pesticides.

Honeybees: Attracted to sweet/minty scents, plants on which they can perch and blooms fully open in the daytime. They prefer flat, shallow blossoms and actually retain a memory of plants they have visited! Try Iris, Mountain Laurel, Violets, Cosmos, Hollyhock, Phlox, Nepeta, Salvia, Lavender and Roses.

Bumblebees: Long-tongued and heavier than Honeybees, Bumblebees are sun worshippers. Twice as fast as Honeybees, Bumblebees carry a great deal of pollen per trip because they are so much larger and are not making much honey. Consider using: Columbine, Snapdragons, Monarda, Monkshood, Candytuft, Agastache, and Buddleia.

Butterflies: Although oddly enough butterflies taste with their feet and don't get much pollen on their bodies, they are still highly efficient pollinators. They like brightly colored red, orange, purple and yellow highly-scented flowers which grow in clusters and are fully open during the day. Growing Asters, Sedum, Sweet William, Marigolds, Coneflowers, Zinnias and Buddleia will be sure to attract them.

Moths: They don't get much attention, but moths are the night-shift pollinators in the garden. Appearing in the late afternoon, moths are attracted to all the nocturnal, heavily-scented flowers. Many of those flowers open in late afternoon and bloom into the night; most of the flowers have long-throats and the pale flowers stay visible for a long time. Attract moths with Nicotiana, Gaura, Stock, Honeysuckle, Moonflower, Evening Primrose and Night-blooming Jasmine.

Birds: Flowers attracting birds need to be shaped to accommodate those whirring wings and their stems must be strong enough for perching. Hummingbirds, key to native wildflower pollination, are attracted most by red flowers but other birds head for the nectar available in many summer flowers. Birds have no real sense of smell but bright colors, especially red, attract them all summer long. Plant Columbine, Agastache, Salvia, Penstemon, Trumpet creepers and Bee Balm to bring them flying in.

Providing extended seasonal blooms for pollinators just takes a little planning. Bees and butterflies will be attracted to many different flowers over the course of the gardening season and will spend a great deal of time in the garden if you provide a selection of their favorites. For example:

Spring: Aubretia, Hyacinth, Pulmonaria, Crocus, Hyacinth, Lilac, Primrose

Summer: Baptisia, Buddleia, Bee Balm, Cosmos, Echinacea, Honeysuckle, Hosta, Lavender, Nepeta, Valerian

Fall: Asters, Chrysanthemum, Goldenrod, Hyssop, Sedum, Vernonia, Zinnias