



Make pollinators a priority

The last several years have seen a significant decline in bees, butterflies and other pollinators. How much of an impact do these pollinators have in our daily lives? Well – a lot. They’re responsible for as much as one-third of the food and drinks we consume. They also play an important role to the production of our clothes.

Can you imagine a world without bees? Without them, we wouldn’t have the abundance of a variety of fruits and vegetables or almonds that we enjoy. Of those foods and beverages we enjoy on a daily basis, over 30% rely on or benefit from the pollinator. Production of animal-pollinated crops is valued at over \$235 billion annually worldwide. A world without pollinators would leave us with fewer food choices and would certainly make it harder to obtain the nutrition we need to survive.

Fortunately, there are steps gardeners can take to help boost the population of these important insects.

Supporting pollinators isn’t something done only during the warm growing months. Successful pollinator habitat provides resources for the entire lifecycle. Pollen and nectar support the adult pollinators, but adequate nesting habitat is also needed if you want pollinators to live in your landscape as opposed to simply pass through.

Different pollinators have different needs to support each stage of their lifecycle. About 70% of native bees are ground nesting and need access to bare soil. Tilling the ground can disrupt the habitat. The other 30% of native bees are cavity nesting and need cavities in dead wood, hollow stems or brush piles. Bumble bees create nests in cavities underground or in trees.

Butterflies lay their eggs on specific plants or within plant families that are called host plants. The host plants provide food and shelter for caterpillars when they emerge. Milkweed is a favorite for butterflies and is the only plant a monarch butterfly will lay its eggs on.

Something else gardeners can do is to grow pollinator-friendly plants. These plants provide the nectar and pollen resources on which pollinators feed. Choose selections of trees, shrubs and flowers with overlapping bloom times to help ensure there’s enough pollen and nectar to support the pollinators spring through fall.

To help maintain your pollinator population, avoid using pesticides. Commonly used in urban and agricultural settings to kill invertebrate pests, diseases and weeds, pesticides, especially insecticides, are harmful to pollinators and other beneficial insects. These products reduce food

sources by removing flowers from the landscape, causing subtle yet concerning effects on reproduction, navigation and memory.

Unfortunately, pesticide contamination is wide spread and can happen in numerous ways, including direct contact with spray residue on plants, through ingestion of contaminated pollen and nectar or through exposure to contaminated nesting sites or materials.

Pollinators are a diverse and fascinating group of invertebrates, and we have them to thank for beautiful blooming meadows, juicy summer berries, bountiful vegetable gardens, and colorful pumpkins and gourds.

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