



Celebrate pollinators during Pollinator Week June 19-25

While seed selection, rich soil and adequate moisture all play key roles, pollinators take the lead when it comes to successful gardening. Pollinator numbers have been declining over the past several years so it's important to raise awareness of the role pollinators play in gardening and what can be done to protect them.

Pollinator Week is slated for June 19-25 and will emphasize the connections between climate and pollinators. Pollinators are dying because their food and shelter are disappearing, diseases are increasing and rising temperatures and natural disasters are affecting their ability to survive.

What is a pollinator? Most pollinators, about 200,000 species, are beneficial insects such as flies, beetles, wasps, ants, butterflies, moths and bees. They are critical to an ecosystem. About 1,000 of all pollinators are vertebrates such as birds, bats and small mammals. About 75% of all flowering plant species need the help of pollinators to move pollen grains from plant to plant for fertilization.

What exactly is pollination? It's a vital stage in the life cycle of all flowering plants. When pollen is moved within a flower or carried from one flower to another of the same species, it leads to fertilization. This process is necessary for healthy and productive native and agricultural ecosystems. Pollination also has a direct impact on the foods and beverages we enjoy. Pollination produces nearly \$20 billion worth of products annually.

Did you know there is one tiny fly, called a midge, that is responsible for the world's supply of chocolate? Also, one out of every three bites of food we eat is due to pollination.

What can gardeners do to help boost the pollinator population?

- Reduce your impact by reducing or eliminating pesticide use.
- Create pollinator-friendly habitat with native flowering plants that supply pollinators with nectar, pollen and homes.
- Design your garden so there is a continuous succession of flowering plants from spring through fall.
- Install houses for bats and native bees.
- Supply water for all wildlife, but don't let it become a mosquito breeding ground.
- Select old-fashioned varieties of flowers when possible because breeding has caused some modern blooms to lose their fragrance and/or the nectar/pollen needed to attract and feed pollinators.
- Plant native to your region using plants that provide nectar for adult pollinators plus food for insect larvae.

Don't be afraid when observing bees in the landscape. Most species of bees don't sting; only honey bees are defensive and may chase someone who disturbs their hive.

As you step out into your landscape, take a look around at the lush and colorful plants that are there, thanks to pollinators doing their job.