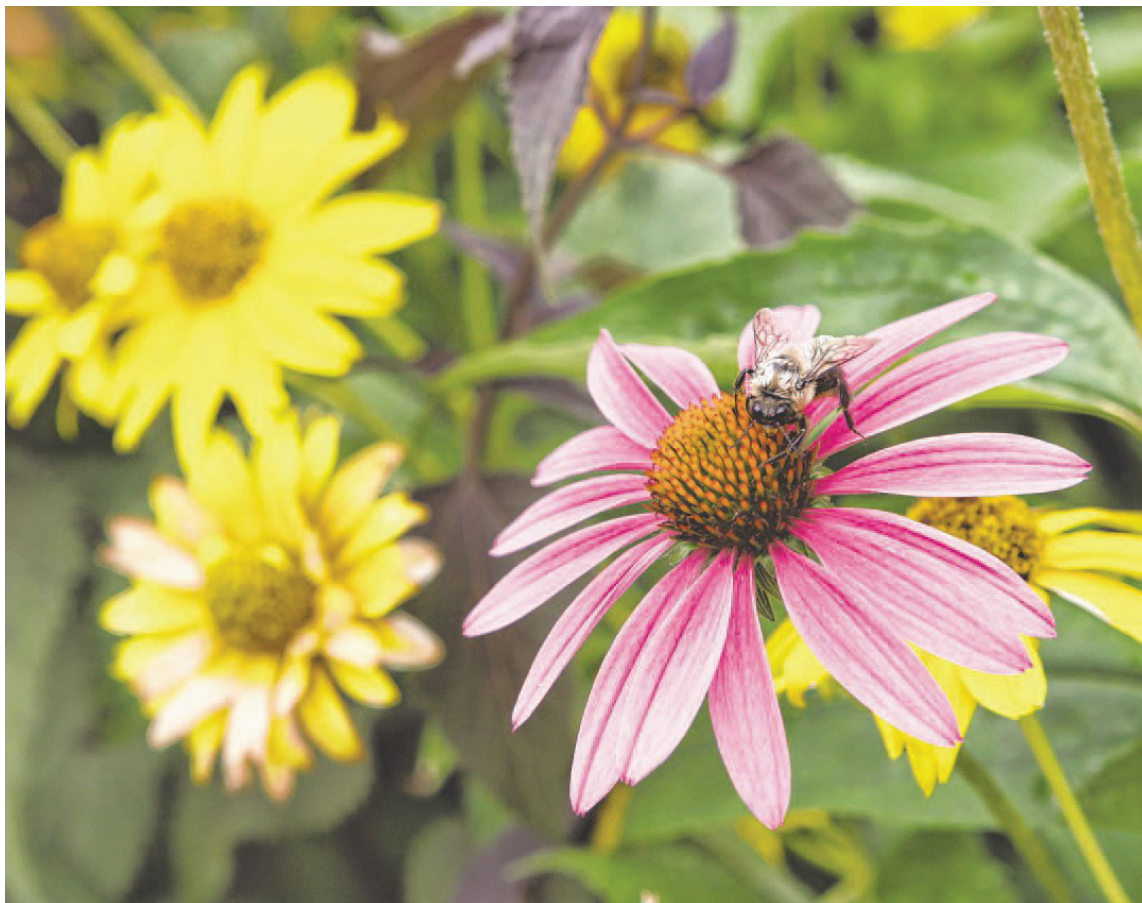


Life & Style



A bumblebee enjoys a purple coneflower in the butterfly and hummingbird garden at the Native Plant Center at Westchester Community College in Valhalla. FILE PHOTO BY MARK VERGARI/THE JOURNAL NEWS

PLANTING FOR POLLINATORS

Honeybees and other garden helpers are in a tailspin, but you can help save them 

By Bill Cary
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As home gardeners get ready for spring, native-plant expert Kim Eierman urges us to consider planting for pollinators, instead of just falling for what looks pretty at the garden center.

Eierman, who lives and gardens in Bronxville, was one of our speakers at the well-attended annual spring conference put on by the Native Plant Center. Called "Wildlife Matters: Creating Landscapes that Sustain Nature," it ran all day Monday at the Westchester Community College campus in Valhalla. Eierman's interesting, energetic talk was on "Planting for Pollinators."

GARDENING: Give embattled pollinators a helping hand

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As we all know, honeybees and many other pollinators are in serious decline and need all the help we can give them. Honeybees, by the way, are not native to the United States. Most are either Italian or Russian.

There are 4,000 species of bees native to the U.S., and many of these are in trouble, too, Eierman says. Among these are about 50 species of bumble bees. About half are in serious trouble. Bumblebees make honey, too, but only enough for them to eat.

"Honeybees are the only insect to make sufficient honey for human consumption," Eierman says. A healthy colony has about 50,000 bees.

When gathering pollen, a honeybee will visit up to 50 to 100 flowers per trip out of the hive, and make up to 50 trips per day. They will fly about 3 miles for good foraging, but you don't want to make them work that hard.

Other pollinators include butterflies, beetles, bats, flies, moths, birds (especially hummingbirds) and wasps. Butterflies, which are not as efficient as some of the other ones, pollinate many of the common flowers in our gardens, including milkweed, Joe-pye weed, coneflower, sunflowers and gayfeather (liatris).

When planting a garden for pollinators, you want to plant things that bloom from early spring right through late fall, to attract the full range of pollinators and to ensure there is always something for them to feast on. And just think how great your garden will look, with something always in flower.

When shopping for plants that help pollinators, don't buy just one, Eierman says. Buy groups of plants, to create a fairly large target for bees and other pollinators to find. Her ideal is to cre-



Flowering shrubs like this serviceberry (Am elanchier) are important for pollinators. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO



A bee collects pollen from the flower of a summersweet shrub (*Clethra alnifolia*) at Wildflower Island in the Teatown Lake Reservation in Ossining. FILE TJN

ate a 4-by-4-foot target. In a meadow, you want repetitions of the same flowers.

Also, remember that the closer a plant is to the straight species the better it is for bees, Eierman says.

Avoid overhybridized flowering plants. Also, don't just think of perennials with pretty blooms. Native flowering shrubs and trees like maples and crab apples are enormously important to pollinators.

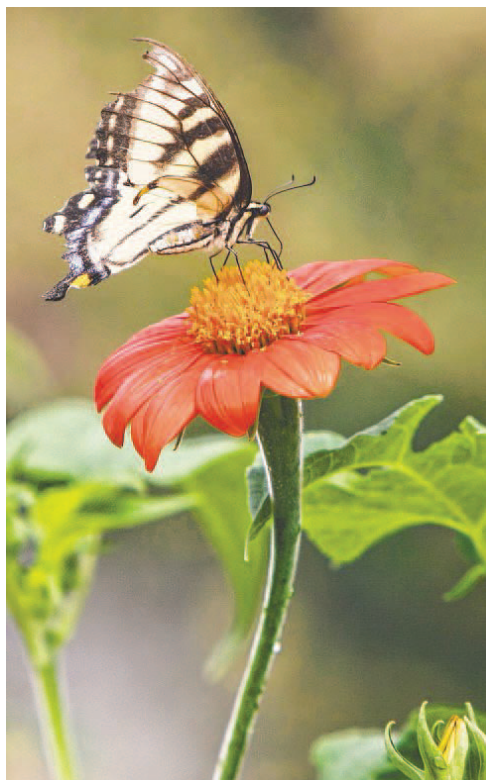
If you want to draw pollinators to your yard and garden, you cannot use any pesticides. Even

the broad-spectrum organic ones can be just as destructive to bees, Eierman says.

You should clean up your garden and cut back perennials in spring, not fall, she says. That way you leave up seed heads and foliage for overwintering insects and birds.

If you have a meadow, it's best not to mow it down every spring. Rather, cut down one-third each year, over a period of three years. Then you don't kill as many insects.

A particularly good website for identifying insects is bugguide.net, Eierman says.



Butterflies pollinate many of the common flowers in our gardens, including milkweed, Joe-pye weed, coneflower, sunflowers and gayfeather (liatris). FILE TJN

NATIVE PLANTS FOR POLLINATORS

Early spring bloomers

Red maple tree
Alders
Serviceberry
Redbud tree
Green hawthorn
Virginia strawberry
Tulip tree
Plum trees
Pussy willow – a very early source off ood
Red oak
American elm

Later spring bloomers

Common persimmon
Wild geranium
Hollies, including inkberry and winterberry
Crabapples
Tupelo tree
Black cherry
Sumac
Black locust

Early to middle summer bloomers

Button bush
Coneflower
St. John's wort
Smooth hydrangea (*H. arborens*)
Ninebark
Brambles/red and black berries
Elderberry – great for wet spots

Late summer plants

Agastache
Swamp milkweeds — all are good
Fireweed
Summersweet/
Clethra
Eupatoriums — Joe-pye weed and boneset
Helianthus
Hardy hibiscus
Liatris
Horsemint
Primrose
Mountain mint
Rudbeckia
Culver's root — good for wet spots
New York ironweed

Fall bloomers

Goldenrod — avoid the Canada variety, which is aggressive
Aster

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