



The National Gardener

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How to Create a Pollinator Victory Garden

Winning the War Against Pollinator Decline

■ Plant for a succession of bloom from spring through fall. Different pollinator species emerge at different times of the year, and have different life spans. Create an ongoing "pollinator buffet" throughout the growing season.

■ Skip the double-flowered plants—they have little, and sometimes no, nectar or pollen. What is beautiful to the human eye may be a source of starvation for a bee or other pollinator. Find the beauty in what a plant does, not just how it looks.

■ Don't forget to include trees and shrubs in your landscape—pollinators need them. Many "woody" plants are important for pollinators, and not just those with showy blooms. Some early blooming native trees and shrubs can be a source of nectar or pollen to early emerging bees. Some trees even provide habitat to pollinators.

■ Emphasize native plants to support pollinators. Evolution matters! Native pollinators have evolved with native plants; some may depend upon a single type of plant. One example—Monarch caterpillars only eat milkweeds. Many native plants are good nectar and pollen sources for the European honey bee, too.

■ Plant a diverse array of plants with different flower shapes, sizes, and colors. Different pollinators are attracted to different plant characteristics. And, a pollinator's tongue length, body size, and shape will determine what flowers it can use. A plant with long, tubular flowers can be accessed by long-tongued bees, but will not be useful to short-tongued bees, such as honey bees.

■ Maximize floral targets for pollinators. Make it easier for pollinators to find flowers—plant a sizable target of a single plant species or repeat the plant throughout your landscape. Some pollinators will only use a single plant species during a foraging trip—make sure they don't go hungry!

■ Provide nesting sites for pollinators in your landscape. 70% of native bee species nest in the ground and need bare soil in a sunny spot—dedicate small areas for these ground-nesting bees. Accommodate the other 30% of bees that nest in old mouse holes, tree cavities, pithy plant stems, dead trees, etc.

■ Eliminate chemical pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides. Chemical pesticides are often very deadly to pollinators. Even some organic products can be lethal. Skip the "secret sauce" and attract beneficial insects, nature's pest control, to your garden with native plants.

■ Reduce or eliminate "The Green Desert" (your lawn). Figure out how much lawn you really need and lose the rest—it's an ecological wasteland for pollinators. Replace lawn with flowering perennials, trees, and shrubs.

■ Add a pollinator habitat sign to your landscape. Help raise awareness about the importance of pollinators and make a point of showing off your Pollinator Victory Garden to family, friends, and neighbors.

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