

# Pollinators

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“Busy as a bee” takes on a new meaning when you recognize how vital bees are to our food production. Our world depends on pollinators for one-third of the food we eat and the elaborate biodiversity in natural ecosystems. A healthy pollinator population can improve fruit quality and size as well as produces fertile seeds. Almost all flowering plants need to be pollinated.

The number of both native pollinators and domesticated bee populations is declining. Many stressors have contributed to this decline, including loss of natural habitat, chemical pesticide usage, disease, poor nutrition and weather. To positively influence pollinators, we need to provide the necessary habitat, including the basics of food, water, shelter and enough space to grow their young.



## Who Are the Pollinators?

- The European Honeybee was imported almost 400 years ago and is considered the rock star of agricultural pollination. The United States is also home to nearly 4,000 species of native ground and twig nesting bees, many of which are solitary.
- Butterflies are attracted to flowers and gardens with full sun, water sources and flowers large enough for landing platforms. The monarch butterfly needs milkweed to support its nutritional needs and the larval stage.
- Beetles are not as efficient nor beautiful, but they play an essential role in pollination with more than 30,000 species found in the United States.
- Flies are generalist pollinators, meaning they visit many species of plants and should be left alone to do their job. There are nearly 900 species of flower flies in North America that mimic wasps or bees with their yellow and black stripes and are among the most frequent visitors to a wide range of plants.

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- With their long beaks and tongues drawing nectar from tubular flowers, hummingbirds are the primary bird pollinators in the United States, carrying pollen on their beaks and feathers.
- Bats are crucial pollinators of night-blooming plant species in tropical and desert climates. More than 1,300 bat species consume vast amounts of insects every night, including some of the most damaging agricultural pests.

## Simple Steps Can Be Taken to Support Pollinators

- Watch for pollinator activity in your landscapes.
- Add native plants that provide selection with varying heights, flower shapes, colors and continuous blooms from early spring through fall. Don't forget about night-blooming flowers that support moths and bats!
- Include plants that provide food and shelter for larval development, even though some host plants are less than ornamental and considered weeds.
- Change mowing habits to allow for yard flowers and some weeds that provide food for pollinators.
- Leave places for pollinators to nest by keeping bare areas for ground-nesting insects, and leave dead snags and shrubs for twig nesting bees.
- Provide safe access to clean water, which could be as simple as adding a rock for safe landing and providing a bucket of water next to a garden.
- Contact your extension agent for more help or information regarding plants that support pollinators.
- Support local beekeepers by purchasing their honey and providing a safe space to manage their hives.



- Reduce the use of pesticides by finding safer alternatives. Remember that many moths and butterfly larvae need specific plants as food sources and these caterpillars can eat a lot in a short time period. Research insects widely before trying to get rid of them, as they might be pollinators.
- Pledge to continue to promote pollinator health and well-being by participating in National Pollinator Week in June.

For more information on selecting native plants that grow best in your region, visit the Pollinator Partnership at [www.pollinator.org](http://www.pollinator.org). Click on planting guides and enter your zip code. Learn more about starting a pollinator habitat at *Homegrown National Park*, a grassroots call to action to regenerate biodiversity and ecosystem function by planting native plants.

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