

Planting for Pollinators

Federal agencies have been directed to take steps to protect and restore pollinator populations due to recent declines in the number and distribution of pollinating insects causing significant concern. These declines include our managed bee population used in agriculture, native bees, monarch butterflies (suffering a 90% decline over the last 20 years), and many others. Pollinators are essential to 1/3 of our food production. The critical causes of the pollinator decline are the loss in the amount and distribution of habitat and food plants for them.

What is a solution? Home gardeners who provide food and habitat for pollinators in their own garden can certainly help by creating an oasis of things that are “pollinator friendly”.

Tips to attract bees and pollinating insects

- Select plants that will provide pollen and nectar. Pollen is essential an essential part of the diet for young bees. Nectar is the raw material used by bees to produce honey and energy.
- Native plants and wildflowers will provide these two essentials for bees. Many of our showy annuals have been bred for flower size and do not produce pollen or nectar.
- Select plants with colors and shapes to attract pollinators. Bees and butterflies are attracted to blue, purple and yellow, and flowers with a flat disk shape (think daisy) will attract a wider variety of insects because their tongue can reach the pollen or nectar easily. Bumblebees prefer deeper blossoms and are also attracted to flowers with hidden nectar spurs, such as monarda, larkspur, columbine and snapdragons. Hummingbirds are attracted to colors in the red family and prefer tubular or trumpet shaped blooms.
- Add variety. Plant a garden that has a succession of bloom from early spring to late fall. Pollinators need diverse sources for nectar and pollen for a balanced diet.
- Plant in groups so the pollinators can find and visit many flowers in one location. A good example is echinacea, which grows in a large clump and will attract a wide variety of native bees and butterflies.
- Provide blossoms in all three growing seasons: Spring, Summer and Fall.
- Plant species that are food and shelter for the larval stage of butterflies. These are called host plants and are usually different than the ones that provide food and shelter for adult butterflies.

Lists of pollinator-friendly plants can be found at:

OSU Extension

Fact Sheet [EPP-7155](#) (Nectar and Pollen Plants of Oklahoma)

Fact Sheet [E-1034](#) (Master Gardener Manual)

Fact Sheet [EPP-7317](#) (Honey Bee, Bumble Bees, Carpenter Bees, and Sweat Bees)

USDA

Milkweed and Nectar Plants for Monarch Butterfly Gardens

The Plants Database – plants.usda.gov/monarchplantinglist.org

Other

Pollinator.org

Thehoneybeeconservancy.org

Gardenclub.org – Inviting Butterflies into Your Garden

Monarchwatch.org -- (a service of KU.edu)