Planting for Pollinators

Creating a Thriving Pollinator Garden

In the summertime, when the weather is high you can stretch right up and touch the sky. When the weather's fine, you got flowers, you got flowers on your mind! Grab your glass of iced tea and let's talk about planting for pollinators to enjoy in the beautiful Oklahoma summer!

Pollinators, such as bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds, play a crucial role in the ecosystem by helping plants reproduce. Creating a garden that attracts these creatures can promote biodiversity and ensure the health of local flora. Choosing the right plants is essential to developing a thriving pollinator-friendly garden.

https://extension.okstate.edu/fact-sheets/landscaping-to-attract-butterflies-and-moths.html

Understanding Pollinators

Pollinators are animals that move pollen from one flower to another, facilitating plant fertilization. The most common pollinators include:

- Bees: Bumblebees, honeybees, and solitary bees
- Butterflies: Monarchs, swallowtails, and painted ladies
- Moths: Hummingbird moths and luna moths
- Birds: Hummingbirds
- Other insects: Beetles and flies

Pollinators are attracted to flowers by their color, scent, and nectar. Each type of pollinator has preferences that can guide your plant selection.

Selecting Plants for Your Pollinator Garden

To ensure a steady supply of nectar and pollen, choose a variety of plants that bloom at various times throughout the growing season. Some considerations include:

Native Plants

Native plants are those that occur naturally in a region and have adapted to local conditions. They are typically more resilient and require less maintenance. Examples include:

- Milkweed (Asclepias spp.): Essential for monarch butterflies
- Bee Balm (Monarda spp.): Attracts bees and hummingbirds
- Goldenrod (Solidago spp.): Supports a variety of pollinators
- Black-eyed Susan (Rudbeckia hirta): Loved by butterflies

Herbs

Herbs can be both ornamental and functional in a pollinator garden. They provide nectar and can be used in cooking or for medicinal purposes. Consider planting:

- Lavender (Lavandula spp.): Attracts bees and butterflies
- Thyme (Thymus spp.): A favorite of bees
- Basil (Ocimum spp.): Provides nectar for bees
- Mint (Mentha spp.): Draws bees and butterflies

Flowering Shrubs

Shrubs provide structure and height in a pollinator garden. They often bloom profusely and are long-lived. Popular choices include:

- Butterfly Bush (Buddleja spp.): Attracts butterflies
- Spirea (Spiraea spp.): Beloved by bees
- Viburnum (Viburnum spp.): Supports various pollinators
- Hydrangea (Hydrangea spp.): Attractive to bees

Designing a Pollinator Garden

A well-designed pollinator garden should cater to the needs of the pollinators while being visually appealing and manageable. Follow these steps:

Plan Your Layout

Consider the size and shape of your garden space. Ensure a mix of heights, colors, and textures to create an inviting environment. Group plants in clusters to make them more noticeable and accessible to pollinators.

Provide Water Sources

Pollinators need water to survive. Add features such as birdbaths, shallow dishes with stones for insects, or small ponds to provide hydration.

Create Shelter

Pollinators require shelter from predators and harsh weather. Include elements such as:

- Trees: For nesting and resting
- Shrubs: To provide cover

- Deadwood: For solitary bees to nest
- Leaf litter: Moths and butterflies use it for pupation

https://xerces.org/sites/default/files/publications/18-014.pdf

Maintaining Your Pollinator Garden

Regular maintenance ensures the health and longevity of your pollinator garden. Here are some tips to keep it thriving:

Watering

Most pollinator-friendly plants are drought-tolerant, but young plants need regular watering to establish roots. Water deeply and infrequently to encourage strong growth.

Pruning

Pruning helps maintain plant shape and encourages more blooms. Remove dead or damaged branches to make room for new growth.

Weeding

Weeding prevents competition for resources and maintains aesthetic appeal. Use mulch to suppress weeds and retain moisture.

Organic Practices

Avoid using pesticides, as they can harm pollinators. Instead, use organic methods such as: Companion planting to deter pests, beneficial insects to control harmful ones, and natural fertilizers to nourish plants. Consider IPM – Integrated Pest Management. However, if a pesticide is needed, read the label carefully and spray during times of the day pollinators are the least active, such as early morning or at dusk.

A pollinator garden is a beautiful and beneficial addition to any outdoor space. By selecting the right plants, designing thoughtfully, and maintaining diligently, you can create a haven for pollinators that supports the local ecosystem and enriches your environment.