

Plants for Pollinators by Lynne Brosch

Did you know that over 80% of flowering plants require an insect to move pollen and that 35% of crop production worldwide depends on pollinators? To bring it home to you, one in three mouthfuls of food and drink that you consume has been produced through the work of pollinators. Bees are the main pollinators but wasps, flies, butterflies, moths and beetles are also contributors. Honey bees, one of our most important pollinators are in severe decline due to pesticides, colony collapse, disease and stress. Even as we are losing more and more bees the need for these bees is increasing. Cropland has increased to feed the increasing needs of our global population. There are a variety of other bees and pollinators which are prevalent in our area and need help as well.

As a home gardener you can help to provide for many endangered pollinators. Your garden can provide a foraging habitat by providing a wide diversity of plants that alternate flowering through the growing season. Native plants are the best as they are adapted to our climate and soils and maintain their health with little care. These native and adapted plants provide good sources of nectar and pollen for the native bees. It is important to find natives that flower early, such as Oregon grape, so that the bees that reproduce multiple generations in a year will be able to find enough food to reproduce the numbers that will establish them successfully. Good planting for bees require a wide selection of color such as blue, purple, violet, white and yellow. Asters which are very open lend themselves to insects of a variety of sizes and bees with short tongues. Lupines and penstemons have longer tube shaped flowers that provide nectar that is harder to reach therefore more appealing to bumblebees that can push aside the petals to get in. Other flowers that are attractive to pollinators are salvia, yarrow, sulphur buckwheat, alyssum, purple coneflower, California poppy, blanketflower, cosmos, basil, marjoram, russian sage, rosemary and purple gay-feather.

Further steps you can take to support pollinators are to leave bare patches of ground and brush piles as well as nesting blocks. Use pesticides with caution. Take the Pollinator Protection Pledge and after preparing your special garden site go to www.BringBackthePollinators.org and fill out an application to be eligible to receive a Pollinator Habitat sign.

Follow these simple steps and you will be helping to save our pollinators!

Resources: www.xerces.org

Farming for Bees: Guidelines for Providing Native Bee Habitat on Farms, M. Vaughan, M. Shepherd, C. Kremen and S. Hoffman Black, The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, 2011.

Three Steps You Can Take to Bring Back the Pollinators - www.xerces.org
Attracting Native Pollinators, The Xerces Society, 2011.