

# Think like a Pollinator

By Nancy Bliss

National pollinator week is June 17-23. If you look closely amongst the flowers, you will see little industrious creatures, bustling about, collecting nectar and pollen, seemingly enjoying themselves immensely. So much of our food comes from plants pollinated by bees, hummingbirds, butterflies, wasps and many others.

Pollinators need our help. Many of these different groups are in trouble these days and need our intervention. We need to think like a pollinator while we're planning our gardens.

Bees, prefer flowers in the yellow, blue, violet and white tones! Hmm, not color blind! There are so many types of bees in addition to honey bees; bumblebees, carpenter bees, sweat bees, miner bees.

Hummingbirds prefer the color red and long tubular flowers. Butterflies have their preferences for nectar as well as for host plants where they lay their eggs to provide food for hatching caterpillars. For a successful garden, we need to lay out the welcome mat for all of them. To create a pollinator garden:

First "Go Native." Pollinators are best adapted to native plants that have co-evolved in our regions. These could include salvias, sages, bee balm, Bee's Bliss (a hybrid salvia), echinacea, ceanothus, yarrow, Western redbud. Some non-native, Mediterranean-adapted plants like lavenders also nourish pollinators. There are local nurseries that can help you find plants suited for your area. Be patient, it takes time for natives to become well established. But they are low maintenance once established.

Second, plant big patches of each plant. That makes foraging more efficient and bountiful.

Third, be chemical free. Pesticides do so much damage to our beneficial insects and other creatures, such as birds and aquatic life. There are many master gardener articles on pest control that do not harm others:

[https://ucanr.edu/sites/MG\\_of\\_CS/Publications/Gardening\\_Articles\\_494/](https://ucanr.edu/sites/MG_of_CS/Publications/Gardening_Articles_494/)

Then, mix it up. Instead of nice neat rows of vegetables, mix in some attractors like zinnias, marigolds (a great pest deterrent), or borage. An interesting fact: borage is a source of nectar, its nectaries refill every 2 minutes, making it very popular with bees.

Plant for all seasons. **Spring:** Grape hyacinths with their popular, fragrant early blooms; crocus; chives; poppies. **Summer:** Lambs ear sends up spikes of purple flowers late spring and early summer. Lavender; echinacea, a native that blooms late summer to fall; black-eyed Susans; sunflowers; cosmos; asclepias (milkweed) for butterflies. **Fall:** Sedum; asters; Gaura (although at my elevation, they don't survive the cold).

Be messy and wild with your garden. Seventy percent of our native bees live underground. Leave bare places without weed cloth or heavy mulches to give them space to create homes. A few places of sunny, bare, well-draining soil are also beneficial. Add a few diverse features like a random log, or a large rock or two. Hollow twigs offer habitats for nesting bees and other insects. You can also add a mason bee home, easy to find online.

For ideas, the UC Davis Arboretum offers downloadable plans for gardens. Click on Arboretum All-Stars or Gardening for Pollinators to learn more. <https://arboretum.ucdavis.edu/>

*Nancy Bliss is a UCCE Master Gardener in Tuolumne County. UCCE Central Sierra Master Gardeners can answer home gardening questions, from rainwater tanks to drought-resistant plants. Call*

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