

Support Your Local Pollinators



The past few years have seen a sharp decline in the numbers of butterflies, honey bees and bumble bees that grace our landscapes and pollinate our crops. The reasons for the decline are the subject of much scientific research and debate. Among topics being investigated are pesticides and other chemicals suspected of being harmful to the insects.

Loss of habitat is one cause that everyone agrees upon as a prime culprit in the loss of pollinators. We can do something about that.

Like all animals, insects have specific needs at different stages of their lives. It is well known that Monarch butterflies must lay their eggs on milkweed for the caterpillars to feed upon when they hatch. As pastures have been converted to farm fields, milkweed has become harder for butterflies to find; and unfortunately, milkweed is highly susceptible to glyphosate herbicides. Roadside ditches are routinely sprayed or mowed. Planting a butterfly garden with milkweed and other native species provides a lifeline to Monarchs. A rain garden is a perfect place to plant milkweed.

Providing pollinator-friendly gardens can help many species:

1. Plant native flowers. Native birds and insects are adapted to these species and the plants are adapted to native soils and climate. Fertilizer and pesticides are not needed.



2. Plant a variety of flowers that will bloom from early spring until fall to provide food throughout the year. A variety of sizes, colors and shapes will attract a variety of pollinators. Avoid hybrid or "doubled" flowers as they often lose pollen, scent and nectar in the process.

3. Include plants for caterpillars (as noted above) to support all of the life stages. A little online research will tell you which plants to choose – or consult Cooperative Extension or Soil & Water Conservation District.

4. Cluster plants so the insects or birds can find abundant food with little time spent searching.

5. Leave some bare ground or use a shallow birdbath filled with soil, sprinkled lightly with sea salt and kept moist to provide minerals and water for the insects.

6. Build or buy a bee house for native bees such as bumblebees, mason bees or leaf cutter bees. These insects are efficient pollinators, and although they don't provide honey, they rarely (bumblebees) or never (mason and leaf cutter bees) sting.



7. Avoid using pesticides if at all possible. If you want butterflies, you must not poison the caterpillars!

8. Pollination is performed by many species of bees, butterflies, beetles, moths, bats, and birds. Welcome them all.

