

## The Scoop Planting a Pollinator Garden

Why would you want to plant for the pollinators? Aren't insects annoying? Don't you use spray to kill them? Well...

The fact is we cannot survive without them. They are critical to our food supply, keep flowers blooming and increase fruit and seed quantity in many of our plants.

Native plants are the first you should consider for your garden or yard. It is best to put your plants in a cluster. They will attract the pollinators more quickly. Most plants like sun and little wind. Also the pollinators will need water near by and you can also water your plants with this water supply. Things to consider – different types of plants will give different types of nectar. Long blooming flowers will attract more pollinators for a longer time. You might want to consider putting a small plot of wildflowers next to your vegetable garden to attract bees and other pollinators to help increase your harvest.

What are the beneficial insects? We all know how very important bees are as pollinators, they are the most important pollinators in the ecosystem. We all love honey and the honey bees but the Mason bee and other bees are critical to growing food and flowers. You can purchase Mason bee houses or you can make one by drilling holes in a log or putting cane or other hollow plants in a cluster and hanging them near your plants. Butterflies are always a favorite pollinator. The sad news is most butterfly species are on the decline. Plant milkweed or do not destroy it so you can have Monarch butterflies. The caterpillars only eat milkweed which contains the vitamins and minerals they need. The adult Monarch also like the flowers on the milkweed and they do have a pleasant smell. You can plant trees to support caterpillars and birds. Oaks host 534 species of moth and butterfly larvae. If you are tree shopping, purchase native species rather than non-native. The native variety can support 35 times more caterpillars. Also consider planting willows, cherries, and plums that host 456 species, also consider Maples and Birches. Other pollinators that we are not as familiar with are praying mantises, ladybugs, beetles and green lacewings. The lacewings and ladybugs eat aphids that can do great damage to our vegetables gardens. It is great to plant early blooming plants with tiny blossoms like alyssum or biennials such as carrots or parsley that have been allowed to bloom to attract these beneficial insects. They will also be attracted to Queen Anne's lace, yarrow and other compound blossoms later in the growing season. Herbs are also good to have such as lavender, mint, sage, dill, fennel and lemon balm. The swallowtail butterfly caterpillars feed on dill. And once a caterpillar starts on a particular herb it will not feed on a different variety.

Birds are great bug eaters too and are pollinators. Plant for your birds to enjoy in your garden. Bird feeders and nesting boxes are important. Hummingbirds are fun to watch on your plants for nectar and at a hummingbird feeder. Bluebird boxes make it easier for the bluebirds to come to your yard. You can also plant sunflowers, coneflowers, and black-eyed Susans as their seed heads will feed the birds in the winter.

The Gateway Garden Club is an award winning Federated Garden Club. For more information about this club call Becky Oliver at 270-522-3150.