



Guide to planting a pollinator-friendly garden

Do you have a garden space that you bee-lieve needs some new flowers? Are you buzzing with excitement about providing much needed nectar for our pollinators? This guide will allow your imagination to take flight as you plan your pollinator friendly garden.

Why plant a pollinator garden?

In recent years, beekeepers report they're losing on average [30 percent](#) of all honeybee colonies each winter—twice the loss considered [economically tolerable](#). Just as worrisome, wild bee populations are also in [decline](#).

We rely on bees to pollinate 71 of the 100 crops that provide 90 percent of the world's food. Imagine no [almonds](#), fewer apples and strawberries, fewer raspberries and pumpkins, and the list goes on.

Habitat loss and pesticide use threaten our pollinators, from honeybees and native bees to bats and birds. We can support our pollinators by planting gardens that include both native plants and diverse flowering plants, and are maintained using pesticide-free management techniques.

Native species support native pollinators

A species is considered native if it's in a region through natural processes. In other words, humans weren't involved in bringing it there. Native bees are essential to pollination, particularly for some of our summer favorites -- [melons, cranberries, blueberries and sunflowers all rely on native pollinators](#).

In addition to bees, native pollinators can include bats, moths, birds and butterflies. Many native pollinators depend on native plants as essential food sources. You can find a list of [plants that are native to your region here](#).



What, when and where

Let's take a deeper dive into what, where and when to plant.

What to plant

Pollinator gardens should include a variety of plant species that bloom at different times from early spring to late fall. It's best if you can include a mix of annual plants, plants that generally only bloom for one year, and perennial plants, which, with proper care, come back year after year. You also want to select plants that differ in color, shape and height to attract a diverse set of pollinators to your garden. For example, bees are particularly drawn to purple, blue, white and yellow flowers. Some of our favorite pollinator plants include: Joe Pyes, milkweed, goldenrod, aster, bee balm and purple coneflower. Don't forget to include native plants in your selection!

Where to plant

Anywhere is a good place for a pollinator garden, but you have to consider the needs of what you're planting. Check your seed packet or plant tag to determine the light needs of various plants. Butterflies and many other pollinators love to sunbathe, so look for a place that gets full or partial sun. When you're planning the actual layout of your garden, put swathes of similarly colored plants together. **Most pollinators are drawn to blocks of color.**

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When to plant

This answer depends on what you're planting. If you select a wildflower or pollinator mix, you should broadcast the seed in late fall/winter or early spring. We recommend such an early start date because the longer the season is for your pollinator garden, the better it will provide a continual supply of nectar, pollen and habitat.

But what if you aren't planting from seed? If you're transplanting flower starts from a local nursery, you will generally want to wait until after the last frost. To figure out that timing, you can find out [which planting zone you are in here](#).

Preparation and planting

And now the really exciting part: prepping your bed and planting your pollinator garden.

Remove any weeds or choking grasses from your garden bed. Loosen the soil with a hoe or shovel but don't dig more than 4 inches deep. You don't want to expose dormant weed seed to light, giving it a chance to germinate.

Then, rake the area smooth. You're ready to broadcast your pollinator mix or plant your transplants. Most pollinator seed mixes suggest a shallow covering of soil -- typically about one-eighth to one-quarter inch. Be careful to not bury your seeds too deep.

Now, give your seeds or transplants a gentle soak. If you are using a hose, we suggest getting a nozzle that has a gentle rain setting. For both seed mixes and transplants, you'll want to maintain consistent moisture for the first 4 to 6 weeks while your plants are germinating and getting established. Keep an eye on your plants through the summer -- they'll let you know if they're thirsty.

Maintenance

Pollinator gardens are not only helping the bees, but they can also help us. Gardening is a relaxing hobby that allows us to get outside and connect to nature. Spend time in your garden weeding, watering and otherwise maintaining your plants. Watch as bees and butterflies come by to drink some nectar and grab some pollen.



Pollinator Garden with bee bath

In maintaining your garden and landscaping, please eliminate pesticide use. These chemicals are toxic to both our pollinators and beneficial insects.

All pollinators need shelter, a hiding place from predators and a place to raise their young. By leaving your garden and yard cleanup until spring, you are providing a critical winter habitat. Stalks of perennials, flower heads, dead limbs, grass clippings and leaf litter are some favorite options for nesting sites and shelter. So hold off on raking your yard, deadheading your flowers, or removing any plants from your garden until the following spring.

Other fun stuff

Like us, pollinators enjoy a good swim in the summer months. However, they aren't very good swimmers. You can safely provide water by filling a bird bath or shallow bowl with rocks or aquarium stones and water. That way, they can stand on the rock and splash to their hearts' content.

Native bees, like mason bees and leafcutter bees, are solitary nesters. You can [make a bee house](#) that offers shelter to these important pollinators.

Final considerations

Pollinators are critical to a healthy ecosystem and a thriving food system. Planting a pollinator garden is a wonderful way to provide nectar, pollen and habitat. Remember to select a variety of colors, shapes and heights and don't forget to include as many native plant species as you can.



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