



PLANTING FOR POLLINATORS

Pollinators like birds, bats, butterflies, moths, flies and bees are critical to our natural ecosystems, transferring pollen among flowers with their feet, bodies and wings as they forage. In the wild, the process of pollination creates genetically diverse seeds and fruits, contributing to more resilient plant communities and ample food sources for wildlife. In agriculture, healthy and abundant pollinators result in improved fruit set, size and quality. Over 80% of flowering plants and a third of the food we eat rely on pollinators to reproduce. Threatened with habitat loss, disease, invasive species, pesticide poisoning and a warming climate, insect and animal populations are on the decline.

But you can help! When maintained correctly, native pollinator gardens provide valuable food, nesting and overwintering habitat for the several hundred native species of mammals and insects that call Central Oregon home. Using native plants and living with a certain level of untidiness may require a shift in aesthetic preferences, but it is well worth saving the creatures that help sustain us.

HOW TO CREATE A POLLINATOR-FRIENDLY GARDEN

EMBRACE THE SUNSHINE

Most pollinators prefer to forage in warm, sunny spots protected from the wind and rain. Plant a windbreak if necessary.

MAKE IT HOMEY

Trees and shrubs provide nesting areas as well as protection from predators and weather. Leave dead snags, leaf litter and open patches of dirt for ground nesters, and don't forget to include species that serve as host plants for caterpillars, like milkweed.

GO NATIVE, GO BOLD

Large patches of the same plant are not only easier for insects to see but also increase foraging efficiency, so group plants together in swaths. Choose native plants as they best support native pollinators, and include a diversity of colors, forms and bloom times to attract a diversity of pollinators. That said, herbs and annuals like sunflowers and chives are great food sources for bees and butterflies, so sprinkle them in here and there to boost foraging potential. Choose early, mid and late bloomers to cover the entire season.

DITCH THE CHEMICALS

Even when used correctly, pesticides can harm pollinators. Keep garden pests at bay by starting with healthy soil and plant material, and site plants correctly for their light and moisture requirements. A balanced ecosystem leads to balanced predator-prey systems.

DON'T FORGET WATER

Add a shallow water feature like a bird bath filled with pea gravel to keep pollinators hydrated.

HOW DO I MAINTAIN MY POLLINATOR GARDEN?

Traditionally-kept landscapes have long been defined by straight edges, round shrubbery and tidy grass squares, all religiously cleansed of fallen leaves and dead plant material come the winter season. Pollinator gardens require a different kind of care, something that replicates the natural systems we observe in the wild. It's important to consider the wholeness of your garden and how the presence of one living organism affects the whole. Some caterpillars turn into beautiful butterflies, yes, while others nourish baby birds - either way, they'll chew through many leaves on their journey from pupa to adult. You may not like the aphids on your columbine, but ladybugs need something to eat. Accepting wildness and imperfection is part of successfully maintaining a native pollinator garden.

SAVE THE STEMS, LEAVE THE LEAVES

Leaf litter not only houses a myriad of overwintering insects, but also insulates plant roots, protects the soil underneath and breaks down to enrich soil nutrients and improve soil texture. Seed heads provide sustenance to birds and other mammals during the cold winter months. Hollow stems become nesting sites for native bees and other beneficial insects when summer returns. Stripping your garden of these elements every fall interrupts natural cycles and effectively reduces the number of pollinators able to thrive in the space you've created for them. So embrace the mess! Kindly educate your neighbors if asked about your wonderful habitat. And if you must remove garden debris, pile it unshredded in an inconspicuous part of your property to give insects a chance to hatch.

IT'S WORTH REPEATING: DITCH THE CHEMICALS

Pesticides encompass a huge range of chemicals - "natural" and synthetic - used to control pests and weeds. The problem is, many of these chemicals are overused or misused, resulting in environmental pollution and insect and animal death. Due to lack of regulations on private use, home owners actually use more pesticides per acre than the average farmer. We've been sold the idea that a healthy landscape is bug-free, but that's just not the truth.

Start with healthy soil and plant material, and site plants correctly for their light and moisture requirements. Practice the maintenance techniques above and let nature find the balance. Use physical or biological controls like a jet of water to knock bugs off your plants, and hand-pull, tarp or burn weeds. As an added bonus, the hours spent getting your hands dirty in the garden will open your eyes to the day-to-day nuances of insect and animal life.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Native Plant Landscaping | Worthy Environmental
worthyenvironmental.org/resources

Central Oregon Native Pollinator Plant List | Pollinator Pathway Bend & Worthy Environmental
pollinatorpathwaybend.org/resources

Ecoregional Planting Guides | Pollinator Partnership
pollinator.org/guides

Pollinator Conservation Resource Center | Xerces Society
xerces.org/pollinator-resource-center

Monarch Waystation Program | Monarch Watch
monarchwatch.org/waystations/

