

## **Looking Ahead: Plan to Help Pollinators Next Year**

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Kicking back to consider next year's garden, let benefitting pollinators be one of your considerations. Of course pollination is important to us because we like to eat—one-third of our food supply exists because pollinators pollinate. Pollinators, specifically native bees, are real work horses of the pollination world—just 250 native bees do the work of thousands of honey bees.

Some native bees, like the bumble bee, colonize, meaning they hang out together in a social structure with everybody having a specific job to do. The vast majority of native bees, however, are solitary, living out their lives with no honey to make or designated job to complete. Why is this important, you ask? Because improving the environment of a solitary bee involves different strategies than those for hive bees where intervening efforts are concentrated. This doesn't mean there's nothing to do to help native bees, quite the contrary.

Plant native flowering plants. Not only are these plants tough for a reason, the flowers provide a protein source—pollen—and a sugar source—nectar—for developing larvae and adults. Because it's important to have food sources available in spring, summer and fall, select plants for the time they are in flower. Group some plants together to better attract pollinators.

Choose to leave a few weeds. Clover and dandelions are excellent food sources for pollinators. This doesn't mean the entire yard has to be covered in weeds but a pollinator-friendly yard can be strategic by leaving some weeds in designated areas.

Rocks and pebbles are important in a watering dish. Pollinators will drink from bird baths but be sure to prevent them from drowning by placing rocks and pebbles for insects to alight while getting water. Change out the water every other day to keep mosquito populations down.

Put in a pollinator hotel. This provides cavity-nesting native bees with a place to lay eggs and provision their young with a pollen-nectar combination. Different diameter holes, along with specific depths of holes, will attract different bees. Find out how to build a pollinator hotel with this NebGuide: <http://extensionpublications.unl.edu/assets/pdf/g2256.pdf> .

Use pesticides—herbicides, insecticides and fungicides—sparingly or not at all. These products have the capability of killing pollinators or, for those that survive, causing erratic behavior, such as disorientation, failure to mate, and not eating.

Apply to have your garden certified as pollinator habitat through the Nebraska Pollinator Habitat program: <https://entomology.unl.edu/pollinator/pollinatorapp.pdf> . Remember that any size garden, small to big, benefits pollinators.