

POLLINATOR HABITATS

By: Kelly Feehan, Extension Educator

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It's national pollinator week. If interested in making your yard pollinator friendly, here are a few tips and a link for the Nebraska pollinator certification program with lists of plants to use.

To create pollinator habitats, food, water and nesting areas are needed. It's important to avoid using insecticides or use biopesticides that are less harmful to pollinators. At the very least, use insecticides only on a limited basis at the correct time in a pest's life cycle to control economically harmful insects.

If insects are encountered in a garden or landscapes, don't be too quick to apply a pesticide. First identify what the insect is and determine if it is even a pest. It might be a beneficial predator or a pollinator.

If leaf damage is seen, don't assume insects are the culprit. It might be wind tearing leaves or a minor disease that caused weak spots to drop out of leaves and create holes. Even if an insect is causing some damage, how harmful is it to the plant? Most plants tolerate leaf feeding as long as enough green tissue remains for photosynthesis.

For harmful insects, consider control options other than pesticides when your goal is to be pollinator friendly. There are a number of methods to use including row covers, hand-picking, and even metallic mulch to deter some insects.

When creating habitats, many types of pollinators are attracted like bees, flies, moths, butterflies and beetles. While butterflies may be the most desirable, honey bees and native bees are the most efficient pollinators. Did you know we have close to 350 types of native bees in the Midwest?

For pollinator food nectar and pollen, it's best to have something blooming from early spring to frost. A cluster or mass of blooms is better than having a few plants blooming here and there throughout the yard. Pollinators are tiny and use a lot of energy if they have to fly far to forage.

Just as we have favorites foods based on color, aroma and taste, so do pollinators. These are called pollinator syndromes and describe flower characteristics that appeal to different pollinators.

For example, bees prefer bright white, yellow or blue flowers, especially if they have unique markings like stripes or polka dots. These are called nectar guides and help guide bees quickly to nectar and pollen. Bees prefer flowers with mild aromas and those that are shallow (flat) or tubular shaped.

Butterflies prefer bright red and purple flowers with a fresh but faint aroma and blooms with abundant nectar hidden deep within the flower. Preferred flower shapes are tubular or flat and wide to use as a landing pad.

For a water source, there are a variety of methods to use. The simplest is placing some rocks in the catch basin of a container and keeping it clean and filled with fresh water.

Nesting sites can be bare soil areas, hollows in trees and shrubs, and hollow plant stems. You may have seen bee hotels. These are not hives but a collection of hollow tubes like bamboo or holes drilled in wood used by solitary bees (those that nest alone). The female bee creates a nest in one of the tubes using bits and pieces of leaves to lay her eggs. After the larval bees develop, they leave the nest.

If you would like more information on creating pollinator habitats, refer to the Nebraska Pollinator Habitat Certification program found at <https://go.unl.edu/nebraskapollinatorhabitatcertification> .