

POLLINATOR HABITATS

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Last week was national pollinator week. If the well-deserved media attention has you thinking about making your landscape more pollinator friendly, here are a few tips and a link for the Nebraska pollinator certification program with lists of plants to use.

Creating habitat for pollinators means supplying food, water and nesting areas. It also means avoiding the use of pesticides, using biopesticides that can be less harmful to pollinators, or at the very least using insecticides on a limited basis at the correct time to control economically harmful insects.

If you encounter insects in a garden or landscapes this summer, don't be too quick to apply an insecticide. First identify what the insect is and determine if it is even a pest. It might be a beneficial predator or a pollinator.

If you see damage on plant leaves, don't assume an insect is the culprit. It might be wind tearing leaves or a minor disease that caused spots which dropped out of leaves and created 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 insects that can be a harmful pest, consider control options other than pesticides when your goal is to be pollinator friendly. There are a number of methods including the use of row covers, hand-picking and even metallic mulch that deters some insects from feeding.

When you create habitats, all types of pollinators will be attracted. This includes bees, flies, moths, butterflies and beetles. While butterflies might be considered the most desirable to attract, bees and different types of flies, many that resemble bees, are the most efficient pollinators.

As far as food, having something blooming from early spring to frost is ideal. 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 when they have to fly too far.

Just as we have favorite foods based on color, aroma and taste, so do pollinators. These are called pollinator syndromes and they describe flower characteristics that appeal to different types of 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 deeply in the flower. Preferred flower shapes are tubular or those that are flat and wide so they have a landing pad they can rest on.

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 filled with water.

Pollinators need nesting sites such as bare soil areas, hollows in trees and shrubs, and hollow plant stems. You've probably heard of using bee hotels. Some people think of these as hives where bees live. But this is not the case.

Bee hotels are nesting sites for solitary bees. A single mama bee creates a nest in one of the tubes using bits and pieces of leaves, then lays 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 www.entomology.unl.edu/pollinator-habitat-certification.