

Smart Planting for Pollinators

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While spring may be the farthest thing from your mind right now, that does not mean we cannot think warm thoughts of green grass, bountiful flowers, birds chirping, and pollinators buzzing around of course! Many of us enjoy these sights and sounds, but they would not be possible without those pollinators moving from place to place. As a homeowner, there are several things that you can do to support these creatures in both your landscaping and gardens.

Let's first start with what a pollinator is in the first place. Pollinators are animals such as bees, birds, various insects, and other animals which move pollen from one flower to another, so plants can be fertilized and then produce fruits and seeds. When visiting a flower, the pollinator is not necessarily after the pollen the plant wishes for it to spread, but the nectar that is found inside the flower of plants. Nectar is a sweet sugary water-like liquid that is a nice sweet treat that the pollinators are after. Pollen then attaches to the legs, wings, and various other body parts as the pollinator is making its visit.

So, what makes a pollinator important? Without pollinators such as bees, birds, bats, butterflies, and many more, pollen would have a hard time getting from one plant to another for fertilization which is important in order for seeds and fruit that we enjoy to be produced. This means things like apples, cucumbers, almonds, strawberries, lettuce, cabbage, and even chocolate would be much harder to find and be very expensive if we were to lose our pollinators. Without pollination, plants are unable to produce seed needed to grow more plants. Populations are in sharp decline due to pesticides, disease, and parasite issues. According to Peter Berthelsen of Pheasants Forever, if we do not address the environmental issues that pollinators face, there is a 60% chance of them becoming extinct in the next 20 years.

According to KidsGardening, that pollinators contributed either directly or indirectly, almost \$30 billion towards crop production in 2010 alone! As you can see, that butterfly you see traveling around plays a big role in providing you with a plentiful food supply. Expanding beyond food crops, pollinators are responsible for the success of over 75% of the flowering species that graces your landscapes and gardens.

What can you do to help these important pollinators? The simplest way to help pollinators is by creating a habitat that they prefer whether it be in your landscaping or in your garden. One key thing to understand is that pollinators are looking for habitats which provide them with food, water, and shelter. With that in mind, we want to provide the pollinator with plants that are going to have prominent blooms that produce plenty of nectar. With plant selection, you want to select a variety of plants in which at least something is going to be blooming from the beginning of spring through the fall so pollinators have a food source well throughout the season.

Let's talk placement and selection of plants. According to KidsGardening, it is best to use perennials that will come back year after year and plant them in groups of at least three plants compared to spreading them throughout your garden. When planting in clumps such as this, the pollinators have an easier time locating the plants they are seeking, plus the visual impact of these clumps will be pleasing to your eye as well. Native plant species are a great consideration to keep in mind when it comes to plant selection. KidsGardening notes that you will want to select species which naturally are found in this area will attract the native pollinators as they have evolved with one another over time. Even though the species may be native, you will want to be sure that it is suited for the soil, light, and moisture conditions that make up your landscaping or garden.

Pollinators rely on different plants at during their life cycles, so it is important to consider plants that they can feed on at all life cycle stages. Take butterflies as an example. At the caterpillar stage of the butterfly's life, it relies on the milkweed plant to feed on an obtain energy it will need as it forms a cocoon that eventually will become a butterfly. Without milkweed, we would not have caterpillars which means we will have no butterflies! So be sure to plant clumps of milkweed around your landscape and garden for the caterpillars who eventually become butterflies!

While spring may be the farthest thing from your mind right now, it is never too early to think about things you could implement in your garden or landscaping this spring which will give nature a helping hand. Want to get some native species that are friendly to pollinators? Be sure to check out the tree seedlings and wildflower packets being offered as part of our 2018 Tree Sale! Call the office at 419-399-4771 or visit our website www.pauldingswcd.org for more information!