

CREATE YOUR OWN POLLINATOR GARDEN

The work of pollinators helps us to grow the majority of food crops and allows us to create the beautiful flower gardens we love. They are essential to our survival, yet many of them are at risk. A major threat to their survival is habitat loss through expanding urban and agricultural development. The other serious impact occurs with the use of pesticides either by direct contact or by infecting the plants pollinators visit.

What are pollinators?

Pollination occurs when pollen grains are moved between two flowers by wind or animals. Pollination allows plants to reproduce and almost 80% of flowering plants rely on animal pollinators.

Often when we think of pollinators, we think of bees. They are the most important of the pollinators, with 5 different families of bees in Ontario: the Apidae (honeybees, bumble bees, carpenter bees, some other solitary bees); Andrenidae (andrenid bees); Halictidae (sweat bees); Megachilidae (leafcutter and mason bees) and Colletidae (plasterer bees). Contrary to popular belief, most bees are not aggressive and unlikely to sting unless directly threatened.



Pollinating flies such as flower or hover flies look similar to bees and wasps because of their colour and markings. While these flies are effective pollinators, they also have larvae that are predatory or parasitic on aphids and other unwanted insects.

Butterflies, skippers and moths also play an important role in pollinating plants. Their long tongues can reach nectar in open or deeper flowers.

Pollinating beetles, wasps, hummingbirds and some bats are also active in pollinating many plants.

Habitat for Pollinators

Choose native plants with a diversity of flower shapes and colours. Bees prefer blues, purples, white and yellows. Butterflies are drawn to many colours including red, through blue or violet. Hummingbirds are most attracted to red trumpet or bell shaped flowers.

Ensure there are plants flowering throughout the season from early spring to fall.

Shrubs and trees such as apple, blueberry, dogwood, cherry and willow will provide pollen or nectar early in spring when many plants aren't in bloom yet.

Consider late blooming flowers for the fall, such as aster, cup plant and goldenrod.

Plant in clusters of 3 or 5 to attract the attention of pollinators.

Provide water in the garden to quench their thirst. A shallow dish or bird bath with partly submerged stones as a perch for drinking.

Even a small balcony can provide pots of flowers for passing pollinators.

Allow some leaf litter to remain in your garden as a site for bumblebees to overwinter.

Logs and old stumps in the sun are ideal for bees that nest in cavities.

Don't cut back all your plants in fall or leave an area of your yard to go "wild" with grasses, wildflowers and brush to provide nesting, sheltering and overwintering sites. Some bees overwinter in plant stems.

Leave some patches of open soil in sunny, well drained south facing areas for ground nesting bees.

Provide food for caterpillars—most require certain native plants ie. Butterfly Weed for Monarch butterflies

And above all, avoid the use of pesticides.

Native Plants to Attract Pollinators

Spring Bloom: Apple, blueberry, cherry, dogwood, serviceberry, eastern redbud, flowering current, viburnum, choke cherry, columbine, violet, willow, wild strawberry, smooth leaved honeysuckle and ninebark.

Summer Bloom: Bergamot, native roses ie Carolina rose, buttonbush, milkweeds, coneflower, Culver's root, dogbane, fleabane, hyssop, meadowsweet, yarrow, New Jersey tea, beard-tongue, cardinal flower, prairie clover, sumac, elderberry, raspberry and trumpet vine.

Late Summer/Fall Bloom: Aster, blue vervain, Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), Clematis: Virgin's Bower, Joe-Pye weed, native sunflowers, blazing-star, ironweed, goldenrod, cup plant, blue lobelia, jewelweed and shrubby cinquefoil.

References

[MacPhail, Victoria. \(n.d.\). Toronto Plant Guide for Attracting Pollinators, David Suzuki Foundation.](#)

[Mac Rae, Maria. \(2008\). Gardening For Pollinators, Canadian Wildlife Federation, Kanata, ON](#)

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