

Planting a Native Pollinator-Friendly Garden

More and more gardeners are selecting and growing flowers that support native pollinators: the bees, flies, wasps, butterflies, moths, and birds that fertilize 75 percent of all flowering plants producing fruits and seeds. Plants and their pollinators co-evolved to help each other reproduce and survive; for example, flowers with long tubes of nectar feed hummingbirds that carry pollen between the tubular flowers they visit. Blueberries, strawberries, apples, watermelons, carrots, broccoli, and pumpkins are among the many plants requiring pollinator services to create the fruits and vegetables we eat—which means we need pollinators, too.

Here are some simple guidelines for creating healthy habitat for pollinators on your land:

- **Analyze your landscape to see how it could better support pollinators.** Consider replacing areas of sterile lawn with native-plant habitat attractive to bees, butterflies, and other insects.
- **Choose open spaces that receive full sun for a least part of the day** for your pollinator garden. Sunny places are preferred by most small insects because they lose heat quickly.
- **Opt for mostly native plant and tree species** to attract native insects. Do some research to learn which species of plants and insects have co-evolved (see the resource list below); then plant those native species that attract pollinators you want to see.
- **Group plants in at least three-foot-wide clumps** to attract pollinators; don't plant single specimens. Rounded beds of flowers, not rows, are easier for flying insects to see than isolated plants and invite less weed invasion.
- **Consider offering nesting habitat**, such as wooden nest blocks drilled with holes for mason bees or bundles of hollow stems, near or within the garden area.
- **Don't use pesticides anywhere near a pollinator garden.** If pest problems occur, hand remove the offenders, consider releasing predatory insects to eat them, or use insecticidal soap.
- **Provide food and habitat for all stages of a pollinator's life.** The larvae of many insects are host-specific, meaning they must eat certain plant species to develop into their next stage of life. Monarch butterflies are a famous example; they only lay eggs on milkweed plants of various species for their caterpillars to eat although the adults take nectar from and pollinate many other flowering plants.
- **Select plants with nectar-producing flowers for butterflies and hummingbirds.** Native butterflies prefer purple, yellow, orange, and red blossoms, and hummingbirds like red flowers.
- **Plant species that bloom at varying times throughout spring, summer, and fall.** Bees and butterflies are active from very early spring until late fall. Plan for something always blooming to provide nectar and pollen for insects during the entire growing season.
- **Include flat stones, damp areas that puddle, and shallow bowls of water** in the garden. Many insects like to bask in the sun on stones to raise their body temperature, and most need water especially during hot dry summer. Place large stones that rise above the water level in shallow bowls to give insects a place to perch and not drown.
- **Let go of perfect! Take pride in chewed leaves and battered flowers**, marks of a successful pollinator garden. Enjoy looking at the creatures who call your garden home and realize that every beautiful butterfly starts life as a hungry caterpillar.

Educational Resources about Native Plants for Pollinator Gardens

Long Island Native Plant Initiative (LINPI)

www.linpi.org, 631.260.1513

The mission of this volunteer-based organization is to protect the genetic integrity and heritage of Long Island native plant populations and thus its biodiversity from a landscape to genetic level. LINPI strategies include establishing commercial sources of genetically appropriate local (ecotypic) plant materials for use in nursery, landscaping, and habitat restoration. LINPI offers two annual not-to-be-missed native plant sales in spring and autumn, and sells plants by appointment, too.

The Pollinator Partnership

www.pollinator.org

The Pollinator Partnership is the largest non-profit in the world dedicated exclusively to the protection and promotion of pollinators and their ecosystems. See their excellent 24-page Planting Guide for our area on their website, along with a vast array of information about their programs for supporting pollinators.

Million-Pollinator Garden Challenge

www.millionpollinatorgardens.org

This national campaign hopes to register a million public and private gardens and landscapes to support pollinators. Its website shows you how to plant a pollinator garden and how to register it to be counted. The Children's Garden at Suffolk County Farm in Yaphank is a registered Million-Pollinator Garden; visit it for inspiration on what to plant in your garden!

The Xerces Society

www.xerces.org

The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation is an international nonprofit that protects wildlife through the conservation of invertebrates and their habitats. Publisher of essential handbooks such as "Attracting Native Pollinators," the Xerces Society offers a wealth of information, including pollinator-friendly plant lists, on its website.

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

www.wildflower.org

A research branch of the University of Texas at Austin, this amazing center maintains a Native Plant Database where you can explore the wealth of native plants in North America. Use its options to search for 8,128 native plants by scientific or common name or choose a particular family of plants.

The New York Flora Atlas

www.newyork.plantatlas.usf.edu

The New York Flora Atlas is a source of information for the distribution of plants within the state, as well as information on plant habitats, associated ecological communities, and taxonomy. In addition, users can learn where vouchered specimens are and see images to get a better visual for each plant.

Plant Native

plantnative.org/rpl-denjny.htm

A national organization, Plant Native maintains regional lists of plants, including this one for Delaware, Southern New Jersey, and Long Island. This list of native plants is intended for residential or commercial landscapers who want to create attractive and varied native landscapes and includes trees, shrubs, groundcovers, vines, flowering perennials, and ferns.

USDA PLANTS Database

<https://plants.usda.gov/>

This database provides information about the vascular plants, mosses, liverworts, hornworts, and lichens of the U.S. and its territories. It includes names, plant symbols, checklists, distributional data, species abstracts, characteristics, images, crop information, automated tools, onward Web links, and is an invaluable reference for US plant status.