



Winery Pollinator Programs Are Bringing Biodiversity Back to the Vineyard

Benefits include better soil health, improved grape quality, and pest and disease management.

By Samantha Maxwell- August 11, 2025



Pollinator populations, from birds to bees to butterflies, are showing signs of decline, thanks to climate change and pesticide use, among other factors. This is a huge problem considering that pollinators are essential to agriculture—without them, we might struggle to produce enough food. Unlike many crops, though, wine grapes actually don't require pollinators, since they're capable of self-pollination. So why, then, are some wineries building pollinator gardens on their properties?

It turns out that the advantages of pollinators stretch beyond pollination itself, with some wineries seeing significant benefits in their own vineyards... and in their glasses. Several wineries have started pollinator programs to better understand why they built their gardens in the first place and how they've come to impact farming, the cellar, and the winery experience as a whole.

Creating More Biodiversity in the Vineyard

Conventional farming involves monocultures, where only one type of plant is grown over a vast area. This is how many of our crops—including wine grapes—are grown. However, monocultures come at a cost: they're harmful to ecosystems and put grapes at an increased risk of disease. That's why some wineries are committed to creating pollinator gardens, which function to significantly increase the number of both plant and animal species in and around vineyards.



“Even though grape vines are self-pollinating, pollinators bring a lot of value to the vineyard ecosystem,” explains Rob Takigawa, winemaker at True Myth Winery in San Luis Obispo County, California. The winery works with the Pollinator Partnership, a nonprofit that promotes pollinator and ecological health. According to Takigawa, “[Pollinators] help maintain biodiversity by supporting native plants that grow around the vines, which in turn create healthier soils.” Healthier soils generally mean healthier grapes in the present and a legacy of sustainability from which future generations can benefit.

The wineries we spoke to have a holistic view of soil, grape, and pollinator health and have found that biodiversity through pollinator gardens improves all three. “At Jordan Vineyard & Winery, pollinators support the cover crops planted between vineyard rows, such as clover and mustard, that naturally replenish soil nutrients, improve soil structure, and help stimulate better vine health, which ultimately enhances the grape quality,” says Brent Young, director of agricultural operations at Jordan Vineyard & Winery, which is the largest dedicated pollinator habitat among Bee Friendly Farming-certified vineyards in the U.S.

Avery Heelan, winemaker at [Larkmead](#) in the Napa Valley, also finds that pollinator gardens—in conjunction with other sustainable farming practices—can work to enhance grape quality. “Everything that happens in the vineyard translates and comes through in the cellar,” she says. “Biodiversity [is] not something that you can really measure the effects of quantitatively, but qualitatively, the difference is huge for me in the quality of the fruit.”

Biodiversity can also be beneficial to wineries that are interested in expanding their offerings beyond wine itself. Larkmead has, in the past, produced honey thanks to its honeybee population nourished by on-site pollinator habitats. And at Jordan, pollinators are essential to the winery’s food program. “[Pollinators] are also essential in Jordan’s chef’s garden, by pollinating fruits, vegetables, and herbs that inspire food pairings with Jordan wines,” Young explains.

Controlling Predatory Insect Species and Preventing Disease

Biodiversity goes beyond soil health and grape quality, though. It’s also essential for controlling pest and disease pressure in the vineyard. Some types of insects can spread disease in vineyards, which can seriously hinder a harvest’s success. By limiting or removing the plants that attract these insects, viticulturalists can reduce disease in the vineyard. Similarly, plants can attract insects that are actually good for the vineyard as well. According to Ann Baker, Larkmead board co-chair and local landscape architect, “When you introduce the cover crops throughout the vineyard... you basically promote different beneficial insects that will keep down your populations of predating insects in your vineyards.”

When Baker’s parents, who own the winery, first took over from Baker’s grandparents, they were experiencing issues in the vineyard with Pierce’s disease. This disease is spread by an insect called a blue-green sharpshooter, which was attracted to some of the plants, like Himalayan blackberry, that populated the riparian areas on Larkmead’s property.

However, the Bakers didn’t want to spray in a riparian area, since chemicals could flow downstream and disrupt other populations. So, they found a more natural solution. “We did a big restoration project to



remove these ... invasive plants and reestablish Santa Barbara sedge and California bee balm, which are native sedges and perennials, so we didn't have all that habitat for the blue-green sharpshooter," explains Baker. "The problem went way, way, way, down, just by promoting a diverse native plant understory in the riparian area." Takigawa has had similar experiences at True Myth and describes pollinator habitats as "better natural pest control."

Attracting More Than Pollinators

Pollinator habitats don't just serve to attract pollinators and pollinators alone. They also provide a richer experience for both guests and workers at wineries. "A vineyard monoculture can feel... you know, not as alive," says Larkmead's Baker. "So when you start to bring in native elements and restore the native elements around and through the vineyards... the whole area starts to feel more alive. I think people respond to that. It just makes people happier."

A lot of the pollinator habitats at Larkmead are located closer to the vineyards themselves, but the winery also wanted to showcase one near the tasting room. They get various butterflies, bluebirds, swallows, and other birds, and even a family of quail that have begun nesting in the garden. This garden, teeming with wildlife, is part of the appeal of visiting the winery. "You'd be surprised just how guests coming in from the city or coming in from other places just like to sit down in a garden that feels really alive," says Baker. Both Baker and Heelan agree that the pollinator gardens on site also make for a much more pleasant and peaceful working experience for employees. After all, [humans are technically pollinators too](#), so it only makes sense that people find themselves attracted to the beauty and peacefulness of such rich, bountiful gardens.

Like True Myth, Jordan Vineyards and Winery pairs with the Pollinator Partnership. According to Young, the organization plays a vital role in "providing opportunities to educate and inspire guests and other landowners through estate hikes and tours showcasing pollinator conservation." Not only do visitors get the chance to experience the beauty of the winery's extensive pollinator gardens, but the winery also plays an influential role in showcasing a more pollinator-friendly kind of agriculture to hopefully convince others to do the same.

As climate change continues to threaten vineyards across the globe, moving toward more sustainable agricultural methods, including promoting pollinator populations and increasing biodiversity, will be key if the wine industry is to survive long-term. Luckily, there are already producers on the cutting edge of the pollinator curve who can lead the way.