

## What's the Big Deal About Pollinators?

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Even if you are not a gardener, farmer or florist, pollinators can impact your daily life because more than a third of our food supply relies on the plants they pollinate.

Let's think about and list some of the food we buy and consume which would NOT be available if it weren't for bees, butterflies, wasps, beetles, and moths.

- Fruits
  - strawberries, blueberries, apples, watermelon, peaches, etc.
- Vegetables
  - Pumpkins, tomatoes
- Meat and Dairy
  - Beef, milk, cheese (cows fed alfalfa and clover)
- Other
  - Cotton
  - Canola oil
  - Almonds
  - Chocolate
  - Coffee
  - Vanilla

This is only a partial list. Can you imagine a world without coffee or chocolate? How dreadful.

What's more...because of pollinators, such as bees, butterflies, moths, wasps, flies, beetles, bats and even hummingbirds, many plants have increased crop yield and are higher quality after insect pollination. Pollinators also help native plants reproduce, producing fruits and seeds that feed other wildlife like birds and bears.

There are roughly 4000 native species of bees in North America. These native bees are the primary pollinators for most wildflower crops in the US. Many folks believe that all bees and wasps are aggressive, stinging insects, but in reality, most of our native bees are unlikely to sting unless grabbed or stepped on. In fact, a number of native bees have stingers too weak to even penetrate human skin. Only honey bees, bumble bees and a few of the social wasps (such as yellow jackets – which are not significant pollinators) are likely to sting, but mostly when their nests are disturbed or attacked.

Another falsehood is that many people think the honeybee is native to North America, but it was imported by Europeans in the 1600s. Although, the loss of honeybees is concerning, many of our wild native bees are also in trouble. A number of our roughly 50 native bumblebee species are in precipitous decline, with a couple of species likely having gone extinct in recent years, and a few other possibly teetering on the brink of extinction, which is unfortunate.

You can help!

Tired of mowing the lawn? Plant a native wildflower garden. Studies show that native plants are four times more attractive to native bees than non-native flowers. By including a diversity of native flowering plants, you also support a diversity of different types of pollinators. You get a beautiful garden, pollinators have an abundance of food. It's a win-win.

Experts suggest you diversify your garden plantings so you have different flower colors, fragrances, and shapes from early spring to fall so that pollinators have a nectar and pollen source all season long. Try to use plants that have blue, violet, yellow, and white flowers which are particularly attractive to native bees. To be most effective, create large (four feet diameter) clumps of native flowers in various areas around the yard. In addition to flowering plants, pollinators need a safe environment free from pesticides. They like messy areas of twigs, brush piles, stones and other natural shelter to lay their eggs and to spend the winter.

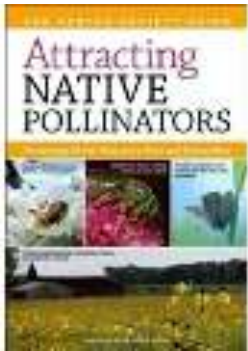
For a list of plants that attract native pollinators visit: <http://www.xerces.org/plant-lists/>

More ways to help pollinators?

The Xerces Society has three online resources that enable you to take the next step:

- Pollinator Seed Store: You can buy regional wildflower seed mixes that provide season-long blooms on pollinator-friendly plants; mixes are locally produced in their respective regions— [xerces.org/pollinator-seed](http://xerces.org/pollinator-seed).
- Pollinator Conservation Resources Center, where you find additional information to help protect pollinators — [xerces.org/pollinator-resource-center](http://xerces.org/pollinator-resource-center).
- Great Sunflower Project, encourages all ages, preschoolers to scientists, to plant a sunflower and count how many bees visit in 15 minutes — [greatsunflower.org](http://greatsunflower.org).

NEW Resource Book



“Attracting Native Pollinators: Protecting North America’s Bees and Butterflies,” a guide by The Xerces Society, looks into the world of pollinators, including bees, wasps, flies, beetles, butterflies and moths. The 384-page softback book highlights the roles of these insects in home gardens, farms, parks and natural areas. Included are regional lists of bee-friendly wildflowers, advice on building nests and plans for pollinator gardens, meadows and other landscapes. \$29.95; Storey Publishing, [Storey.com](http://Storey.com).

### **AND Don’t forget ...Pollinator Week**

Five years ago the U.S. Senate’s unanimous approval and designation of the final week in June as “National Pollinator Week” marked a necessary step toward addressing the urgent issue of declining pollinator populations. Pollinator Week has now grown to be an international celebration of the valuable ecosystem services provided by bees, birds, butterflies, bats and beetles. The growing concern for pollinators is a sign of progress, but it is vital that we continue to maximize our collective effort. The U.S. Secretary of Agriculture signs the proclamation every year. Pollinating animals, including bees, birds, butterflies, bats, beetles and others, are vital to our delicate ecosystem, supporting terrestrial wildlife, providing healthy watershed, and more. Therefore, Pollinator Week is a week to get the importance of pollinators’ message out to as many people as possible.