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Bees and Honey: Creating Pollinator Gardens

Insects such as butterflies and bees are not just pretty to look at or mere producers of honey. Instead, they are vital to life on earth. More than 80 percent of flowering plants need pollinators in order to reproduce, and flowering plants that cannot reproduce cannot produce food for the world. Butterflies and bees are vital for pollination, and everything we can do to help them survive and thrive has a global impact, especially since bee populations have been in decline in recent years. One of the best things we can do as individuals to help these pollinators is to create pollinator gardens that attract them and give them a place to find food, reproduce, and experience safety from predators and from the elements. These pollinator gardens can help sustain the bees of the world, which are necessary for pollination and for honey production.

Here are some basic facts and tips for success for pollinator gardens:

- Pollinator gardens are gardens composed mainly of flowers and plants that give shelter, pollen, and nectar to many different pollinating insects.
- Pollinator gardens should feature a diversity of shapes, types, and sizes of flowers and plants.
- A sunny location is the best place for a pollinator garden.
- A pollinator garden should include sheltering spaces that offer protection from cold winds.
- Plant flowers of the same kind in large groupings.
- Plant flowers with staggered bloom times so that the garden can sustain pollinating insects over many months.

Pollinator gardens are gardens composed mainly of flowers and plants that give shelter, pollen, and nectar to many different pollinating insects.

A pollinator garden is not defined by its size: It can be large enough to cover many acres or small enough to fit into a container. What defines a pollinator garden is the presence of plants

and flowers that offer pollinating insects the nectar, pollen, and shelter that they need to survive. Pollinator gardens do not have to include only flowers and plants that are desirable to pollinating insects, but most of the plants and flowers must be attractive to pollinators.

Pollinator gardens should feature a diversity of shapes, types, and sizes of flowers and plants.

The greater the diversity of pollinators a pollinating garden attracts, the more helpful it will be to the environment. Having a diversity of flower types, shapes, and sizes will attract a variety of different pollinating insects. Some flowers are attractive to one kind of pollinator but not to others. Bees will take nectar from the different flowers and turn it into honey, which can then be bottled by those who enjoy beekeeping as a hobby or for profit.

A sunny location is the best place for a pollinator garden.

Pollinating insects thrive in warm, sunny conditions, and the same is true of the plants that attract them. To get the most out of a pollinator garden, location is key. Planting it in a sunny area will keep it warm, give the plants the sun they will need, and increase the odds of success.

A pollinator garden should include sheltering spaces that offer protection from cold winds.

Pollinating insects do not like cold winds any more than people do. If a pollinator garden does not include places for insects to take shelter, pollinators will not visit it. Fortunately, it is easy to create areas to shelter pollinating insects from the wind and places where they can find warmth on cool days. Flowering shrubs give pollinating insects places to hide, so make sure to include them in a pollinating garden.

Plant flowers of the same kind in large groupings.

Pollinator gardens should easily attract pollinating insects. The best way to do this is to group the same flowers together. Large groupings or drifts of the same flowers are easier for pollinating insects to find.

Plant flowers with staggered bloom times so that the garden can sustain pollinating insects over many months.

As the seasons change, plants flower at different times. Having plants that flower in succession over many months means that the garden habitat will attract pollinators throughout the seasons. Make sure to include plants that will flower at different times of the year. When this is done, the number of pollinators will more steadily increase over time.

Stay away from pesticides.

Pesticides are harmful to the pollinating insects you are trying to attract. Some gardeners are tempted to use these chemicals to control other pests, but there are other natural ways to keep

out unwanted bugs. Wise planting can reduce or eliminate the need for pesticides. The result is a healthier environment and a garden that is more attractive to pollinators.

Other Key Tips for Successful Pollinator Gardens

- Use native plants in a pollinator garden that bloom in different seasons and even open up at different times of the day. Native plants that bloom at different times can keep the pollinators coming all day and year. Some flowers even bloom at night, attracting pollinating insects such as moths that do not come out during the day. Plants that flower in succession make for a healthier garden and better place for pollinators. They also provide year-round beauty.
- Stay away from hybrid flowers. Plant breeders have developed flowers and flower hybrids that are often more attractive to the eye, but unfortunately, many of these hybrids have reduced or eliminated stores of nectar and pollen. Such plants and flowers will be of no use to pollinators and pollinator gardens.
- Eliminate pesticides or use low-toxin varieties. Pesticides are harmful to the environment, and they are particularly dangerous to bees. Planting the right kinds of flowers in your pollinator garden can help. For instance, marigolds attract insects that feed on aphids. If you have to use a pesticide, choose one with low toxicity for your garden habitat.
- Don't forget larval host plants. You'll get more butterflies by adding plants that caterpillars feed on. If caterpillars have a reliable food source, they will multiply, and more butterflies will be the end result. Not all larval host plants for caterpillars are flowering plants; some may look more like weeds.
- Butterflies and bees are also attracted to damp salt licks. They are easy to make: Use a dripping irrigation line or hose to dampen part of the soil, and mix in some sea salt with the dirt.
- Create hive opportunities for bees. Bees love to build hives in dead branches and old wood. Leave a dead tree branch behind and the bees might move in. You can also use lumber: Attach a piece to a post in the garden and drill holes of different diameters at depths of three to five inches. Different habitats will attract different bees.
- Add nectar sources. Flowers are not the only place butterflies can get nectar: A hummingbird feeder filled with homemade nectar is also a good option. Fill a feeder with a mixture of four parts water to one part table sugar. Do not use honey or other sweet substances.
- Add food sources besides nectar. Butterflies and bees are often attracted to rotting fruit, for instance, so placing some rotting banana peels in the garden can be a good choice. A small dish of water mixed with sea salt can also bring the butterflies and other pollinators in.