

✦ Control of every pest in the garden has led to unnecessary use of pesticides at home. Before you assume that an insect in your garden is bad, determine what it is. Most insects are actually beneficial. Bring a sample to the Master Gardeners diagnostic clinic for identification.

✦ Leave some dead trees or limbs for nesting sites for native bees. Build houses for bees by drilling a variety of hole sizes 3 to 5 inches deep in untreated lumber attached to the south side of your house or a fence post. Also provide bat houses. Designs can be found at the library or online.



✦ Keep water available for all wildlife. A dripping faucet or milk carton with a pinhole in the bottom works for most insects. Larger wildlife may need a small container. For butterflies, refill shallow containers daily to discourage mosquito growth or bury a shallow saucer to its rim in a sunny place, fill it with coarse bark or stones, and fill it to the rim with water.

✦ Augment nature's nectar with feed you supply. Hang hummingbird feeders in your yard. Mix four parts water with one part sugar to create nectar. Don't use artificial sweeteners, fruit juice or honey. Place something red on the feeder and clean the feeder with hot, soapy water at least twice per week. Butterflies are attracted to unsavory foodstuffs such as overripe bananas, oranges, other fruit or a sponge in a dish of slightly salted water.

### Online Resources:

**Xerces Society:** [www.xerces.org](http://www.xerces.org)

**US Fish and Wildlife Service:** [www.fws.gov/pollinators/](http://www.fws.gov/pollinators/)

**US EPA:** [www2.epa.gov/pollinator-protection](http://www2.epa.gov/pollinator-protection)

**Washington State Beekeepers Association:** [www.wasba.org](http://www.wasba.org)

**WSU Publication FS174E—Pollination and Protecting Bees and**

**Other Pollinators:** <http://ext100.wsu.edu/island/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2015/07/FS174E.pdf>

**For more information:  
Contact the Master Gardener  
Diagnostic Clinic  
May through September**

*Tuesdays 11:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.*

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# Pollinators & You

What you  
can do to  
support pollination



## What is pollination?

Pollination is a necessary step in the plant reproductive cycle. If a plant grows without its flower being pollinated it will not produce fruit or seeds. Pollination involves the transfer of pollen from the male anther to the female stigma in the same plant or between multiple plants. This is accomplished either by passive pollination – wind or water – or active pollination – insects or animals.

When most people think of pollinators, they think of honey bees. They are a vital member of this group, but there are a multitude of other pollinators, as well, such as other varieties of bees, moths, flies, butterflies, beetles, ants, hummingbirds, bats and even the honey possum, mice and some primates.

Insects and animals pollinate as an after effect of their search for food. Sugary nectar is a source of energy; pollen is a source of protein. In the attempt to gather either nectar or pollen, these animals and insects carry pollen on their bodies from one plant to another. Some grains of pollen fall off in the gathering process, unintentionally transferring pollen to the female flower. Not all pollinators are as efficient as others, but they should all be encouraged as they prefer different plants and are active in different seasons. Variety is always encouraged in gardening.

## Why is active pollination important?

From a selfish standpoint, pollination is important because 1/3 of the food produced, and therefore eaten, relies on insect and animal pollinators. This includes all flowering plants such as vegetables, fruits, nuts and alfalfa, which is fed to cattle.

Without these pollinators, the only foods we would have available are from corn, rice and wheat, as these crops are pollinated by wind. Think of your dinner plate, then imagine what that plate would look like without these foods. It would mainly be carbohydrates and it would have no red, purple, orange or green colors. Even cocoa is pollinated by insects, so imagine the world without chocolate. No thank you. The annual value of these crops in America is \$15 billion



Another important reason is the continuation of natural beauty and habitat. If flowers are not pollinated then they cannot mature into seeds, which are next year's plants. Eventually the store of seeds in the soil will deplete, so plants relying on seeds for reproduction will vanish. Once again, think about variety and imagine the world with far less color from flowers.

## What can YOU do?

✦ Become aware of pollinators. Look for them in your garden and town, especially in sunny, planted areas at midday.

✦ Plant your garden with a continuous succession of flowering plants through the year. Use what grows best in your area and replace lawn with flower beds. Plant in clumps rather than singly to help pollinators find the blooms. Remember night-blooming plants to attract moths and bats.

✦ Plant native species that provide nectar for insects, such as milkweed for monarch butterflies.

✦ Leave some wild patches in your yard, including larval host plants. Butterflies come from caterpillars, so include plants they prefer. These plants will get eaten, so hide them behind something larger or out of the way if this damage disturbs your view. Some host plants are even weeds, so be willing to change your attitude about their worth. Use a guide to determine what is most beneficial.

✦ Use old-fashioned varieties of flowers rather than the newer hybrids, especially “doubled” flowers, as these have often had the pollen, nectar and fragrance bred out of them in exchange for a showy bloom. They may look good to us, but they won't attract beneficial insects.

✦ Avoid pesticide use, even “natural” ones, whenever possible. If you must use them, choose the least toxic and apply at night when pollinators are least active. A healthy garden is most effectively achieved by proper watering, intense variety, careful sanitation, natural compost and choosing the right plant for the right place, not pesticides.

✦ On your purchased produce and in your yard, accept some insect damage as part of nature. Consumers' demand for “perfect” produce has forced farmers to use massive doses of pesticides.