

Pollinators Needed for Healthy, Biodiverse Ecosystems

June 17-23 is National Pollinator Week. Its intent is to raise awareness that pollinators need us, and we need pollinators.

Between 75 and 95 percent of flowering plants need pollinators to help with pollination. This accounts for two-thirds of crop plants – or one out of every three bites of food we eat.

As pollinators gather nectar and pollen, they also provide \$217 billion dollars to the global economy. That's quite a chunk of change for this diverse batch of insects, birds and mammals.

Unfortunately, many of the world's pollinators are at risk. Monarch butterflies have declined by 90 percent in the last 20 years. A quarter of bumble bee species are thought to be in serious decline. Pesticides and other toxins have also negatively impacted other crucial pollinators.

But it's not all gloom. An army of agencies and nonprofit groups have assembled to help restore and protect pollinator populations. And there are things you can do in your very own yard to help pollinators flourish.

First, you can incorporate pollinator friendly plants into your landscape. Native plants are typically best, and the diverse use of flowers is best, meaning different shapes, colors and times of bloom. Natives include beardtongue, tickseed, black-eyed susan, native sunflowers, purple coneflower, bee balm and milkweed.

Avoid using pesticides. While pesticides kill those pesky bugs, they take out a lot of beneficial bugs, too. Explore non-pesticide options when protecting yourself and your plants. Planting certain plants can ward off unwanted bugs or attract those good bugs to ward them off for you.

You can also promote pollinator habitat in your community. Green spaces like parks and golf courses can provide valuable habitat for pollinators. As urbanization continues to deplete natural lands, these green spaces can serve as sanctuaries for pollinators. Encourage your local leaders to use landscaping best suited for pollinators.

Roadsides are another resource for helping pollinators. American roadsides have 10 million acres of land that could be ideal habitat. Ask your local and state highway officials to allow native vegetation to colonize roadsides, creating an aesthetically pleasing vista for motorists as well as helping pollinators.

USDA and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) recognize the importance of pollinators. We have conservation programs that provide funding to landowners to establish pollinator habitat on their farm and ranching operations. For more information on how you can help protect pollinators, visit your local NRCS field office.

Pollinators on the Web

For information on NRCS programs, visit www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov.

For information on pollinators, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/pollinators.

For information on National Pollinator Week, visit www.pollinator.org.

Some other helpful sites are www.xerces.org/pollinator-conservation/ and www.abfnet.org.