

Bees, Hummers, and Butterflies – Oh My! How to draw more pollinators to your garden, by Jenny

Mandt, Owner 

Well known gardener and author Elizabeth Lawrence said many years ago, “The hum of bees is the voice of the garden”. We have heard that the bee and pollinator population is decreasing and this season, my garden has seen fewer pollinators than in the past. A recent study suggests that wild honeybee population has dropped from 50 years ago. Pollinators (bees, flies, moths, butterflies, bats and birds) are so crucial for our gardens, especially for fruits and vegetables to grow. When pollinators aren’t around in quantity, there will be less fruit, berries, nuts, veggies, etc... Garden ecosystems don’t thrive and we get fewer crops. Pollinators move pollen from one part of the plant to another which fertilizes the plant. Only fertilized plants can bear seeds and fruit. You also need seeds and nuts for future new plants. Not all is lost - there are things you can do to increase the variety and number of pollinators that are coming to your garden.

Having a wide variety of plants, especially natives that bloom from early spring to fall really can encourage pollinators to come to your garden. Shrubs like flowering Red Currant, Serviceberry, Indian Plum or Tall Oregon Grape provide large amounts of nectar or pollen the hungry foraging bees need in the spring. Douglas Asters, Yarrow, Geum, Gentian, Crane’s Bill Geranium are all native, summer blooming plants and loved by butterflies and bees alike. Planting the same type of plant in different areas of your garden can be a good way to encourage a larger feeding and pollinating area. Shrubs like the Strawberry Bush, Cotoneaster, Blueberries, Mountain Laurel, California lilac, Japanese Snowbell are great attractors as well. Trees like Crabapple, Korean Mountain Ash and Arolla Pine also attract pollinators.

Don’t forget to include flowering host and nectar plants that caterpillars (which become butterflies and moths who pollinate) can munch on. They love annuals like Bachelor buttons, cosmos, dahlias, dianthus, petunias, alyssum, and verbena especially for their nectar. Perennials like beebalm, coneflower, asters, common milkweed and Shasta daisies can be hosts to caterpillars and give them a source to munch on as they grow. Butterflies and bees love an area with a drip hose near a bird bath when you mix in some ashes or sea salt for a salt lick in the mud. Or you can put out a natural sponge that has sea salt water in it and see what kind of butterflies you can attract with that. They also like rotting fruit as well.

Birds need berry trees and shrubs to be able to survive year round and by moving from trees to tree or shrub to shrub can help to pollinate as well. They love the showy fruit from Dogwood trees, Elderberry, Juniper berries, Sumac, Viburnum and crabapples. Hummingbirds love the color red! Cardinal flower, Cape and Hardy Fuchsia, Penstemon, Honeysuckle, Salvia are all wonderful perennials to plant in your garden to attract these beauties.

Save that tree limb! These can be great locations for native bees to make their nests. Or you can make your own bee condo by drilling holes in left over lumber and put on a post or under an eave of your house. Mason bees love to lay eggs in holes that are between 3 and 5 inches deep. I have seen some amazing designs of these mason bee houses on the internet – the skies the limit on your imagination.

Lastly, try to eliminate pesticides or use the least toxic one if you have to use it in your garden. Make sure to read labels carefully and apply mostly at night when pollinators are not as prevalent outside or when recommended (like on a non-windy day). There is this wonderful website I use and encourage clients to check out that was create by Washington State University Extension called Hortsense (www.hortsense.cahnr.wsu.edu). It encourages homeowners to use non chemical methods called Integrated

Plant Management first before applying insecticides, fungicides or pesticides on many different types of trees, shrubs and plants. Another website I like to use to check the toxicity levels of a particular pesticide or garden product is the Grow Smart Grow Safe Guide at www.growSMARTgrowsafe.org . They rate garden products toxicity on all kinds of garden issues like animal pest, to moss to snails and weeds.

We can all do a little bit to bring more pollinators back into our gardens. Even if you don't have fruiting trees or vegetables growing, you can do your part to help revive the populations of bees, butterflies, birds, bats and other pollinators in our area. They play a vital role in our very survival and we are all connected!

If you would like help coming up with more flowering plants to put in your garden to draw more pollinators or to create a pollinator attracting garden and you don't know how, give me a call or send me an email! I would love to help you – jenny@gardencoachingsolutions.com or (206) 915-0585.



This article is in memory of my son Ian – he created my beautiful logo with a Shasta daisy on it!