

Would you like your yard to be a flower show all season?

by Sandy Dennison-James, Volunteer Chair, Native Plant Sale Committee

This year we want to help you plant natives for blooms from spring thaw to fall frost. Look in this brochure, on our [website](#) and at the Native Plant Sale for lists of long-blooming plants, as well as lists of plants for sun and shade, in order of bloom. Our on-site experts can help you fill in the “quiet” times in your garden.

Even better, by enjoying native plants in bloom – from the maples and bloodroot of spring to the asters and witch-hazel of very late fall – you will be helping beneficial insects, especially endangered native pollinators.

If you like to eat, you need pollinators! And we’re talking about more than honey. It’s estimated that one out of every three bites of food we eat is dependent upon pollinators, from bees to butterflies to hummingbirds to beetles. Yes, beetles – if you’ve tasted pawpaw fruits, then you have benefited from their “work.”

If you have a garden – or merely have room for a few tomato plants – you’ll discover how adding native plants will bring pollinators that increase your harvest. These same plants can attract beneficial insects that prey on “bad bugs” that might damage your crops.

Many people have heard about Colony Collapse Disorder, which is causing huge die-offs among honeybees. So it’s even more important than ever that we foster our native pollinators to supplement the European honeybees that growers have relied upon in the past.

Wild bees already are responsible for pollinating many crops, from tomatoes to watermelons. Native bees are more tolerant of cool conditions, so they get to work early and remain active late in the season, and they don’t stay home on cloudy days.

But native pollinators are in trouble, too. Researchers have found that native bumblebees are declining. Monarch butterflies, which visit and pollinate many flowers, are disappearing. Monarch caterpillars must feed on *Asclepias* (milkweeds). With reduced numbers





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of wild areas that contain milkweeds, fewer monarchs are able to reproduce – and that means that here in the Mid-Atlantic we are seeing them less often than ever before.

Even wasps can be important pollinators – some don't sting, and others are likely to sting only when grabbed or when their nest is disturbed. Many of them prey on other insects that often are undesirable to gardeners. And some of the "bees" you see are really flies in disguise.

The best way to attract and protect these workers is to choose a variety of shapes and colors of blooms and to keep the show going for months. For example, combine the lacy blooms of *Zizia aurea* (golden Alexanders) or *Viburnums* with daisy-like flowers (*Sanguinaria canadensis*, asters, *Echinacea*, *Helianthus*, *Rudbeckia*), dangling bells (*Vaccinium*), and bright trumpets (*Aquilegia*, *Lonicera*). To grab attention, group together at least three plants of the same species. Luckily, that's also the recipe for a beautiful, interesting garden.

At the sale you will find several species of *Asclepias* to entice not only monarchs but many other pollinators. They are bonanza plants, among the top groups for attracting beneficial insects.

Other terrific plants for a variety of pollinators include: *Acer* (maples), asters, *Baptisia* (wild indigo), *Ceanothus americanus* (New Jersey tea), *Cercis* (redbud), *Lobelia siphilitica* (great blue lobelia), *Lupinus perennis* (Lupine), *Monarda* and other mints (bee balms, especially *Monarda fistulosa*), *Penstemon* (beardtongue), *Rosa* (wild roses), *Rubus odorata* (flowering raspberry), *Salix* (willows), *Solidago* and other goldenrods, *Tilia Americana* (basswood), *Tradescantia* (spiderworts), and *Vaccinium* (blueberries).

Consider sprinkling in some plants that are useful to very specific types of bees or other pollinators: *Helianthus* and *Heliopsis* (sunflowers), *Hibiscus moscheutos* (swamp rose mallow), *Oenothera* (evening primrose), *Vernonia* (ironweed), and many spring ephemerals such as *Trilliums*.

You can help native pollinators by providing nesting sites and "baby food." Many native butterflies and other insects might visit non-native blooms, but most require native plants to feed their young. A bonus for you: native insects draw nesting birds looking for a protein-rich meal for their young. Insect nesting sites can include a bare patch of ground, a brush pile, or a dead snag on a tree. You don't have to worry about being attacked by a swarm – most native bees are solitary, and many do not sting.

Leave perennials standing in the fall, or only cut them back somewhat. Some bees will overwinter in the hollow stems of plants such as *Eutrochium* (Joe Pye-weed) and *Sambucus* (elderberry). (And of course, birds will continue to feast on the seeds.)



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Avoid using pesticides, especially long-lasting neonicotinoids that are absorbed into the plant. Their presence in pollen is suspected of weakening pollinators' immune systems. Even some pesticides approved for organic use are considered harmful to bees and butterflies, so try to stick to horticultural oils and soap sprays if you must use a pesticide. "Wait and see" is a good practice when you notice plant damage – often it doesn't get any worse.

If you'd like more information on pollinators, check the following websites: [Delaware Native Plants for Native Bees](#); [Penn State Pollinator Trial](#); [Pollinator Partnership](#) and its [fact sheet](#) included on the National Park Service website; [The Xerces Society](#).



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