

Learn About Pollinators!



What is a pollinator?

A pollinator is an insect, bird or mammal that moves pollen grains from the anther to the stigma of a flower. The pollen fertilizes the plant so that the plant can produce seeds, nuts, fruits and vegetables.

What are the types of pollinators?

There are more than 200,000 types of pollinators. If you were asked to name an example of a pollinator, you would probably say “bees,” but butterflies, moths, wasps, flies, beetles, bats and other mammals are also common pollinators.



How do pollinators know where to find flowers?

The gorgeous colors and wonderful smells of wildflowers were meant to attract insects and birds and to invite them to drink nectar. Nectar is a sweet, sugary liquid that they love! The beautiful colors and flowery scents are like big flashing restaurant signs telling insects and birds to stop by and eat. They pick up and move pollen at every flower that they stop at.

Here are some interesting pollinator facts:

- Many pollinators are fussy eaters and will only visit certain plants, and therefore, only pollinate those plants. Although **monarch butterflies** drink the nectar from many flowers, they cannot survive without the milkweed plant. The caterpillar (larvae) that turns into a monarch butterfly only eats milkweed.
- **Bees** are one of our most important pollinators and not just because we like honey! They pollinate over 100 crops, like almonds, apples and strawberries. Bees are attracted to yellow and blue flowers but cannot see red. So, if you are going on a summer picnic and don't want bees to be attracted to you, what color should you wear? If you said “red” you are correct!
- **Moths** pollinate flowers just like butterflies do, but while butterflies do their feeding during the day, moths feed after the sun goes down. Moths prefer dull or white flowers.
- **Hummingbirds** need a lot of energy to beat their wings so fast. They stick their long beaks into flowers to drink nectar and when they are finished, their faces and beaks are covered in pollen! They love flowers shaped like trumpets mostly because they are strong enough to hold their bodies while they feed.
- Maybe you already know that **flies** like dead and rotting things. Many times, they are attracted to smelly rotting flowers and transfer pollen by visiting hem. The midge is a type of fly and is one of the pollinators of the cocoa tree; you know what that means – their pollination is responsible for chocolate!
- **Bats** pollinate over 300 fruits in desert and tropical habitats, like guavas, mangos and bananas.





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What can you do to help pollinators?

Plant native flowering plants that pollinators love! A “native” plant is a plant that has grown naturally in your area without a human bringing it from another area and planting it. Native plants grow very well without needing pesticides or fertilizer. They also provide food and shelter for the insects, birds and mammals that live in your area. Many plant nurseries sell plants with labels that say they are native plants to your area. Read the label carefully to see how much sun and what type of soil the plant needs. Try and plant some flowers that bloom in the spring, some that bloom in the summer, and some that bloom in the fall so that your pollinators will visit and be happy most of the year!



Here are a few native plant suggestions for our area:

- Butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) — bright orange flowers that attract monarch butterflies
- Cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) — red spikes of flowers that attract hummingbirds
- Wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*) — lavender flowers that bees love
- Beebalm (*Monarda didyma*) — pink or red flowers that attract hummingbirds
- Goldenrod (*Solidago nemoralis*) — golden yellow flowers that attract butterflies
- Aromatic aster (*Symphyotrichum oblongifolium*) — purple flowers that attract caterpillars and butterflies
- Garden phlox (*Phlox paniculata*) — pink, purple or white flowers that attract butterflies

Help your family clean up most of your garden in the spring instead of the fall. Although some garden cleanup may need to happen in the fall, leaving some leaves and dried plants on the ground provides a great home for many pollinators to live in and survive the winter.

Butterflies, moths and many insects are beautiful creatures, and it's very tempting to try and catch them. Take a picture instead! Once you have a picture, you can try to find out what type of butterfly or insect it is and learn more about them... like what they like to eat and where they like to live. Caterpillars are especially fun to research and find out what type of butterfly or moth they will become!

