

Bell County Master Gardener
Tip of the Week
By Mary Lew Quesinberry
Plant Pollinators

Do you ever wonder why your vegetable garden is not setting fruits? Many of our food crops depend on the diligent work of pollinators. Many plants depend on the wind and pollinators to produce crops such as tomatoes, cantaloupes, watermelons, peaches and onions. Important pollinators are bees, butterflies, moths, beetles, flies, hummingbirds, bats and wasps. Insect and animal pollinators are critical to food and seed production as they visit plants searching for pollen and nectar.

Make your garden a haven for pollinators. Gardens attractive to animal pollinators have a minimum of lawn and varying layers of trees and shrubs and flowering plants. Water sources such as shallow bird baths, misters, drip hoses, water-filled saucers with stones for the bees and butterflies to stand on and muddy areas are important.

Overly ripe fruit is a treat for butterflies. Most importantly, keep your landscape pesticide free. One careless pesticide treatment can destroy generations of bees and butterflies. Be sure to plant diverse groups of plants to satisfy the needs of different pollinator species. Drifts of the same flower and plantings with different bloom times will provide a buffet of nectar and pollen to these important insects and animals all growing season.

Avoid hybrid plants. Native perennials such as bee balm, columbine, butterfly weed, Blackfoot Daisy, *Salvia greggii*, goldenrod, milkwort, penstemon, and passion flower vine will produce the best quality nectar and pollen over engineered plants. Some easy herbs to plant are mint, oregano, garlic, chives, parsley and lavender. Zinnias, cosmos, sunflower, marigolds and impatiens are good annuals to plant. Roses, irises, morning glory and thyme are also good plants to include. Don't forget the night blooming plants for the moths and bats, such as cactus, flowering tobacco, moonflower, Four O' Clocks, and gardenia. You will be surprised at the variety of "critters" planning and planting for the pollinators will attract!

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com

In the photo: Animal pollinators are important to seed and crop production. Make your garden a haven for bees and butterflies by providing pollen and nectar-rich native plants, water sources and layers of shrubs and trees for shelter and keep your garden pesticide free.

