

Keep it simple ... try this



Take an apple and cut it in half by slicing across its middle. What you will see in the apple halves is a central compartment in the shape of a five pointed star. If the apple has two seeds in each of the star's points, which would be a total of ten seeds, the apple had been completely pollinated by bees. If there were less than 10 seeds, not enough pollen reached the flower's stigmas to develop all the seeds. An apple flower that is poorly pollinated will develop an apple that is small and disfigured or if there is no pollination, there will not be an apple at all.

Three-fourths of the world's flowering plants and about 35 percent of the world's food crops depend on animal pollinators to reproduce. More than 3,500 species of native bees help increase crop yields. Some scientists estimate that one out of every three bites of food we eat exists because of animal pollinators like bees, butterflies and moths, birds and bats, and beetles and other insects.

You may have heard that bees are disappearing and bats are dying. These and other animal pollinators face many challenges in the modern world. Habitat loss, disease, parasites, and environmental contaminants have all contributed to the decline of many species of pollinators.

Animal pollinators play a crucial role in flowering plant reproduction and in the production of most fruits and vegetables. Most plants require the assistance of pollinators to produce seeds and fruit. About 80% of all flowering plants and over three-quarters of the staple crop plants that feed humankind rely on animal pollinators.

Pollinators visit flowers in search of food, mates, shelter and nest-building materials. The

energy that powers pollinator growth, metamorphosis, flight and reproduction comes from sugars in nectar, and the proteins, fats, vitamins and minerals from pollen grains.

The secret bond of the partnership is that neither plant nor pollinator populations can exist in isolation – should one disappear, the other is one generation away from disaster.

Here are seven ways to make your place a haven for native pollinators:

1. Use pollinator-friendly plants in your landscape. Shrubs and trees such as dogwood, blueberry, cherry, plum, willow, and poplar provide pollen or nectar, or both, early in spring when food is scarce.
2. Choose a mixture of plants for spring, summer, and fall. Different flower colors, shapes, and scents will attract a wide variety of pollinators. If you have limited space, you can plant flowers in containers on a patio, balcony, and even window boxes.
3. Reduce or eliminate pesticide use in your landscape, or incorporate plants that attract beneficial insects for pest control. If you use pesticides, use them sparingly and responsibly.

4. Accept some plant damage on plants meant to provide habitat for butterfly and moth larvae.
5. Provide clean water for pollinators with a shallow dish, bowl, or birdbath with half-submerged stones for perches.
6. Leave dead tree trunks, also called "snags," in your landscape for wood-nesting bees and beetles.
7. Support land conservation in your community by helping to create and maintain community gardens and green spaces to ensure that pollinators have appropriate habitat.

Even though you may be wrapped up in three blankets and your heat set to 80 degrees, spring really is on its way. Give some thought to enhancing the long-term strategies to increase pollinators around your yard, home and farm. Plant native species and enhance some of those odd areas with native grasses and wildflowers. This is something we all can benefit from.

For additional information on establishing pollinator species, contact kurt.mason@ky.usda.gov or call 502/643-4692.