FLOWER COURTSHIP IN YOUR GARDEN

Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: African bulbine is a very drought-tolerant plant with flowers attractive to many pollinators.

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Bees do it; birds do it, and insects too! Plant pollinators are a diverse group. Bees, flies, butterflies, moths, and beetles are among the many insects that pollinate plants. Plants, firmly rooted in one spot, are unable to seek out a mate for reproduction. This makes pollinating insects of vital importance to them.

What is pollination? Pollination is the process of transferring pollen from the anther (male part) of a flower to the stigma (female part). This completes the courtship, or sex, if you will, of the plant. A plant, seed, fruit, or nut will be forthcoming to continue the cycle of life. Without this process of pollination, our ecosystems, and we humans cannot survive.

There is a world of wonder, amazement, and delight in the observation of pollinating insects being lured into the courtship process. Aromatic flowers and certain shapes or colors of flowers all play a role in the pollinator attraction.

I plant particular plants purely for their alluring qualities to the various pollinating insects... mostly through fragrance but many also through their color. I have been so captivated at times watching the numbers of insects working a certain plant that I have been late for work! You will be awestruck at how these amazing wonders awaken your garden, making it come truly ALIVE!
In my fascination with the pollinators and their choice plants, I have come up with a group that truly are pollinator magnets. My very favorite is the sweet almond bush, *Aloysia virgata*. It is small herbaceous shrub with a heavenly sweet fragrance. It thrives in full to part sun. If allowed, it will reach five to six feet tall. With its almond-scented white plumes, you will notice a variety of pollinating insects.

Chickasaw plum, *Prunus angustifolia*, is a native shrub, growing to fifteen feet. It prefers full to partial sun and does well on sandy soils. In early spring it puts on quite a show with its white flowers, drawing many pollinators. Wildlife prize the fruit which follow.

Anise hyssop, *Agastache x ‘Blue Fortune’*, is an absolute gem in the garden, producing beautiful sky-blue to lavender blooms until frost. It attracts almost every kind of pollinating insect. The flowers and foliage have a most wonderful anise-like scent and taste, making the plant not only very attractive to our busy bees but also a wonderful edible herb for us.

Yet another popular plant with the pollinators is Queen Anne’s lace, *Daucus carota*. Just the other day, from twenty feet away, I noticed something abuzz around my plant. Moving closer I saw upwards of a hundred sweat flies just working as hard as they could. Many people cannot successfully grow Queen Anne’s lace. It requires a dry, sandier soil, full to part sun, and a very lightly mulched bed because it is a good re-seeder.

Last but not least is *Bulbine fruticosa ‘Hallmark Tangerine’*, African bulbine. This is a wonderful, somewhat succulent plant, that will persist year-round, constantly sending up flower spikes of small orange-yellow flowers that beckon a diverse group of pollinators. This beauty loves it high and dry and full to part sun. It grows to a height of about eighteen inches and usually even remains evergreen through the winter.

I’m hoping you will all share in my fascination with pollinating insects and their favorite plants by planting several this week. After all, this is National Pollinators Week, June twenty-second through the twenty-eighth. Be prepared to be amazed and delighted.