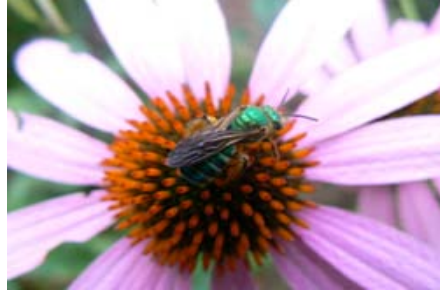


## Pollinator gardens attract bees, butterflies, insects galore



*Photo by Vanessa Walthall: Here a sweat bee pollinates a purple coneflower. But sweat bees also pollinate some of our food crops and so are very valuable to us.*

*Vanessa Walthall received her BS in wildlife ecology at the University of Florida and is employed by Native Nurseries. She is also a member of the University of Florida IFAS Leon County Extension Advisory Committee. <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu> For gardening question e-mail us at [Ask-a-MasterGardener@leoncountyfl.gov](mailto:Ask-a-MasterGardener@leoncountyfl.gov)*

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Watching butterflies flit between bright flowers all summer long in a garden is fun. I enjoy watching butterflies, but I also take immense enjoyment from eating fresh fruit and vegetables. Butterflies are not pollinating food crops. The work-horses of pollination are bees.

Bees, including non-native honeybees and many species of native bees, are cross-pollinating oranges, apples, blueberries, broccoli, carrots, squash, and most other food we eat. Without bees, the refrigerator would be awfully empty. That is why I am suggesting people broaden their butterfly gardens to include plants that are attractive to bees to create a pollinator garden. By welcoming other pollinating insects into a butterfly garden, habitat for bees is expanded, helping to boost their populations so they can better service our food crops.

Fortunately, most butterfly garden plants are attractive to other pollinating insects, making the transition from butterfly to pollinator garden simple. Whether converting an established garden or creating a new garden, consider foraging habitat, nesting habitat, and water. Habitat needs for wasps, flies and beetles, the other groups of insect pollinators, are generally met by managing a garden for butterflies and bees.

Foraging habitat is improved by providing a diversity of plants. An insect's size, tongue shape, and behavior determine what flowers it can extract nectar from, so a pollinator garden should have a wide variety of flowering plants in different shapes, sizes, and colors. Both native and

non-native plants attract pollinators, but often native plants are best because insects are adapted to foraging on their flowers. To insure a continuous food supply for insects, a succession of blooms through spring, summer, and fall is important. It is critical to provide early spring blooming plants (i.e. willow) for insects emerging from winter hibernation and late fall blooming plants (i.e. goldenrod) for insects to build up strength and numbers approaching winter hibernation. Butterfly and moth species require different larval foods for their caterpillars to eat, so planting a variety of host plants is critical to promote diversity of butterflies and moths.

Nesting habitat includes places for bees and insects to lay eggs and nest, and places for butterflies to roost at night. Bumblebees are social and build small colonies in abandoned rodent nests, in old birdhouses, or under loose leaf piles. Most native bees are solitary. Ground nesting bees need direct access to the soil surface, so leave a sunny, unmulched patch of ground in well-drained soil. Tunnel nesting bees lay their eggs in stumps, snags, and pithy or hollow centers of stems and twigs. Even if not right in the pollinator garden, keep snags on the property and protect any pithy-stemmed plants (i.e. elderberry, pokeweed).

Water is often taken for granted, but it is extremely important in a pollinator garden. Insects need a very shallow pool with a rock or structure in it so they don't drown.

A pollinator garden is really just a glorified butterfly garden. Adding a few different plants that are more desirable to bees or flies or beetles and creating nesting habitat will promote a greater diversity of pollinating insects. The vast majorities of native bees and wasps that will visit a garden are not aggressive and can be observed safely up close. We can enjoy butterflies and other insects while thoroughly enjoying a fresh snack from the garden, thanks to the hard-working bees.

**Plants to Consider in a Pollinator  
Garden**

Purple Coneflower – native

Ironweed – native

Horsemint – native

Mexican Sunflower – non-native

Anise Hyssop – non-native

African Blue Basil – non-native herb

Garlic Chives – non-native herb