

# Attracting Pollinators to Your Landscape

By **Mary Jane Frogge** and  
**Soni Cochran**

*UNL Extension Associates*

Plants need pollinators to develop seeds. Important pollinators include bees, butterflies, moths, beetles, birds, and animals like bats. Pollinators transfer pollen from one flower to another, fertilizing the plant so it can grow and produce food. Without pollinators, many of our agricultural, food crops, and native plants wouldn't survive.

You can help. It doesn't matter where you live, you can help increase the number of pollinators in your area with a few simple additions to your landscape. By selecting the right plants and creating the right habitat, you can attract and protect pollinators.

## Food

Flowers provide pollen and nectar to pollinators. Fermenting fallen fruit also provide food for bees, beetles, and butterflies. Plant flowers in groups or mass plantings to increase pollination efficiency. Plant with bloom season in mind. Provide food from early spring to late fall.

Many herbs and annuals, although not native, are very good for pollinators. Mint, dill, oregano, chives, and parsley are a few herbs you can plant.

Zinnia, cosmos, and sunflowers are excellent annual flowers that

attract bees and butterflies. Even weeds like common milkweed can be a source of food for pollinators.

## Shelter

Pollinators need protection from severe weather and from predators as well as sites for nesting and roosting. Group plantings so pollinators can safely move through the landscape and provide plants suitable for the larval stage of pollinators like butterflies. If you are unable to leave dead snags or leaf litter for shelter in your yard, consider building bee boxes or insect hotels in your yard to attract pollinators. Leave some areas of soil uncovered to provide easy access for ground nesting insects.

## Water

A clean, reliable source of water is essential to pollinators. Water features such as bird baths and small ponds provide drinking and bathing opportunities for pollinators. Water sources should be shallow or have sloping sides so pollinators can easily approach the water without drowning.

## No Pesticides

To protect pollinators, pesticide use must be avoided. This can be difficult for gardeners who have well manicured landscapes. Here are some tips to help you ease into a pesticide free environment.

- For natural pest control, provide a



A swallowtail butterfly on common milkweed



Blanket flower

diverse garden habitat with a variety of plant sizes, heights, and types to encourage beneficial insects.

- Lower expectations and accept a little bit of pest activity.
- Remove garden pests by hand.

*More on next page*

**Know how. Know now.**

# Plants Which Attract Pollinators

COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	PLANT TYPE	FLOWER COLOR	BLOOM TIME	HEIGHT	LOCATION
Maple	<i>Acer</i> spp.	Tree	Green, yellow	March–April	20–75 ft.	Sun
Black Cherry	<i>Prunus serotina</i>	Tree	White	April–May	40–60 ft.	Sun
Redbud, Eastern	<i>Cercis canadensis</i>	Tree	Pink, lavender	May	20–30 ft.	Sun
Daisy	<i>Chrysanthemum</i> spp.	Perennial	White and yellow	May–July	24 in.	Sun
Coreopsis	<i>Coreopsis</i> spp.	Perennial	Yellow	May–Sept.	24 in.	Sun
Aster	<i>Aster</i> spp.	Perennial	Lavender, pink, white	May–Oct.	1–6 ft.	Sun
Butterfly Milkweed	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	Perennial	Orange	June–July	24 in.	Sun
Beebalm	<i>Monarda fistulosa</i>	Perennial	Lavender	June–August	24 in.	Sun to part shade
Blanket Flower	<i>Gaillardia aristata</i>	Perennial	Red with yellow	June–August	18 in.	Sun
Coneflower Purple	<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>	Perennial	Purple	June–August	36 in.	Sun
Black-Eyed Susan	<i>Rudbeckia fulgida</i>	Biennial or short lived perennial	Yellow, brown center	July–August	24 in.	Sun
Sumac, Staghorn	<i>Rhus typhina</i>	Shrub	Greenish yellow	July–August	15–20 ft.	Sun
Goldenrod	<i>Solidago</i> spp.	Perennial	Yellow	July–Oct.	1–3 ft.	Sun
Gayfeather, Blazing Star	<i>Liatris</i> spp.	Perennial	Purple	August–Sept.	18–36 in.	Sun
Sedum, Tall	<i>Sedum telephium</i>	Perennial	Rose to salmon	August–Oct.	18 in.	Sun



## Habitat Project at UNL Extension in Lancaster County

The Cherry Creek habitat project involves transforming an underutilized space into a native pollinator/wildlife habitat area which includes a small drainage area. The location is north of the UNL Extension in Lancaster County office at 444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln.

In the Fall of 2013, many native plants and shrubs were planted. These plants bloom throughout the growing season which is important for native pollinators. The plants are identified with small signs.

A large habitat structure (photo above) was built in layers using six pallets. Each layer is filled with a variety of nature and reused/recycled materials. It will support a wide variety of native pollinators, beneficial insects and wildlife.

Another structure is filled with native bee nesting blocks of scrap wood blocks and natural logs. The drilled holes vary in depth from 6–8” and the diameter varies: 3/8”, 5/8” and 1/2”. Hollow tube reeds will fill out the rest of the structure.

The Cherry Creek habitat will provide many educational opportunities for youth, Master Gardeners and the public. To follow the progress at Cherry Creek habitat, stop by and visit or check out the blog at <http://buzzatcherrycreekunl.wordpress.com>.

## Build a Bee Box

You can purchase nest boxes for solitary native bees online or have fun building your own! It's easy and inexpensive. You may have all the supplies you need at home to attract important pollinators.

1. You'll need 4" x 6" or 6" x 6" dried fir or pine. You can also use weathered fence posts. Do not use cedar or any wood with preservatives. Cut your wood into 8–12" long blocks.
2. On one side of the block, begin drilling holes using a variety of hole diameters from 1/4"–3/8". Drill the holes 3"–5" deep, and at least 3/4" apart from the hole centers. Do not drill completely through the wood from one side to the other. When you drill, try to make the hole as smooth as possible on the inside.
3. Drill at least 3 or 4 dozen burrows, or as many as your block will accommodate.
4. If your wood is light-colored, you can use a propane torch to lightly burn and blacken the side of the wood where the burrows are located. This may help attract more female bees to the block.
5. Mount the nesting block at least 3 feet above the ground, and within 100 yards of the blossoms you want pollinated. The bees like to be close to



Vicki Jedlicka, UNL Extension in Lancaster County

their food source. A good site is under the eave of a garage or shed, low enough to catch the morning sun but still protected from the elements. A south/southeastern exposure is good. You can also attach your bee block to a fence post. Add a small roof to the top of your block to help keep the burrows dry.

If woodpeckers attack your bee box, use chicken wire over the block. The bees will be able to go through the wire, but the birds will be kept out.

Did you know? Shorter burrows produce mostly male bees. Deeper burrows will produce more female bees.

Sources: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service