

Ask Flora—May 2023

Dear Flora,

I recently attended a class at the library about “Planting for Pollinators”. It has sparked my interest in topic—can you tell me more about why planting for pollinators is important?

Sincerely,

Polly Nate

Dear Polly,

Thanks for asking! Pollinators are a very important part of the process for food production and creating a more diverse plant world. Small changes made to your yard can help build resilience within our larger eco-system.

Did you know that 70% of the food that we eat benefits from pollination? Plants cannot produce a fruit or a seed without fertilization—pollinators are a vital part of this process. Pollination helps the plant to produce viable seeds, increases production, and promotes more variety within our food supply, with better nutritional qualities. Plants like fruit trees, berries, tomatoes, squash, cucumbers, melons, and flowers depend on pollinators.

Over the past few decades, there has been a significant loss of pollinators—including honey bees, native bees, birds, bats, and butterflies. The problem is serious and creates significant challenges for the sustainability of our food production systems and the ability to protect the health of our environment.

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Dear Flora,

Can you tell me what kind of pollinators we have in Wyoming? How does the pollination process work?

Wondering,

Bea Friend

Dear Bea,

We have a wide variety of pollinators in Wyoming—there are over 800 species of native bees alone! Bees, flies, beetles, butterflies, moths, and wasps are frequent insect pollinators. Hummingbirds, bats, and small mammals help in the pollination process, too. Wind and even water can assist with the pollination process.

Plants need pollinators to transfer pollen from the anther (male part) to the stigma (female part) of the flower. When a bee sips nectar buried deep within a flower, powdery yellow pollen sticks to its fuzzy body. The bee carries this fertilizing pollen from flower to flower as it gathers food, brushing against the stigma of another flower. The stigma needs pollen to produce fruit and seeds. Other methods of pollination--can include the wind or water moving pollen to other plants, mammals and birds transfer pollen as they move from plant to plant, even humans can manually complete this process.

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Dear Flora,

Are there ways that I can promote pollinators in my own yard?

Sincerely,

Rufous H. Byrd

Dear Rufous,

That is a great question! There are many ways to help promote pollinators in our own backyards and our larger community. Here are a few ideas:

- Plant in succession—pollinators need nectar during all seasons of the year. Create space within your yard for a diversity of plants that bloom at different times of the season--early spring, summer, and late summer.
  - Plant a diversity of flowering plants—native plants are especially attractive to pollinators. Put some flowering plants close to the vegetables that require pollination and let pollinators do the work for you! Herbs like borage, cilantro, oregano, thyme, and mints are also great choices to attract those pollinators, too.
  - Avoid pesticides (especially Neonicotinoids)--these chemicals are long-lasting, travel throughout the whole plant, and are very highly toxic to bees.
  - Create pollinator friendly habitat—create nesting sites for pollinators with a source of water. Pollinators fly from patch to patch of habitat to forage for nectar. They can only travel so far before they need to “fuel up” again so we need to work together to create habitats throughout our larger ecosystem for their success.
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Dear Flora,

I am wondering where I could go to learn more about pollinators?

Cordially,

Sage Mason

Dear Sage,

There are many great resources to learn more about pollinators. Here are a few good ones:

- Sublette County Public Library—has several books on this topic. Here are a few of my favorites—“The Bee-Friendly Garden” by Kate Frey & Gretchen LeBuhn (great photos with suggestions for garden design/plants), “Bees: Native Pollinators” by Roberta Baxter, “Mason Bee Revolution” by Dave Hunter.
- Barnyards & Backyards—University of Wyoming Extension, local office located at Sublette County 4H Extension, 9660 US Highway 191, Pinedale or online visit @ <http://www.uwyo.edu/barnbackyard/> In fact, the Sublette County Extension Office has multiple copies of their excellent publication, “Promoting Pollinators On your Place - A Wyoming Guide.”
- Sage and Snow Garden Club—Arlinda McLaughlin has a wealth of information that she is willing to share, contact her at 307-367-2791. For more information about club activities/membership, go to our website @ <https://www.sageandshowgardenclub.org/>