

2/9/18

When most people think of pollinators, they think of hives and honeybees. However, honeybees are not native to Washington (or the United States, for that matter) and there are many, many other pollinators that are better suited to our climate and do the work of pollinating our trees, fruits, vegetables, flowers and shrubs.

This week, KCD staff has been at the NW Flower & Garden Festival sharing *5 Simple Ways to Support Native Pollinators & Beneficial Insects*. Soon hibernating pollinators like bumble bees and beetles will be emerging, so consider the following ways you can support their habitat:

1. **Provide Native Plants** - Native plants have been found to be four times more attractive to pollinators than non-natives and many butterflies only lay eggs on native species. By planting a mix of annuals and perennials that bloom from early spring through mid-fall, you can ensure flowers in your garden that provide food for pollinators throughout their active seasons.
2. **Re-Think Chemical Use** - Before you spray, make sure you truly have a pest problem! Many insects are harmless or even helpful. Information on pest control is available through your County Extension office or Master Gardeners. If you must spray, be mindful of your timing. Apply early morning before blooms open and avoid spraying the flowers. Also, pollinators are less active in early mornings or late evening. Remember, however, any chemicals applied to plants can be consumed by hungry caterpillars.
3. **Leave the Leaves** - One of the most valuable things you can do support pollinators and beneficial insects is to provide them with winter cover in the form of leaves and standing dead plant material. Considering creating a sign to inform your neighbors of your pollinator-friendly choice!
4. **Re-Think Tillage** - Just like raking leaves, tilling is an annual chore for most gardeners. It is what we have always done! However, tilling can disturb or even kill hibernating pollinators. One of the most recognizable pollinator, the bumble bee, survives Washington's winter chill by burrowing only an inch or two in the ground. If you till to avoid compaction, consider growing cover crops or only digging in exact planting areas.
5. **Grow Cover Crops** - Like leaves, winter cover crops of rye, vetch and clover offer habitat and protection from the elements for pollinators. In spring, flowering clover is an early source of nectar and cover crops prevent compaction which limits the need for tilling. (In order to avoid nuisance cover crop weeds, do not let flowers go to seed.) In the backyard garden, cover crops can be "chopped" with a spade or hand turned with less disruption to pollinator habitat than mechanical tillers.

We can all take simple steps to protect pollinators and promote bio-diversity in our yards, gardens and open spaces. For more detailed information about supporting pollinator habitat, visit www.xerces.org.