

Gardens key to supporting pollinators

By Kym Pokorny
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CORVALLIS – From a bee’s-eye view, cities aren’t the biological deserts experts once thought, thanks in large part to gardeners.

“Many studies show that gardens and gardeners are the key factor,” said Gail Langellotto, an Oregon State University Extension Service entomologist. “In cities, you have more people and where you have more people you have more gardens and where you have more gardens you have more bees. So this is an instance of people having a positive impact on biodiversity and it’s because of gardens.”

This new information is supported by a review of current research by an international collaboration of scientists, including Langellotto and David Lowenstein, an OSU Extension research associate. Both researchers conducted studies to determine the number and species of bees and other pollinators in urban gardens – Langellotto in New York, Lowenstein in Chicago – and

added their results to those of their colleagues.

Up until recently, most people – including policy makers in government and conservation – have considered cities biological wastelands where bees and other pollinators aren’t supported by their preferred habitat. Presently, most outreach focuses on educating the public about preservation challenges so that they appreciate and support ecological efforts. Langellotto and her colleagues want to see those strategies expanded to include citywide initiatives.

An example might be rebates for homeowners who plant pollinator-friendly gardens. On a larger scale, government entities could create built-in habitat by planting flowering shrubs and perennials in parks, along roadways, right-of-ways, greenspaces and other appropriate areas.

“Urban ecology is often an afterthought,” Lowenstein said. “But there’s a push to make cities livable places. We’d like to see a paradigm shift to mobilize the expertise of land planners, architects and other relevant

stakeholders to think about open space and incorporate it into urban design that’s useful in an ecological way.”

Homeowners already play a significant role in urban conservation of bees, both native and honey bees, and other pollinators simply by having a garden with flowers.

“You don’t have to put too much thought into what you plant,” Langellotto said. “Flower type or plant type doesn’t seem to matter. What matters is that you have flowers in your garden. That seems to be the overall driver.”

Still, if you’d like to be more systematic, plant a diverse selection of plants that bloom over a long period. Bees are more attracted to blue, purple, white or yellow flowers with tubular or ray-like shapes. Some particularly enticing plants for bees include lavender, Russian sage, sunflowers, cosmos, asters, zinnias, coneflower, black-eyed Susan, bee balm and sweet alyssum.

Providing water is also helpful. Most important, though, is not using broad-spectrum insecticides, Langellotto cautioned.

Oregon’s future has big solar component

The Oregon Solar Energy Industries Association (OSEIA), Oregon’s solar trade association, has released its Oregon Solar Plan, which outlines a blueprint for the next 10 years of the state’s energy future. The plan, a collaboration between OSEIA and Lewis & Clark Law School’s Green Energy Institute, finds that solar can provide 10 percent of Oregon’s electricity needs by 2027 by installing enough solar capacity to power the equivalent of 500,000 homes.

“The Oregon Solar Plan is our solar community’s path for the future,” said Laurie Hutchinson, OSEIA’s board president. “An energy transition is underway and solar will be a big part of Oregon’s energy future. The Oregon Solar Plan offers an ambitious but reasonable way to achieve that future.”

The Oregon Solar Plan finds that Oregon currently has 226 megawatts of solar installed, enough to power about 25,000 homes. The plan highlights six policies

that OSEIA says are largely responsible for building the state’s current solar capacity. Those policies include net metering, Oregon’s residential energy tax credit, the state’s property tax exemption for solar and other alternative energy devices, and utility ratepayer incentives, as well as federal tax incentives and federal policies. OSEIA said that Oregon needs to continue these policies to maintain its reputation as a stable place to do business and build on that foundation.

The Oregon Solar Plan also finds that Oregon’s current solar workforce could almost double in the next 10 years, growing from the current level of 4,500 workers to as many as 8,000 by 2027. “Whether you talk to a small solar installer or large-scale developer, they will tell you that finding qualified workers is a desperate need,” said Hutchinson. “The Oregon Solar Plan underscores the potential for a strong, stable workforce that could be a major presence in the state.”



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