



ABOVE: Western-tailed Blue butterfly gathers nectar on a wild sunflower.



ABOVE: Native bumblebee hovers above a tray of bacopa in search of pollen in Alder Slope Nursery's greenhouse.



RIGHT: Yellow Swallowtail butterfly gathers nectar on a penstemon.

PLANTING FOR POLLINATORS

It takes work, but it's worth it

By Ellen Morris Bishop
Special to the Chieftain

Albert Einstein once said, "If the bee disappeared off the surface of the globe, then man would have only four years of life left. No more bees, no more pollination, no more plants, no more animals, no more man."

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, pollinators, including bees, butterflies, beetles, birds and bats, are critical to producing more than a third of the world's food. In the U.S., \$85.1 billion of annual food crops are pollinator dependent.

Although we generally think of the domestic honey-bee as the principal crop pollinator, the vast majority of pollination services are carried out by wild, native bees, many of which are in precipitous decline along with the domestic honeybee.

For example, the western bumblebee (*Bombus occidentalis*), once the most common bumblebee in the western U.S. and an important pollinator of apples, cherries and blueberries, has nearly disappeared from its range.

Five years ago, two of these endangered insects were identified on Zumwalt Prairie. The discovery caused a stir of excitement among entomologists.

Whether bee, beetle, bird or butterfly, pollinators rely upon pollen and nectar for their food. Establishing a garden of plants that bloom throughout the season can help local native pollinators thrive.

And as an extra benefit, you'll be able to watch colorful native butterflies, solitary bees

and other tiny fauna in your own backyard.

Few of the native insect pollinators are capable of stinging. Many are solitary – they do not live in hives or colonies. Instead, they live in individual holes or nests.

Some, including bumblebees, alkali bees, and sweat bees, are ground-nesters. Others, including mason bees and leafcutters, nest in small holes in trees or in cavities excavated by beetles and need mud to construct chambers to hold their eggs and protect their brood from parasites.

Planting a garden or landscaping that supports local pollinators means choosing a variety of plants with different blooming times to provide flowers (and food) from spring through summer and fall, said Terry Bates, owner of Eastern Oregon Nursery in Enterprise.

He recommended very early spring bloomers, including daffodils and crocus, to support early-emerging pollinators. Early-mid May flowers include potentilla, a shrub with big, showy blooms, and cultivars of wild geranium plants with generally small flowers that appeal to smaller bees. Chokecherry, a tree with profuse white blossoms and mid-summer fruit that supports birds, is also a favorite early bloomer.

Mid-spring blooms include lupine and cinquefoil. They are followed by Indian blanket, sunflowers, and asters, all favorites of bees and butterflies.

"Herbs like thyme, mints and catnip are excellent choices," Bates said. "They are fragrant, and attract many different pollinators."

And as an extra benefit, generally deer don't eat them," Bates said.

Bates emphasizes planning a garden that provides not only flowers, but also habitat for native pollinators.

"I'm really a fan of solitary, wild native bees, including mason bees," he said. "They need water and mud to help make their nests. You can provide a mason bee nesting area by bundling some hollow bamboo rods that are about six inches long, and 5/16-inch in diameter, and securing these in a tree or even under the eaves of your house. Mason bees don't sting, but they are excellent pollinators."

Other important pollinator habitat considerations include providing bare ground for solitary bees to nest and small piles of leaf litter for rest and overnight accommodations.

When planting a pollinator garden, place flowers and shrubs in clumps or bunches and also vary the height, including low, medium, and taller plants in each bunch, says Oregon State University Extension Master Gardener specialist Gail Langellotto.

Because smaller pollinators (think sweat bees, hover-flies, and solitary wasps) prefer smaller flowers, try to include a variety of blossom sizes in your garden.

When planting for pollinators, you need to think in four dimensions.

Pollinators have a very different view of a flower garden than we do. Most butterflies can see colors. Many species, including tiger swallowtails, see the red-green spectrum colors, while others may see only the yellow-ultraviolet spectrum.

MORE LOCAL INFORMATION

Alder Slope Nursery: Randy and Pam Slinker, 64934 Alder Slope Road, Enterprise, Oregon. 541-426-3317 • alderslopenursery.com

Eastern Oregon Nursery: Terry and Irene Bates, 103 Fish Hatchery Lane, Enterprise, Oregon 541-432-0588

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