



Three Simple Ways to Attract More Pollinators to Your Garden
Raymond Schoenwandt
UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County

Pollination is the act of transferring pollen grains from the male part of a flower, known as the anther, to the female part of the flower known as the stigma. This allows plants to reproduce to make seeds, and in the process, many of the fruits, vegetables, and grains we enjoy eating. Wind and water are only responsible for pollinating twenty percent of the plants in need of pollination, the other eighty percent requires a visit by a pollinator. Attracting pollinators such as bees, butterflies, wasps, beetles, moths, beneficial flies, hummingbirds and bats is essential for your garden if you want to grow vegetables or fruit. Pollinators are considered keystone species, meaning that a large number of other plants and animals are dependent on them in order to reproduce or eat. Three out of every five bites of food that you consume are due to the activities of a pollinator. Without their activities most of our crops would be unable to reproduce or provide the fruits, vegetables, and grains that we rely on to feed ourselves and our animals. Without pollinators you can say goodbye to watermelons, tomatoes, cabbage, strawberries, coffee, chocolate and just about every other vegetable or fruit. Even grains like alfalfa, used for animal feed, need pollination to produce seeds. Here are three simple ways to increase the number of pollinators that visit your garden.

Provide water. Pollinators need a water source for many purposes including drinking and reproduction. Providing water is a guaranteed way to attract them to your garden. Bird baths, small dishes of water, small water fountains, and even a mud puddle are all proven ways to attract more pollinators. Besides attracting pollinators, water will attract birds which consume many of the harmful insects that are known to damage gardens.

May 15, 2019

Provide habitat and food that attracts pollinators. Contrary to popular belief, eighty percent of bees are solitary, meaning they do not live in colonies. While honey bees are required for many fruit trees, they do little to pollinate your vegetable garden. For tomatoes and peppers, bumble bees and carpenter bees are the main pollinators. Since these species of bees are solitary, providing bee houses which you can buy or make yourself are helpful to ensure that more bees visit your garden. Likewise, planting flowers in large groups will attract not only bees, but butterflies, hummingbirds and many other pollinators. Flowers provide a food source for many pollinators and if planted in or around your vegetables will attract more pollinators. Native plant species are also very good at attracting pollinators. Because plants and pollinators have coevolved to support one another. You can find the types of flowers and native plants that will attract the most pollinators to your garden online at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/files/278805.pdf>.

Stop or limit your use of pesticides. Not every plant that is showing signs of distress is being attacked by an insect. Research the problem before you decide to use a pesticide. We encourage you to contact the Master Gardeners with your gardening questions. Many plant problems can be managed without resorting to a chemical means of control. Pesticides are non-selective, meaning at the right concentrations they kill both good and harmful insects. Research has shown that pesticides play a critical role in the decline of bees and many wild pollinators, and that residential use contributes to water pollution and habitat damage.

Join UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County on Saturday, May 18, from 9:00 a.m. to noon, for a free public education class on Water Resilient Gardening, at the Government Center Hearing Room, Building C, 2850 Fairlane Court in Placerville. Using water wisely is important for sustainable gardening, even in wet years. Learn how your plant choices, soil, irrigation and garden design can help you create a water resilient garden. Rain water harvesting and greywater use will also be covered, as well as practical insights and tips on this important subject.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512, or send us an email using the Ask a Master Gardener option on our website. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. We also encourage you to visit us at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, behind Folsom Lake College, El Dorado Center. See http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden for more information and days and hours of operation, or call us to schedule a group tour. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see <http://ucanr.edu/mastergardener> e-news. Master Gardeners are also on Facebook and Instagram; we hope you enjoy our postings and will share them with your friends.