



Bringing Pollinators Home
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Home gardens and yards come in all sizes and shapes: grass, trees, shrubs and flowers. But do you see the all-important bees and butterflies in your yard? Perhaps a hummingbird or two, among other birds? Garden and landscape ideas evolve over time, whether due to climate change, new ideas, or new learning. Using native, and eliminating alien, plants is increasingly popular and can dramatically improve our environment.

A sterile, well-manicured yard may be pleasing to the eye, but it does not necessarily create a biodiverse environment. An important goal should be to create a healthy, balanced, diverse landscape that can keep pests in check without using pesticides. There are many insects that are good for the yard, and bees and butterflies excel in this capacity.

Bees and butterflies are important to the environment because they serve as pollinators. Pollination is the process of bringing pollen from the male part of a plant to the female part, and it is essential to the survival of all plants. Pollination is also critical to people's ability to get fruit and vegetables. Our gardens need plants that attract pollinators, and also provide them food, shelter and a safe habitat.

Some of the plants we are growing are considered aliens, or not native to our climate. Despite their pleasing appearance, they do not contribute to a healthy environment. Instead, there needs to be a diverse and complex collection of plants, animals, and insect predators feeding off the plants. Native insects will not survive on alien plants. You may wonder, is that bad -- do we want insects in our gardens? Absolutely we do, insects are predators naturally keeping the garden healthy and in balance. In other words, there needs to be a wide variety of plants in order to sustain the garden.

Time to plant, but what should be planted to attract pollinators? Goldenrod (*Solidago*), coneflowers (*Echinacea*), flowering dogwoods (*Cornus*), sunflowers (*Helianthus*), Asters, black-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia hirta*), and most importantly: milkweed! Milkweed (*Asclepias subulata*) is a primary butterfly attractor. And three different species of milkweed can be planted together, which will provide a continuous display of flowering color in your garden from June through September, and attract a variety of beautiful butterflies.

Many of us have planted things as attractors for butterflies; however the insects also need someplace to reproduce. The plants are not always one and the same. One example is the Buddleja or butterfly bush. It sounds like the perfect plant, and while butterflies do like to feed in them, no species in North America exist that a butterfly can reproduce on. This was not always the case, but as native plants were eliminated by the planting of aliens, so went the proper habitat.

Bees as well need proper habitat for reproduction; leaves on the ground or an old bird nest will provide a lovely home.

We are in a drought and we live in a Mediterranean climate. Not the best time to replant your entire yard, but a good time to add drought-tolerant natives here and there. Create an area that will attract the bees and butterflies so critical to a healthy landscape. Today from 9:00 a.m. to noon is a free class at the Cameron Park Community Center: Edible Landscaping. Master gardeners will show you how to raise attractive and edible plants in your landscape. Class is at 2502 Country Club Drive, Cameron Park.

Join UCCE Master Gardeners this Saturday for a free class on the hardworking friends of all gardeners: Worms. Learn how worms can make the best organic fertilizer available from kitchen waste, how to set up your own worm bin, and what type of worms should be used. The May 16th class is from 9:00 a.m. to noon at the Veterans Memorial Building, 130 Placerville Drive in Placerville.

UCCE Master Gardeners are at local farmers markets and are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmg>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter. You can also find us on Facebook.