K-STATE Research and Extension | Wildcat District

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Pollinator Planning

Planting flowers for yourself is one thing, but planting them for insects is a different ballgame. Sometimes, these worlds collide, but it might take a little extra planning. How do pollinator gardens and landscaped flower beds differ?

The biggest step in changing from traditional flower beds into pollinators is increasing diversity. Landscapes are often victims of monoculture, which is the planting of a single species. Fescue lawns are a great example of this, or a neighborhood full of sugar maples. While this can be appealing to humans, it doesn't benefit insects. Pollinators, and insects in general, can be host specific and prefer a certain food source. However, to encourage a wide array of pollinators and beneficial insects, plant a wide array of plants. Ideally, these would be native plants, which are better food sources for our native insects. This is not just limited to flowers either! Trees and shrubs can provide food sources, as well as habitats for insects.

The other key aspect of pollinator gardens is supplying the food source all year long. This is related to breaking monocultures because having different plants usually means having different flowering periods. Bees come out of the soil, wood, and hives in early spring in search of food. They will also need food in the heat of summer and then they need plenty before going dormant in late fall and winter. This means that blooms in all seasons are ideal. Early blooming plants include Blue Star Amsonia, Catmint, Ninebark, Spirea, and Serviceberry. There are many summer flowering plants, but some include Bee Balm, Blue Wild Indigo, Virburnum, Coreopsis, Yarrow, Ironweed, and Butterfly Bush, as well as Blazing Star and Black-Eyed Susan. The last plants to flower will include: Stonecrop Sedum, Goldenrod, Coneflower, and Asters.

As mentioned above, pollinators don't just benefit from flowers. Trees and shrubs can provide shelter as well as food sources. Leaf litter and even an old tree stump can house bees over the winter. Keeping a natural habitat with various species, heights, and blooming periods can offer a veritable buffet for insects in the garden. No need to mark the calendar, but keeping these concepts in mind will make a solid plan for promoting powerful pollinators!

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