What’s the Buzz?

Fruits and seeds come from flowering plants—but only if the flowers can exchange pollen with others of the same species. Because plants can’t travel, they must rely on wind or animals to move pollen for them. We call these animals pollinators. To attract them, flowers “reward” pollinators with two nourishing foods—sweet nectar and rich pollen.

Butterflies, hummingbirds, flies, and beetles can all serve as pollinators. The most important pollinators, however, are bees. They help pollinate over 80% of flowering plants, including many of the foods we eat every day.

Got Lunch?

Without pollinators, we wouldn’t have 75% of the foods grown in North America. Can you identify all the summer cookout dishes that involve pollinators?

Answer: Everything except the chips, burger buns, and lettuce! Even cattle growers and dairy farmers rely on alfalfa, which is pollinated by bees.
Plant a pollinator garden. Some gardeners are fearful of being stung by bees and would rather they were not in their gardens. Most native bees rarely sting gardeners and if they do, the sting tends to be mild.

Avoid pesticides or choose non-chemical solutions to insect problems. If you must use a pesticide, read the label and apply and dispose of it according to label directions. Avoiding the use of pesticides may be a reasonable choice in some cases. Nature has its own checks and balances and manages to keep most pests under control without gardeners having to resort to pesticides. Remember, some damage to plants is part of the ecology of your garden.

Provide a source of pesticide-free water and mud. A dripping faucet, mud puddle, or birdbath attracts butterflies and beneficial insects. Mud is also an important nesting material for some bee species. Providing a clean source of water for birds and other pollinators limits their exposure to possible toxins in the garden.

Using native flowering plants is the best gardening you can choose to benefit your local pollinators. Native pollinators and native plants have become mutually adapted through millions of years of partnership with one another. Finding and planting the right plants makes a huge difference for pollinators. The pollinators will thank you.