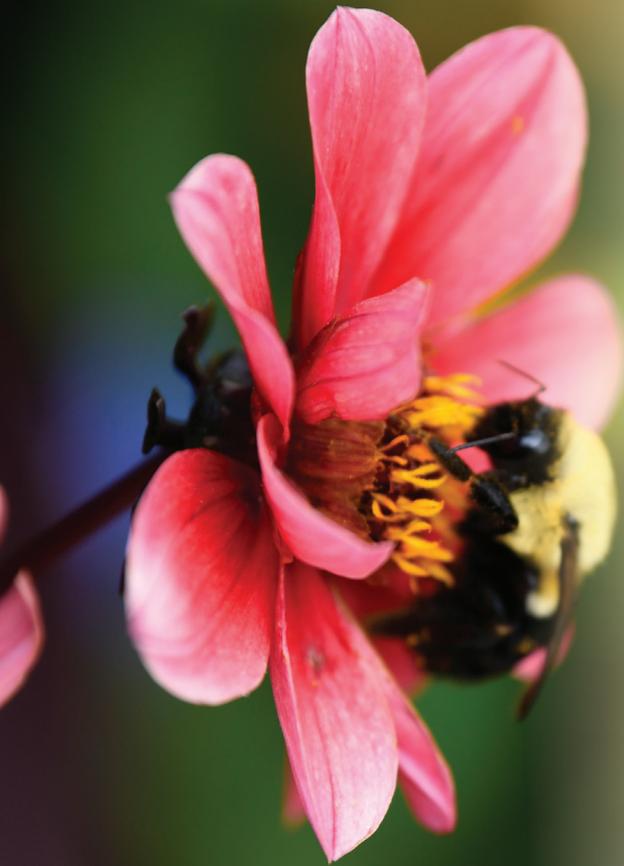


Pollinator Gardens Help Put Food on the Table



Next time you bite into a juicy peach or a ripe tomato, consider this: according to U.S. Department of Agriculture research, one out of every three bites of food you eat exists because of the work of pollinators like bees, butterflies and birds. They carry pollen from the male to the female parts of flowers enabling plant reproduction. The trouble is the U.S. pollinator population is in decline and has been for decades, and that threatens our food supply.

“Without pollinators, our food supply is drastically reduced,” said Green Spring Gardens naturalist Susan Eggerton. “Most fruit, vegetable and seed crops like apples, tomatoes and pumpkins depend on insects and animals for pollination.”

Research shows that managed honeybee populations dropped from six million colonies in 1947 to 2.5 million today, and the monarch butterfly migration is at risk of failing. Contributing factors to the decline include inadequate diets, natural habitat loss due to urbanization, diseases and pesticide poisoning. Eggerton says you can boost the pollinator population and help support a healthy ecosystem by planting a pollinator garden this spring.

“Pollinator gardens are primarily sun gardens because insects like to stay warm,” she said. “If you plant a wide variety of colorful plants, you’ll attract a diversity of pollinators, some of which are predatory insects and animals that eliminate the need for pesticides.”

Eggerton says native plants are good choices because native species and pollinators evolve together. Zineas, marigolds and sunflowers are easy to grow from seed and planting them in a pollinator garden can be a fun project for children. If you choose plants that flower at different times of the year, you’ll provide nectar and pollen sources throughout the growing season. When the season is over, Eggerton says you can help pollinators weather the cold by leaving the garden alone.

“Some pollinators take shelter from the cold under plant debris, and sometimes they’ll go into the stems of plants,” she said. “It’s best for their survival to leave the plant debris over the winter and clear it from the garden in late winter or early spring.”

Green Spring Gardens offers a wide variety of plants at competitive prices that are perfect for pollinator gardens. You can also talk with naturalists and master gardeners for advice about what to plant in your pollinator garden. For hours and more information, turn to the Gardening section.

