

Creating a pollinator habitat garden



Food

A pollinator habitat garden is more than just flower beds. By providing an assortment of plants, which flower throughout the year, you are providing a consistent food supply which will encourage pollinating insects and birds to stay, feed, drink, shelter and even reproduce. It is recommended that you plant swathes or large patches of flowers, rather than scattering them randomly through the garden. By planting flowering food-crops in large patches, you encourage specialist pollinators such as bees to forage within these patches, cross pollinating the plants as they move efficiently from flower to flower.

Shelter

The next thing you need to do is provide potential shelter. You can include hollow logs, pieces of thick bark and crowds of rocks which will provide shelter and nesting substrate for a variety of pollinators. Resin bees, leafcutter bees and solitary wasps will nest in large drilled holes in wood, which mimic the natural cavities produced by wood-boring insects. Hollow or pithy stems can be collected and bundled up when plants are pruned. These will attract reed bees and masked bees as well as small solitary wasps and ants. By providing small cavities in rockeries or with layers of rolled bark, you will be providing shelter for ladybeetles, resin bees and other pollinators.

In Australia, gardeners are encouraged to mulch their plants, to maintain soil moisture. However, some of our pollinators, such as solitary bees and wasps, nest in the ground and find it hard to dig through the thick layers of mulch. So leave an area of bare ground, at least a metre squared, to encourage ground-nesting bees into your garden.

Water

Water is necessary for honey bees and birds so include a shallow bird bath, with a large rock in it to reduce the chances of insects drowning. A bowl filled with wet mud will provide minerals and water for some butterfly species and rocks provide insects with a warm place to bask.

Maintenance

Maintenance of your habitat garden is important if the plants and the pollinators are to thrive. Water deeply and regularly to ensure flowers produce plenty of nectar and pollen. Don't use insecticides. If a plant is infested with many pests, it may need feeding, pruning or pulling out. A healthy garden will not only encourage pollinators, it will encourage wasps, shield bugs, spiders, dragonflies and other natural pest-predators. Keep the water and mud bowls topped up and place a seat out in the garden so you can sit, observe and enjoy your wonderful pollinator habitat garden.

Some suggested plants:

There are many flowers which are attractive to bees and other pollinators. Some vegetable flowers are great pollinator food, so select a few to 'sacrifice' and let them bolt to flower. These are just a few that you can plant in your pollinator habitat garden:

- exotic flowers – dahlia, daisies, hebe, lavender, marigold, roses, salvia, buddleia, diosma
- herbs – basil, borage, mint, parsley, rosemary, sage, thyme, coriander
- native species – bottlebrush, gum trees, Persoonia, Pultenaea, tea-tree, grevilleas, hibiscus, native mint, westringia, banksia, happy wanderer, Dianella, Chocolate lily, Fringe lily
- vegetables – some plants produce flowers to produce fruit; tomato, pumpkin, cucumber, zucchini, eggplant, peas, beans
- and others produce flowers when they bolt. These are great 'sacrificial' vegi plants; bok choy, radish, leek, shallot
- fruiting trees and bushes – apricots, apples, citrus, peach, berries, strawberries
- nut trees - almonds, macadamia.

