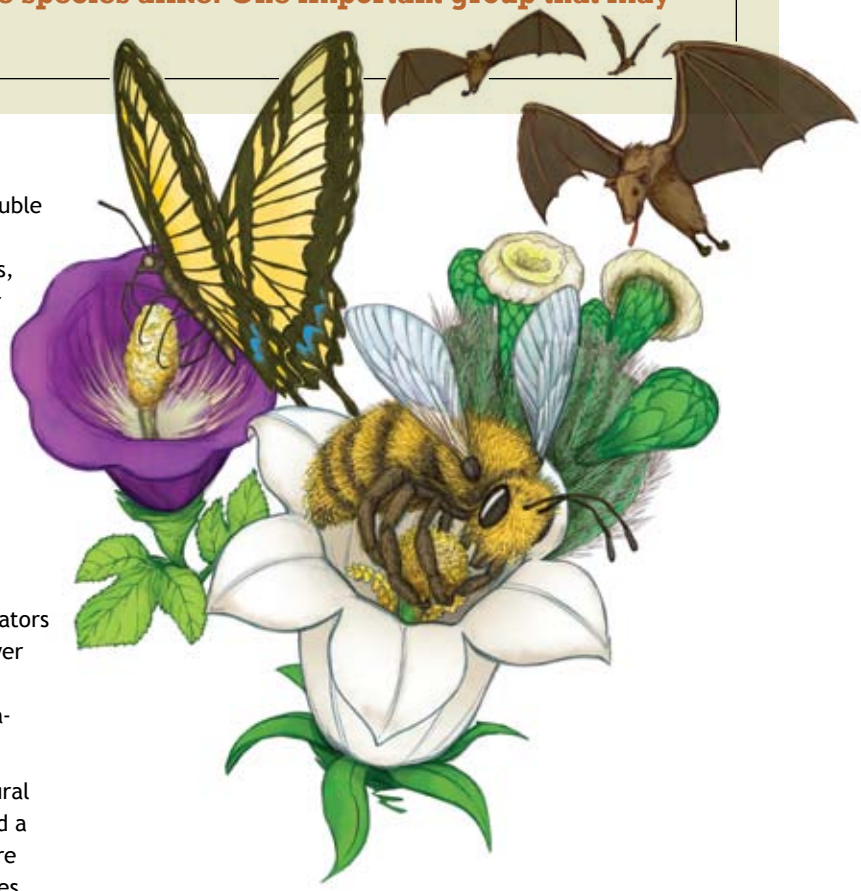
HOW TO: PLAN A POLLINATOR GARDEN

SIMPLE PROJECTS FOR CONSERVATION

Restoring wildlife habitat is a priority for many League chapters. From planting cover and food plots to cleaning up water resources, Ikes are working to restore native habitat for game and non-game species alike. One important group that may not be on your list: Pollinators.



From bees to bats, our pollinators are in trouble — which spells trouble for us in many ways. Much of our food supply depends on pollinators, whether it's to help plants reproduce and bear fruit or to keep crop-eating insects at bay.

A pollinator garden can provide food and shelter for local pollinators such as solitary bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds. Your pollinator garden doesn't have to be big to be helpful — it just has to be done well.

Go Native

The best source of food for your local pollinators is local plants. The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center offers a searchable database of native plants at *www.wildflower.org/plants*. Which natives will bring pollinators to your garden?

- **Check the "Pollinator Value":** The Natural Resources Conservation Service compiled a list of native flowers and legumes that are useful in improving habitats for butterflies, bees, hummingbirds, and other important pollinators. The list includes the scientific and common names of each plant and the plant's "pollinator value" — the relative value of the plant for nesting, shelter, and a food source in one or more of a pollinator's life stages. Visit *http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/pollinator_Value.html*.
- **Get Planting:** The Pollinator Partnership offers a series of regional "Selecting Plants for Pollinators" guides that list local pollinators and their food and habitat needs as well as the flowering seasons for trees, shrubs, flowers, and vines in 31 different "eco-regions" of the United States: *www.pollinator.org/guides.htm*. You can search by Zip code to determine your region. The Xerces Society's new guide book, *Attracting Native Pollinators* (reviewed on page 46 of this magazine) also provides plant guides and more. Once you've selected your plants, check out the U.S. Department of Agriculture's online fact sheets and plant guides for tips on how to grow and manage pollinator-friendly plants: *http://plants.usda.gov/java/factSheet* (the URL is case sensitive).

Invasive plants such as multiflora rose and autumn olive provide food for some pollinators. If your chapter is in the process of eliminating these types of invasives, be sure to replace them with native plants that will be just as welcome to pollinators.

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Viva Variety

Variety is the spice of life for us and our pollinator friends. Mix it up to make your garden more palatable.

- **Color Wheel:** Consider color before you plant. Each pollinator had a different color preference. For example, bees prefer yellow, blue, and purple flowers, while butterflies prefer the red, orange, and yellow spectrum.
- **Scrutinize Shape:** Butterflies must land to eat, so they prefer a flat-headed flower, but hummingbirds can hover and eat. Consider the shape of your plants when working to attract specific pollinators.
- **Seasons Eatings:** Pollinators need food spring through fall, so plan your garden to ensure you have flowers blooming through each of those seasons. Even after the flowers are gone, pollinators can use leafy plants for laying eggs and as food for young larvae.
- **Dandy Dandelions:** Weeds taste good too! Dandelions are the scourge of many suburban lawns, but they provide food for pollinators before other flowers open in the spring and can provide a steady diet throughout the summer and fall.
- **Hands Off Hybrids:** Avoid hybrid "double" flowers — plants that are bred to have extra petals. The breeding process often eliminates pollen and nectar from these flowers, making them useless to pollinators.

It's also important to cluster flowers rather than planting just a few of each type. Planting in clusters helps pollinators work — and feed — efficiently.

Purge Pesticides

Pesticides and herbicides can harm the very pollinators you're trying to help. Limit pesticide use in the areas around your pollinator garden. If you must use a pesticide, apply it when pollinators are least active — very early morning or late evening — and do not apply it when plants are in bloom or conditions are windy.

Add Water

In addition to food, pollinators need a clean, reliable source of water. If you don't have natural water sources nearby, consider a small pool or even a shallow bird bath. Look for a container with a shallow end or sloping side to let smaller pollinators drink without the risk of drowning.

Gimme Shelter

Supporting pollinators also means providing a place for them to nest/roost and to stay safe from predators and severe weather. Different layers of landscaping — trees, bushes, flowers — not only look nice but help provide shelter. You can also build bee boxes for solitary bees and leave uncovered areas of soil nearby for nesting pollinators to dig tunnels.

For step-by-step instructions on how to build a bee house, bat box, or another pollinator-friendly abode, visit the How To page on the League's Web site at *www.iwla.org/howto*.

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