

## Attracting Pollinators

Growing up, I remember a great aunt who maintained a large yard and garden well into her nineties. At the time I thought it was strange that she grew ornamental flowers in rows between her vegetables. I always thought this was a waste of garden space and that the flowering plants could have been more creatively integrated into her yard.

Since then, I have changed my mind about my great aunt's gardening techniques. Many of the flowering plants she used actually attracted beneficial insects that preyed on other insect pests and increased flower pollination. Because of this, she reduced pesticide use and most likely increased fruit set of the various crops she grew.

When planning a garden to attract pollinators and other beneficial insects, it is important to use a variety of plants. This includes planting flowering species as well as traditional vegetables. Many herbs are a great option, especially from the carrot, mint and mustard families. However, to be most useful, some of the planted herbs must be allowed to flower. Useful ornamental plants that attract beneficials include basket of gold, sweet alyssum, blanket flower, candy tuft, wall flower, cat mint, various monardas (bee balms), cone flowers, coreopsis, cosmos, anise hyssop (agastache) and most native perennials. Choosing varieties that blossom at different times of the growing season is also important. Avoid plant cultivars with double flowers. These often do not attract pollinators. Additionally, beneficial plants do not have to be planted in rows in the garden. They may be more creatively used when planted in or close to the garden.

Another way to attract beneficial insects is to create structures that offer protection and a breeding ground. An example of this is a native bee (and excellent general pollinator) called orchard mason bee or blue orchard bee. It can easily be attracted to the yard, and nesting sites are easy to build. For instructions on how to build a structure, access the University of Washington fact sheet, "Orchard Mason Bees" at: <http://king.wsu.edu/foodandfarms/documents/MasonBee.pdf>.

Minimizing pesticide use is important in maximizing the number of beneficial insects. Through proper management, many pesticide applications can be avoided. Consider the following to minimize pesticide use:

- Before purchasing plants, research the conditions plants may be best adapted to and how they will be used. Mature size, light exposure, irrigation requirements, cold hardiness and soil tolerances are all important.
- Few established plants, including lawn grass, tolerate daily irrigation well. Plants prefer to be allowed to dry between irrigations and then be watered deeply. Established trees and shrubs benefit from deep soaking (24 inches deep) every 2 to 4 weeks. Turf should be watered 6 to 12 inches deep one to two times weekly.
- Use pest and disease-resistant plants. Resistance information is often included in label information or other packaging. Additionally, when planting annuals or vegetables "All American Selections" or similar designations are practical in determining useful plants.