

## Pollinator Garden

By Taun Beddes – Juab County Extension Horticulturist

I remember visiting relatives in rural Idaho and Utah growing up in the 1970s and 1980s. Large yards were common back then, often featuring expansive lawns with minimal flower beds. I always thought this was strange. Instead of flowerbeds, the flowers were planted alongside vegetables in the garden. My great aunt, for instance, had many varieties planted in her vegetable garden including peonies, marigolds, iris, tulips, chrysanthemums, and many others. She would have a row of petunias blooming next to her tomatoes, with another row blending petunias and green beans.

Historically, rural areas relied on flood irrigation to irrigate the yard and garden, requiring specific layouts to ensure even water distribution over the entire property. Because of this, the unconventional planting of flowers in the vegetable garden had an unintended benefit: the vegetable garden became a haven for beneficial insect predators and pollinators. This, in turn, boosted vegetable flower pollination. It also naturally reduced the need for pesticides because the increased number of beneficial insect predators reduced the number of pests to tolerable levels.

Today, this practice is less common, but it deserves a revival. With climate change threatening native beneficial insects through habitat loss and development encroaching further into wildlands, home gardens can be a refuge. While mixed planting might slightly decrease the number of vegetables you can plant, consider it a beneficial trade-off. Planting flowering plants in the garden has many benefits. Focus on mint, daisy, and carrot species, avoiding spearmint and peppermint specifically. They are too invasive. But catmints, monardas (bee balms), hummingbird mints (Agastache), cosmos, coneflowers, asters, lantanas, dill, and parsley (allow it to flower) are a few examples that attract beneficial insects, allowing you to enjoy beautiful blooms while supporting vital ecological roles. Focus on varieties with simple flowers that are not extremely ruffled or doubled. These flowers make it harder for insects to reach pollen and nectar.

An added benefit to using flowering plants in the garden is that children often love not only looking at and picking the flowers but also enjoy seeing the interesting insects in the garden, especially butterflies such as swallowtails and painted ladies and many species of ladybugs. Praying mantises and walking sticks may also show up.

Flowering annuals and perennials do not usually require supplemental fertilizer. In fact, fertilizing may reduce the number of flowers they produce. Once established, perennials mentioned in the mint family are waterwise and are happy being irrigated deeply every 10 – 14 days.

It is easy to embrace the beauty and benefits of interplanting flowers in your vegetable garden. You do not need to plant entire rows of flowering plants either. Even a few strategically placed here and there help significantly. Additionally, planting them

elsewhere in the yard is also great. You'll be contributing to a healthier ecosystem, enjoying vibrant blooms, and reaping the delicious rewards of your homegrown vegetables.