

Gardening with a Sense of Purpose

by Dede Moreno

New gardeners often feel overwhelmed and intimidated as they try to figure out how to plant a garden for the first time. You may feel that you can't possibly grow anything in the rocky, clay soil and extreme summer and winter temperatures in the Mother Lode. But, don't despair; take a look around at the natural landscape and use it as a template. Go with the flow and grow plants that are of service to Mother Nature's creatures.

Consider gardening to attract pollinators. This can offer a sense of direction in selecting plants for your location and the décor for your yard. According to the California Native Plant Society, you should clear your planting area of invasive plants such as vinca major, Scotch broom or English ivy. The University of California Cooperative Extension encourages the use of star jasmine, winter jasmine, and forsythia as non-invasive plants.

Fill your new garden with plants and flowers that bloom during different seasons to provide for wildlife all year. Watch the birds, bees and butterflies for hours of visual pleasure as they feed, bathe, nest and look for shelter. The U.S. Forest Service suggests planting berries for food. Some examples include golden currant, Oregon grape and chokecherry. They will bloom in early spring to feed hungry birds. Try planting goldenrod in the fall for flowers that feed pollinators at the end of the season.



The ideal garden provides a continuous source of different food and shelter all year long. Look for a variety of annuals, perennials, evergreens and deciduous plants best suited to your elevation and sun exposure. Plant for each season; find plants that flower or bear fruit at different months to provide a steady supply of food and shelter for birds, bees and butterflies. The North American Pollinator Protection Campaign (NAPPC) at <http://pollinator.org/guides.htm> has a series of excellent guides for

selecting pollinator-preferred plants specific to a location.

Hummingbirds are nectar feeders. They are drawn to tubular flowers such as penstemon and bee balm. (Bee balm does well in wet soil, so you will want to plant it in a shady spot where it can stay damp.) The NAPPC recommends planting scarlet monkey flower to attract hummingbirds.

Birds need food, shelter and protection from the elements in winter. Berry-producing trees, shrubs and vines are ideal. Birds will enjoy elderberry, Oregon grape, wild



gooseberry, Chinese pistache and holly leaf cherry. Insects provide the necessary protein to raise hatchlings. To attract insect eaters, plant Oregon grape, penstemon, ceanothus and California fuchsia.

Asters, sunflowers, salvias, cosmos and milkweed attract bees. They provide both nectar and pollen. Herbs such as lavender, thyme, basil and rosemary also have blossoms that attract bees.

Consider adding a water feature for butterflies and birds. Place a small rock or other perching object in the water for birds and butterflies to use while they bathe or drink. If you wish to provide water year round, place a submersible heater in the birdbath to prevent the water from freezing in winter.

Attracting pollinators will provide the blueprint from which you can design your garden. If you still feel intimidated, simply look for native plants that are blue, violet, white and yellow. Additional recommendations by NAPPC include blue-purple western aster, red columbine, California poppy and California goldenrod for blues, reds, yellows and oranges. Showy milkweed and wild buckwheat have lovely white perennial flowers that both attract and act as host plants for birds, bees and butterflies.



When planting to attract pollinators, your garden will not only look beautiful, but will be of service to wildlife and insects that live in the Mother Lode.

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