



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Save the Pollinators - Inspiration in the Age of the Pandemic (August 7, 2021)

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Our globe is facing alarming issues surrounding the depletion of pollinator populations, and we gardeners need to direct our attention to this crisis. While the major focus is on the dwindling bee population, other pollinators play a significant role, too, and also need attention and protection: butterflies, moths, birds (especially hummingbirds), beetles and bats. The threat to all of these pollinator populations is reaching crisis status, and immediate problem-solving is critical.

Gardeners are generally optimistic, and so it seems that we as a group can take some of this pandemic year's renewed social resolve and commitment to focus on the pollinator crisis. Similar to the COVID-19 pandemic, in this crisis we all have critical roles to play; we gardeners must, for sure, be leaders.

Since home gardening has bloomed during the pandemic, with so many people turning to soil and seeds in the garden looking for a therapeutic way to pass the time, there are many new gardeners among us. So new gardeners, in addition to the joys of gardening ahead, you can also be a part of bringing awareness and education to this environmental crisis.

Certainly, Albert Einstein's words still are true today and serve as a stark reminder of the seriousness of this pollinator disappearance phenomenon:

"If the bee disappeared off the surface globe, then man would have only four years of life left. No more bees, no more pollination, no more plants, no more animals, no more man. "

Modern science has supported and expanded the startling implications of Einstein's words. But Wait!! ...We can all take inspiration and avoid defeatism by learning from the many conservancy organizations that have taken on pollinator protection. Take a few minutes to Google a sampling of excellent current information which is applicable to our area. A quick online search brings you to these easily accessible websites:

- Pollinator Partnership (www.pollinator.org);
- Help Honey Bees (www.planetbee.org);
- California Native Plants (www.cnps.org),
- Xerces Society (xerces.org).

Of these organizations, my favorite source of information is the Xerces Society. (pronounced "zur seez.") The Xerces motto keeps it simple, with their campaign focusing on 4 simple principles.

- 1) ***Growing pollinator-friendly flowers***
- 2) ***providing nest sites***
- 3) ***avoiding pesticides,***
- 4) ***spreading the word.***



The Xerces hope is that real progress will be achieved if each of us does our best to follow these four principles.

First, to determine what to plant to benefit pollinators and beneficial insects here in the Central California Valley Region, the Xerces Society website offers an excellent chart of around 55 desirable native species. The

majority of plants recommended are native, drought-tolerant, easy to establish and don't serve as hosts to crop pests or diseases. Some common favorites from the list are: sunflower, poppy, milkweed, yarrow, redbud and ceanothus.

To support their second principle, the Xerces Society offers information about how to provide nest sites (nest blocks, bundles, boxes, etc.) for native bees. There are 4000 species of native bees in North America; native bees are the most important group of pollinators. Like all wildlife, native bees are negatively impacted by landscape changes, especially the loss of nesting sites.

This loss can be remedied by some simple man-made steps. The solution can be as easy as providing bare ground in open sunny places. Most native bees (about 70%) nest in the ground and need soil surface to build their nests as well as a fresh water source nearby.

The third Xerces principle suggests that even those addicted to using too many gardening chemicals can take an impactful step and cut back on their use and seek out environmentally safe solutions to deter garden pests. Remember that 90% of insects do no harm. If you choose to continue using chemicals, **know how to use them**. Their use can not only be harmful but also wasteful and costly.

The fourth Xerces principle calls on all of us to spread the word! Our experience with the pandemic has taught us that education is the essential component to solving crisis. We know that pollinator protection is a global crisis. It is important to remember that over 85% of the world's flowering plants as well as more than two-thirds of the world's crops species rely on pollinators. For human consumers, 3 of every 5 bites depends on pollination.

The path forward seems clear and is promising if each of us contributes. During the pandemic, we have shown that we know how to pull together when there is a crisis. Now is the time to use your gardener's grit, and tell everyone who will listen what we can do to bring back our extinction-threatened pollinators.

Get your garden questions answered by a Master Gardener!

By phone (leave a message, we'll call you back!):

Tulare County (559) 684-3325

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