

Save The Bees, Save Yourself

Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, March 22, 2018

Q: I heard about the million pollinator garden challenge and I want to join this effort and create a garden that will help bees. Can you give me some advice on how to get started?

A: Creating a space for bees can be a simple project or more complicated one, depending on how involved you would like to get.

For readers who do not know, the million pollinator garden challenges is a campaign to register a million public and private gardens and landscapes to support pollinators to get more people creating spaces that will encourage and nurture pollinators.



(Photo: Jack Work/Contributed)

When most people think of pollinators, they think of bees — more specifically the European honey bee. This is most likely because the bee is the pollinator superstar when it comes to pollinating the most plants. The U.C. Berkeley Urban Bee lab says that “most of our temperate vegetable, fruit, and nut crops, along with most of our wildland flowers, depend on the pollinating services of bees.”

There are many other important pollinators besides bees, such as moths, ants, beetles, butterflies, birds, wasps and bats. The United States Department of Agriculture states that pollination “is an essential ecological survival function. Without pollinators, the human race and all of Earth’s terrestrial ecosystems would not survive. Of the 1,400 crop plants grown around the world, i.e., those that produce all of our food and plant-based industrial products, almost 80 percent require pollination by animals.” For these reasons it is very important to create habitat for pollinators, especially since many native bee species are threatened and honey bees are struggling with colony collapse disorder.

For a garden to be friendly to any type of pollinator it must provide food, shelter and a water source. For native bees, leaving some ground un-mulched and leaving one or two dead limbs in the yard will provide nesting sites. For both honey bees and native bees, providing a very shallow pan of water with stones placed in it or a fountain where water just seeps out of a rock make for good water sources. The USDA recommends also creating a damp salt lick for bees in the yard. This is where you create a damp spot in the yard and mix a bit of table salt or wood ash into the wet soil.

Other practices friendly to bees include eliminating pesticide use whenever possible and planting a variety of blooming plants so that there is always something in bloom in your yard. When choosing blooming plants, avoid the double blooming hybrid flowers as plant breeders may have eliminated much of the pollen in favor of other flower features.

The U.C. Berkeley Urban Bee Lab has found "bees have definite preferences for plants and that certain bee groups can be expected to forage for pollen and nectar on certain plants, and at certain frequencies, regardless of whether the plants are native or exotic to California." The lab has created a list of plants for

California preferred by bees. The plant list can be downloaded here: <http://www.helpabee.org/best-bee-plants-for-california.html>

If you want to be more involved in creating a bee friendly yard, consider starting a bee hive or two. You can now have up to three hives of bees in in your backyard if you live in the Redding. See the City of Redding Bee Keeping 101 in the following link for more details.

<https://www.cityofredding.org/home/showdocument?id=10869>

To learn more about beekeeping, come to the Spring Garden Workshop this Saturday, March 24, at the Shasta College Farm from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. One of the classes offered will be by Master Gardner Phil Baker on beekeeping. For more information about the workshop, call the Master Gardener office at 530-242-2210 or email mastergardener@ShastaCollege.edu

The Shasta Master Gardeners Program can be reached by phone at 242-2219 or email mastergardener@shastacollege.edu. The gardener office is staffed by volunteers trained by the University of California to answer gardeners' questions using information based on scientific research.