



5 Tips for Creating a Perfect Pollinator Garden

Many people are learning about the [plight](#) of America's bees and feeling inspired to create bee-friendly habitats in their own backyard. But while the idea of a pollinator garden is wonderful, it can be challenging to know where to start. Attracting pollinators to your home is about more than planting beautiful flowers, it requires a careful balance of diverse plant life and natural features. If you're planning a pollinator garden this year, the five tips below are a great place to start (additional tips for the novice gardener are [here](#)).

1. Think Native

Honeybees are [extremely important](#) in the United States. They pollinate crops to increase yields and biodiversity and contribute billions to the agriculture industry every year through pollination, honey, and other bee byproducts. But many people don't realize that honeybees aren't native to North America. The honeybee was imported to the United States by European settlers in the 1600s, and while it's an important pollinator today, it's not the only one.

There are approximately 4,000 native [bee species](#) in the United States alone, many of which are more efficient pollinators than the imported honey bee. They're also a lot easier to attract and care for in a pollinator garden. While honey bees build hives, most native bee species are solitary and make their homes in natural features like soil and trees.

2. Incorporate Varied Shapes, Colors, and Sizes

When you're planting your pollinator garden, skip the pansies and peonies and opt for native flowering plants instead. Not only are native plants easier to establish, but they also are up to four times [more attractive](#) to native pollinators than imported or hybridized plants.

When you're selecting your plants, aim for the widest variety you can while sticking to native varieties. Different colors, sizes, and shapes of flowers will attract different kinds of pollinators and bring biodiversity to your garden. Think beyond wildflowers and incorporate flowering trees, vines, and shrubs. Avoid [double-flowered varieties](#), as these flowers tend to hold less nectar and their structure makes it difficult for bees to access what is available.

3. Provide Food in Every Season

Design your pollinator garden to have flowers in as many seasons as possible. Having food sources available throughout the year will attract the widest variety of pollinator species and ensure your resident pollinators have food year-round. Most bee species hibernate or die off during the winter months, so don't worry if your climate can't support winter blooms.

4. Create Natural Sources of Shelter

While some pollinator enthusiasts decide to become backyard beekeepers, building a hive isn't necessary for creating a pollinator habitat in your backyard. Many native bee species nest in the ground, in trees, or in other plants, rather than making hives. This means it's easy to create pollinator shelters in your garden.

For ground-nesting species, nothing more than a patch of bare ground is needed. For cavity-nesting species like the mason bee, a little bare ground and a few dead branches is home sweet home. That said, you can still opt for man made [bee houses](#) if you don't have the space for natural shelter or prefer a more manicured appearance.

5. Let Nature Take its Course

As tempting as it may be to keep your pollinator garden cosmetically perfect with insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides, many of these chemicals — even certified organic ones — are toxic to bees. Instead of turning to chemical intervention, use holistic management practices like crop rotation, integrated pest management, and manual controls like hand-picking and physical barriers to control invasive weeds and pests. While your garden may look less picture-perfect, it will be the ideal home for the important species you hope to attract.

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