



A GUIDE TO CREATING POLLINATOR GARDENS

Create wildlife habitat with native plants
for the benefit of all!





UNDERSTANDING THE BASICS

Who are the pollinators?

Birds, bats, butterflies, moths, flies, beetles, wasps, small mammals, and most importantly, bees are pollinators. They visit flowers to drink nectar or feed off of pollen and transport pollen grains as they move from spot to spot.

Pollination is the process of moving particles of pollen from one flower to another flower of the same species. This action allows the pollinated flower to produce fertile seeds, thus passing on its genes for future generations. Pollination can occur by wind, water, and even within the same plant. However, most flowering plants need the help of a pollinator like a bee or butterfly.



What is pollinator habitat?

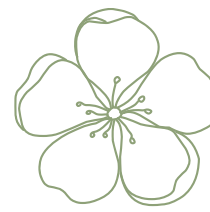
Habitat in general, is the combination of resources (food, water, shelter and space) that allow an organism to survive. So, pollinator habitat is an area that provides the resources that pollinators need to survive. Most often these resources include pollen or nectar, but water and nest sites can be just as important (and limited) to pollinators.

Why is it important?

Pollinators are keystone species within our ecosystem, meaning that other species depend on them for the roles they perform. The act of pollinating a flower allows it to produce fruit that will be eaten by a diversity of wildlife, from songbirds to grizzly bears. Additionally, pollination increases genetic diversity. The more diverse a plant's genes, the more likely they are to survive and reproduce under stressful conditions (e.g., drought or disease).

Why does it matter *right now*?

Habitat loss and improper or overuse of pesticides have caused populations of pollinators to decline. This puts our wildlife and the future of human food systems in danger. These small but mighty animals are integral to ecosystem functioning and they need our support!

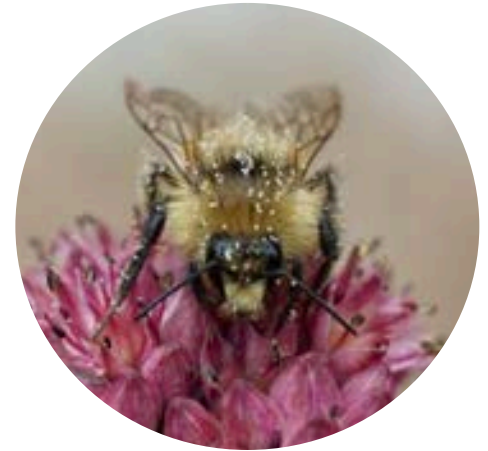


MONTANA BEES

Bees are special!

While not all pollinators are bees, bees are especially important to pollination because they only visit flowers to collect pollen whereas other pollinators like wasps or hummingbirds visit flowers to feed on nectar or the flower itself. This feeding ends up transferring pollen, but these pollinators do not intentionally collect pollen like bees do.

In Montana alone, researchers estimate there are 500-750 native species of bees, of which 28 species are bumblebees. These native pollinators rely on the native flowers that they have adapted to over thousands of years. Many native flowers have specific structures, colors, or smells that attract specialist bee species. A specialist bee will only visit one or a few genera even if other genera are growing nearby. So, a variety of species growing in your pollinator garden ensures support for a diversity of pollinators.



Most native bees are solitary.

Females make a nest, resting there between foraging trips and sheltering there overnight. Male bees don't have it easy. They shelter at night wherever they can find cover, often right in the flowers that provide them with food. Early mornings are the best time to find them in or under flowers, until the warmth of the sun coaxes them out.

To create a more 'bee friendly' landscape, incorporate a diversity of native plants into gardens. To maximize food resources for native bees, plant native flowers of various colors, shapes, textures, and sizes that bloom throughout the growing season.

Early season (spring) and late season (fall) blooms are amongst the most vital since there are fewer resources available for bees and other pollinators during these times of year.





PLANTS FOR POLLINATORS

Pay particular attention to bloom time.

In addition to planting a site-appropriate assortment of species, choosing plants that bloom at varying times of the year ensures that you're supporting a variety of pollinators.

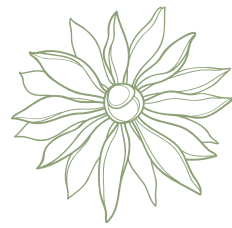
For example, sulphur buckwheat blooms from April-May, blanketflower blooms June-July, and fireweed blooms from July-September. Planting all three supports pollinators from April-September.



Plant community matters.

Planting three or more of a plant together increases foraging efficiency for pollinators. This also applies to planting natives of different species together. For bees, distance equates to the size of the bee. So our small sweat bees can't travel as far as our large bumblebees. The less distance a pollinator has to travel, the less energy they use up and the more flowers they can pollinate.





CARING FOR THE GARDEN

Nature is messy.

How you manage your pollinator garden is very important for providing optimal habitat for pollinators.

While a clean garden looks organized, a garden without branches, rotten logs, or fallen plant material leaves very little nesting space for bees. Consider intentionally, or even artfully, including bee habitat in your garden. Not all bees need decaying material for nesting. Some prefer sunny areas with bare soil, so be sure to include both types of habitat.

Don't be afraid to get creative and have fun with designing your space. Neighbors may be intrigued, leading to a conversation about why they should grow a pollinator-friendly garden too!

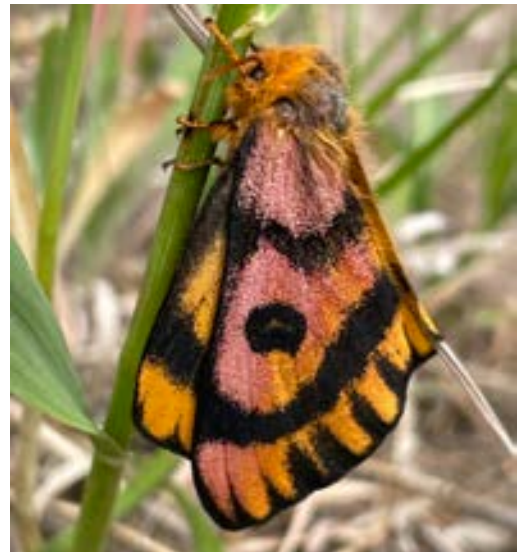
**We recommend following all firewise landscaping guidelines. Avoid accumulating wood debris near your home.*

Native plants provide the biodiversity pollinators need!

Native plants are

- adapted to the local climate
- require less water & maintenance
- store carbon
- provide critical wildlife habitat

Aiming for 70% of native plants in your landscape is the sweet spot to support wildlife and maintain a healthy ecosystem.





WILDFLOWER LESSONS

Sleep. Creep. Leap.

The saying goes: First year they sleep. Second year they creep. Third year they leap.



For Maximilian Sunflower, it took 4 years. Native plants put their energy first into roots, then into leaves, and then into flowers. It takes time to get established and then flourish!



Experiment.

Every piece of land has different soil, sun, aspect, elevation, and moisture. Study up and try something.

Observe.

Continue with what works, and try something new if it doesn't.

Be Patient.

Some species are irresistible, so efforts to keep herbivores away is essential. It took 4 years, but Echinacea is finally thriving!

Celebrate!

Every single plant in the landscape matters. Small additions matter. Big ones matter more. Celebrate being a part of building biodiversity.





GROW WILD'S WORK

Crail Gardens

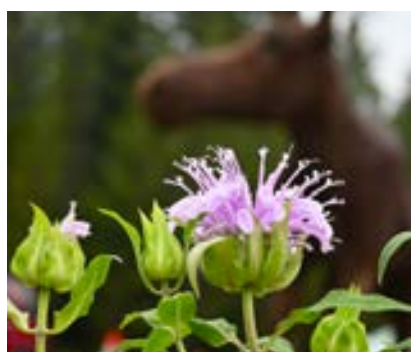
In 2019, Grow Wild built a demonstration garden at Crail Ranch using native plants that are wildlife friendly, water wise, and preserving of the historic landscape.

Open to visitors during daylight hours ~ 2100 Spotted Elk Road.



Moose Pair Pollinator Garden at Ousel Falls

In 2024, we partnered with Arts Council of Big Sky and other community organizations combining art, public pathways and native plants to create pollinator gardens that enrich our community and create wildlife habitat. Visit the garden at Ousel Falls trailhead!





JOIN US IN BUILDING BIODIVERSITY IN THE BIG SKY!

Build your own pollinator garden!

Visit our many resources on our Crail Garden & Wildscapes pages at growwildmt.org.

Crail Garden Benefactors



Moose Pair Pollinator Garden Partners



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growwildmt.org