



Bumblebee photo courtesy Flickr/Smudge 9000

Native Pollinators: Frequently Asked Questions

What is a native pollinator?

A native species naturally occurs in a given region without having been introduced, accidentally or intentionally, by humans. Thus, a native species is known to have naturally migrated to a region without any human influence, or historically occurred in the area. A pollinator is an animal, often a flying insect, which carries pollen grains from one flower to another flower for fertilization. Honeybees, the most popular pollinator in North America, around which modern industrial agriculture is centered, are not native. But many bumblebees, butterflies, moths, flies, birds and bats are important native pollinators. Click [here](#) to learn more.

What are the greatest threats to native pollinators?

The use of toxic pesticides, immense monocropping of the same plants without plant variety, suburban sprawl or industrial development, recreational land use like off-road-vehicle use, and misinformed home gardening practices all commonly put native pollinators at increased risk. These threats combine to increase the damage any one threat might do on its own. To top it all off, these problems are worsened by climate change, which has been shown to change the natural cycle of pollinator emergence and wildflower blooming.

What are the best things I can do to help protect pollinators?

- Buy as much local, organic food from small, family farms as possible.
- Plant a diverse assemblage of native flowering plants in a garden that is free of chemicals.
- Check out the Center's [Native Pollinators Gardening Guide](#) and [Native Pollinators campaign](#).
- Write letters and make calls to regional, state and national decision makers, encouraging them support stronger regulations on chemicals and pesticides such as neonicotinoids that are major threats to pollinators.

What's the importance of pollinator diversity?

Most of the world's 250,000-plus species of flowering plants require pollinators to transfer pollen between plants. The diversity of flower shapes and sizes, as well as the seasonal timing of flowering requires that a diverse assemblage of animal visitors be on hand in search of pollen or nectar or a colorful place to mate. Some plants make more sugar-rich nectar in higher volumes, which are required for hummingbirds, whose metabolic rate requires more food than insects. Other plants only open their flowers at night and require pollination by moths, bats or other nocturnal species.

How do native bees compare to honey bees at the job of pollination?

The main advantage of honeybees, in addition to their making honey, of course, is that they are easily transported in large numbers to where they are needed. However, in some common cases, as with apples, cherries, squash, watermelon, blueberries, cranberries and tomatoes, native bees are far more effective pollinators than honey bees on a per bee basis. Native bees will visit flowers in wetter and colder conditions than honeybees will. As a result, many native species forage for longer periods of time — earlier and later in the day. Many smaller native bees also have shorter foraging distances, which will make a healthy nearby population more "faithful" to your gardens' crops. Finally, the effectiveness of honeybees as pollinators has been shown to increase significantly when they're in the presence of native bees by causing them to move between plants more frequently.

