

Pollinators - Essential to Farm and Garden

We usually think of honeybees as pollinators, but other bees and insects are just as important for pollination. Butterflies, hummingbirds, beetles and mosquitoes can pollinate plants. Even ants and moths pollinate some specific plants.

A pollinator transfers pollen from one flower to another, leading to the growth of fruits and seeds. Some plants are self-pollinating, and some plants can grow fruit without pollination, but the vast majority of the vegetables and fruits that we eat, as well as most wild plants, depend on pollinators.

Plants are wily about attracting pollinators with nectar, bright colors, fragrance and patterns in flowers, some of which are invisible to us. The pollinator is looking for its energy drink or pollen snack, but the plant is fighting for life. Pollination for many plants equals the survival of the species.

There is much concern about the future of pollinators. Honeybees have died due to a combination of factors called "colony decline," and native pollinators disappear as natural areas are cleared.

From the blueberries we grow in New Jersey, to the almonds they grow in California, our food supply and farmers' ability to continue to farm depend on pollinators. There are things you can do to fight the trend of declining pollinators.

Tolerate bees in your vicinity. Most native bees are nonaggressive and do not sting. They are doing something very useful for all of us.

Grow native and other plants that are known to provide nectar and pollen from early spring to late fall. Lists of such plants are readily available.

Be thoughtful in how you use pesticides. Some pesticides are deadly to bees and should not be sprayed when a flowering plant is attracting bees. Be aware that some systemic insecticides may poison pollinators long after you spray them. Always read and follow labels.

Learn more about encouraging pollinators such as mason bees and leaf-cutter bees. You can provide housing and a suitable habitat for bees.

For further information about pollination, visit <http://xerces.org> and <http://ento.psu.edu/publications/gardeningforpollinators>

Checklist for May

Flower and Vegetable Garden

- ✓ Use Mother's Day as a rule of thumb for planting summer-blooming annuals and tender vegetables. Cover tender plants if frost is expected. Please see Fact Sheet "**Spring, Summer, and Fall Bulbs**" <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/ho/ho80/ho80.htm>
- ✓ Be aware that the last frost date in Ocean County will vary from May 15 – 30, depending on your location.
- ✓ Plant dahlias, gladiolas, lilies, cannas and other summer flowering bulbs this month.
- ✓ Work to eliminate weeds before they go to seed. Otherwise, you will be fighting them for years to come! See Rutgers Fact Sheet #385 "**Broadleaf Weed Control in Cool Season Turf**" <https://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/fs385/>

Trees and Shrubs

- ✓ Remove spent rhododendron and azalea blossoms and apply a fertilizer for acid-loving plants, if needed.

Lawn

- ✓ Eliminate lawn weeds. Pull by hand or spot-treat with herbicide.

Ticks

- ✓ Know that the risk of being bitten by an infected tick is greatest in May and June, when the nymph stage is active. See Rutgers Fact Sheet #443, "**Prevent Tick Bites**" <https://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=FS443>