

The Pollinator Friendly Yard: A Seasonal Guide

Pollinators include insects such as bees, wasps, butterflies, moths, beetles, flies, and vertebrates like birds and bats. In Iowa, the ruby-throated hummingbird is our only vertebrate pollinator. Pollinators contribute to healthy ecosystems, as they are responsible for helping nearly 90% of the world's flowering plants reproduce. Pollinators provide pollination services for wild plants and many of our crop species that benefit us humans, as well as other wildlife species. Many of the fruits, vegetables, minerals, vitamins, and even the coffee we drink are thanks to a pollinator. Pollination is important for maintaining genetic diversity in plants and ensuring adequate fruit and seed production for crops, wildflowers, shrubs, and trees.

Unfortunately, pollinators are at risk. Twenty-eight percent of North American bumble bees are at risk of extinction. Five out of the fourteen bumble bee species found in Iowa are at-risk species. Nearly a quarter of Iowa's butterflies are also at risk. Below is a guide to help you figure out what you can do to help these important organisms.

See if you can find anything below to add to what you're already doing for pollinators.	
<p>Summer</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow grass to grow taller than 3 inches. Set lawnmower to 3 inches or taller. • Avoid fertilizers and pesticides (herbicides, fungicides, and especially insecticides. This is a giant step in helping protect pollinators). Good Neighbor Iowa has good suggestions for maintaining a healthy lawn without these. • Put native plants in pots on your deck (or apartment balcony).
<p>Fall</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If space is available (more than 1/10th of an acre), sow native seeds after the ground freezes in late fall. Follow up with establishment maintenance the next growing season with mowing. • Allow some space for messiness in out-of-the-way places in your yard: leave the leaves and do not cut back grasses or wildflowers until spring to provide overwintering sites for pollinators.
<p>Winter</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winter is a great time to plan for the coming year. There is plenty of reading material to choose from. • Native plugs are in high demand. If using plugs, be sure to order early!
<p>Spring</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wait to mow and rake until there have been 5 days with temperature above 50 degrees. • Welcome white clover and violets in your lawn. • Leave some bare soil for ground nesting bees. • Trim vegetation to 18-24" high; leave the dead vegetation on the ground to decompose. • Install some native species plants in your yard. Spring is a good time for planting native plugs. Try to choose a variety to ensure blooms in each season. Maintain with hand weeding. • Put up a sign, homemade or purchased, to let your neighbors know your yard is pollinator friendly. • Register your pollinator garden with Blank Park Zoo's <i>Plant. Grow. Fly.</i> initiative.

A Few Resources

BOOKS

- *Bees: An Identification and Native Plant Forage Guide*, Heather Holm
- *Bringing Nature Home*, Douglas W. Tallamy
- *Pollinators of Native Plants: Attract, Observe and Identify Pollinators and Beneficial Insects with Native Plants*, Heather Holm

WEBSITES



Good Neighbor Iowa:

<https://goodneighborowa.org/healthy-lawns/>



Prairie Moon Nursery:

<https://www.prairiemoon.com/>



Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation:

www.xerces.org



Plant. Grow. Fly.:

<https://www.blankparkzoo.com/conservation/plantgrowfly/>

More Xerces Society Websites

- Nesting and Overwintering Habitat: <https://xerces.org/publications/fact-sheets/nesting-overwinteringhabitat#:~:text=The%20availability%20of%20nesting%20and,support%20pollinators%20and%20other%20wildlife.>
- Pollinator Plant List for the Midwest: <https://xerces.org/publications/plant-lists/pollinator-plants-midwest-region>
- Monarch Nectar Plant List for the Midwest: <https://xerces.org/publications/plant-lists/monarch-nectar-plants-midwest>

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