



POLLINATORS

Wildlife Benefits of Native Grasses and Forbs

What comes to mind when you think of pollinators? Do you think of bumblebees probing Shasta daisies, a butterfly flitting about from flower to flower, or a hummingbird sipping nectar from a trumpet creeper? These are certainly all things that pollinators do. When pollinators go from flower to flower in search of their reward, in the form of nectar, they are unknowingly benefiting the plant. These pollinators are the reproductive mechanism for plants. By spreading pollen from flower to flower they pollinate, or fertilize, the plant, ensuring future generations of those plants.

Not only do pollinators provide ecological benefits by fertilizing plants, but they also provide economic benefits as well. Much of the food and beverages that we consume would not exist without pollinators. In the U.S. alone, more than 100 crop plants require pollinators. A few of these crop plants include okra, mustard, apples, blueberries, pumpkins, vanilla, and many other fruits and vegetables. The economic value of insect pollinated crops in the U.S. in 2000 was estimated to be \$20 billion.

The main threats facing pollinators are habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation. As native vegetation is replaced by roadways, manicured lawns, crops, and non-native gardens, pollinators lose the food and nesting sites that are necessary for their survival. The best way to conserve and support healthy populations of pollinators is to promote a rich, diverse native plant community. Areas for pollinators should incorporate a variety of flowers in order to provide blooms throughout the growing season. A mix of species such as goat's rue, butterfly milkweed, blackeyed-Susan, compass plant, fragrant goldenrod, Illinois bundleflower, partridge pea, ironweed, slender mountain mint, and switchgrass will provide a succession of blooms throughout the year.

Native plants are usually the best choice to attract native pollinators because they evolved together and are well-adapted to local growing conditions, soils, climate, and thrive with minimal attention. Periodic mowing or prescribed burning of native plants is necessary to remove dead vegetation and reduce woody plant encroachment. However, a wide range of insects, including butterflies, beetles, and bees either lay eggs on or overwinter inside plant stems, so the entire site should not be manipulated at the same time.

