Garden Pollinators

Naked, skinny, and homeless… This is where you would be without insects to pollinate the many plants we utilize for our everyday lives. Not only do insects provide supplemental pollination for commercial cotton, but also the United States Department of Agriculture estimates that approximately one third of a person's diet is derived from insect pollinated plants. Without pollinators, this world would be a very different place.

Pollination is the transfer of pollen from the male part of the plant (stamen) to the female part (pistil). A pollinator is the biotic agent that moves the pollen. Insects such as bees, wasps, butterflies and moths are the most common pollinators, but hummingbirds and even bats can be pollinators for some flowers.

Pollination is a limiting factor in all areas of horticulture. Quality, quantity, and overall yield can all be affected by the way a plant is pollinated. So what can we, as gardeners, do to encourage pollinators to visit our lawns and landscapes?

There are three main principles to creating pollinator environments. Proper plant selection, careful pesticide use and application, and the development of pollinator habitats and food stations will all help support pollinators in your gardens.

When selecting plants for pollinators, it is important to keep a few things in mind. Native plants, or plants that grow naturally in a region, are great to attract pollinators. These plants are well adapted to the climate and soil of the region, and therefore require less water than other varieties. Native plants have a long biological history with the native pollinators. This makes them a great start to any garden. Native plants also tend to be the plants that are known as ‘pollinator plants,’ or plants that encourage pollinator foraging.

Careful use and application of pesticides is extremely important when considering the pollinators. Even ‘Organic’ and natural pesticides can harm pollinators such as bees. Any pesticide that is toxic to bees should not be applied during blooming.

There are thousands of pollinators in the world ranging from the well-known honeybee to the not so loved bat. Encouraging pollinators in your backyard can be a fun and rewarding experience. For more information about native plants, pesticide use, or pollinator habitats, please contact me, Kerrie Roach, Extension Horticultural Agent at North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center, by phone at (910) 671-3276 or E-mail me at Kerrie_Roach@ncsu.edu, or visit our website at robeson.ces.ncsu.edu.