

Native Flowers to Attract Native Pollinators

Why Should We Grow Native Flowers?

Native flowers are specifically designed to attract pollinators! They are not hybridized to create double blooms, special colours, variegated leaves or particular scents. As a result, native flowers serve our pollinators well because they:

- are the right shape to make it easy for pollen to be gathered and transferred to appropriate destinations.
- display colours that have evolved to attract pollinators; (sorry but red doesn't make the cut!)

In addition, as gardeners we can help the native plant population in our area flourish by selecting, cultivating, and sharing native plants as alternatives to ornamentals.

Note: some native flowers such as Pearly Everlasting and California Aster are so happy in the vegetable garden that they should be planted in a container!

Six Native Flowers are Suited to Vegetable Gardens

These six flowers are recommended because they thrive in full sun, can be grown in a small area, are relatively long blooming and their flowers are a shape that facilitates pollen transfer and a colour that pollinators can identify from the air.

Woolly Sunflower



Yellow-eyed Grass



Nodding Onion



Sneezeweed



Pearly Everlasting



California Aster



Why Should We Attract Pollinators?

Many vegetable crops are “self-pollinating” (such as tomatoes, peppers and eggplants) which means the plant contains both male and female parts and therefore can pollinate itself. So why attract pollinating insects? To create our desired crop, pollen must move from the male part of the plant to the female part of the plant. Bumble bees are perfectly structured to make this happen; much better than gardeners walking through the garden patch and shaking the plants!

Some vegetables such as squash, cucumbers, and zucchini are not built like tomatoes; they need to be cross-pollinated and are dependent on insects. It takes at least 14 visits from a bee to ensure good pollination of a squash flower!

Pollinators such as syrphid flies also assist crops that have no need for cross pollination such as leafy greens, root crops, broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage because they help control aphids and play a role in keeping the nests of our native bees clean and healthy.

Two types of Native Pollinators likely to visit vegetable gardens:



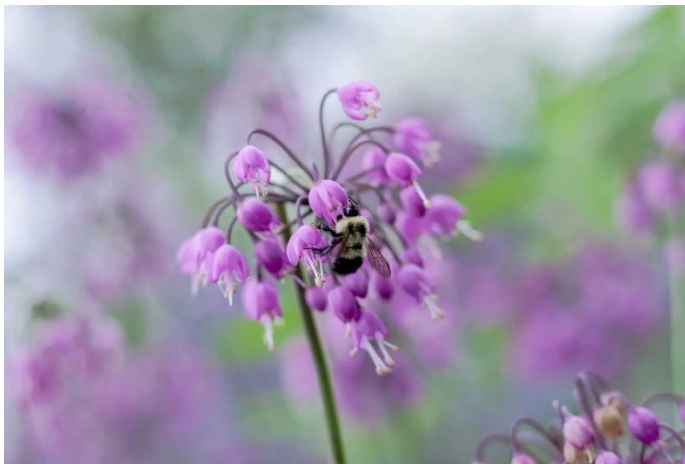
Syrphid Fly on Woolly Sunflower

Tiny “Flower Flies” are very abundant and have a huge role in pollinating our garden beds

Better than marigolds at controlling aphids

Help to maintain healthy bee colonies by acting as “janitors”

Love simple flowers; can’t pollinate double flowers



Native Bee on Nodding Onion

More efficient pollinators than honeybees: “buzz-pollination”

Active over a longer period, out in the rain

Love a variety of flower shapes and colours

Often live in the ground

What types of flowers work best:

- Flat flowers such as Woolly Sunflower for butterflies, bees and flower flies
- Multi headed such as Pearly Everlasting and Yarrow for flower flies
- Tubular flowers such as Nodding Onion for bees

Provide flowers for all seasons:

Spring: Woolly Sunflower; Yellow-eyed Grass

Summer: Woolly Sunflower, Nodding Onion, Yellow-eyed Grass, Pearly Everlasting, Yarrow, Sneezeweed

Fall: Asters (California or Douglas), Sneezeweed, Pearly Everlasting

How to Support Pollinators in your veggie garden:

- Pesticide free
- Provide a water source (shallow dish with water and rocks)
- Plant flowers in clumps of the same type rather than scattering them individually; one metre square is best but difficult in many small city gardens.
- Choose shades of blue, purple, yellow and white, which pollinators see best.
- Plant flowers in groups close to veggies and at the edge of the bed.
- Some bare ground: untilled, unmulched as many bees live in the ground and can't get through heavy mulch.
- Leaf pieces provide protection, mud is a source of water and nutrition for butterflies.
- Leave hollow stems and leaves for over wintering bees and flies.

References:

Attracting Native Pollinators: The Xerces Society Guide

Gardening With Native Plants of the Pacific Northwest: Kruckerberg and Chalker-Scott

For more information, contact **Ask A Master Gardener** at info@msvmga.org