



{GREEN INITIATIVES}

PLANTING FOR POLLINATORS

{BY ERIK RUNQUIST, CONSERVATION BIOLOGIST}

Minnesota native bees like this brilliant green sweat bee are critically important pollinators of our flowering plants and crops.



They light up our gardens, provide reproduction for 75 percent of the world's flowering plants, and make possible one third of our food. Pollinators like bees and bumblebees, butterflies and moths, and some flies, beetles, birds, and bats are critically valuable for their aesthetic, ecological and economic contributions. Without them, we lose chocolate, apples, almonds, melons, pumpkins, squashes, strawberries, blueberries, kiwi, vanilla, peaches, pears, plums, and many other crops, as well as \$30–40 billion annually to the U.S. economy in lost pollination services. Unfortunately, many pollinators and other beneficial insects are in steep decline, suffering from habitat loss, pesticides, and diseases. You can help by planting a beautiful, low-maintenance pollinator-friendly native garden. And, be sure to check out the Zoo's East parking lot this summer where you will find our own pollinator-friendly gardens in full bloom.

- Plant a variety of flower colors and shapes. Different flower types attract different types of pollinators.
- Provide flowers in all seasons. Different pollinators need pollen and nectar in different seasons, from spring through fall.
- Eliminate or avoid pesticides. Some pesticides become incorporated into plants and can kill pollinators months after being applied.
- Plant natives. Native plants are adapted to your local climate (requiring minimal care!) and provide specialized resources for native pollinators. Some non-native plants are invasive.
- Plant "host plants" for butterflies and moths. Caterpillars of most butterflies and moths can only eat certain plants (example: monarchs only eat milkweeds), and these plants (including native grasses) can be different than those used by adults. Leaf damage from caterpillars is a good sign that you are providing a necessary resource for their reproduction! Butterfly and moth field guides include host plant information.
- Provide nesting habitat for bees. Stumps, shrubs, and bare ground are used by different native bees to roost and rear their young. Minnesota may have 350–400 species of native bees!
- Plant in clumps. Single plants provide little benefit.
- Think 3-D. Flowering shrubs and trees (in the right habitat) provide an extra dimension to a pollinator-friendly landscape.
- Support habitat protections like the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan. Minnesota's tallgrass prairie is North America's most endangered ecosystem with only one percent of the original 18 million acres remaining, and many of its pollinators are imperiled.

Check with your native plant nursery, the Minnesota DNR, or the Pollinator Partnership guides on what best suits your location, but some great Minnesota natives include: asters, black-eyed susan, blazing stars, Culver's root, giant hyssop, goldenrods, leadplant, milkweeds, Penstemon, Phlox, purple coneflower, snakeroot, sunflowers, vervain, and wild bergamot.