

How to Invite More Birds and Pollinators to Your Yard This Year

Since we are spending more time at home these days it is the perfect time to think about how we can bring more birds and pollinators, such as hummingbirds, bees, and butterflies, to our yards this year not only for our enjoyment, but also to help perpetuate and preserve these wonderful species and the plants they pollinate. By planting flowers, plants, and trees in our yards that are native to our area, we will attract these pollinators and help support the ecosystem which these species rely on. Bringing nature to our yards also creates a serene, relaxing environment that we all crave and can benefit from in the midst of the events that are happening in our world. We can look to nature around us to bring us peace and comfort, so let us look at some ways we can invite nature into our yards this year.

How can I attract more hummingbirds to my yard?

Hummingbirds migrate to our area each year by early May, coinciding with the timeframe that native plants begin flowering in our region. Hummingbirds are pollinators that are attracted to brightly colored, tubular flowers. As with other pollinators, when they move from one plant to another, pollen attaches to their beaks and feathers and in turn pollinates the plants and flowers from which they feed. Examples of native plants that attract hummingbirds include:

- Blazing Star
- Cardinal flower
- Columbine
- Trumpet honeysuckle
- Virginia bluebells

You can also attract hummingbirds to your yard by hanging a hummingbird feeder in early May. This can be done by simply hanging a feeder from a tall shepherd hook that is high enough to protect the birds from predators, such as cats. Hanging the feeder in front of a window of your home will allow you to observe these fascinating, beautiful birds each time they feed. The feeder should be filled with a sugar water solution which can be made by mixing one part white sugar to

four parts water that is brought to a boil to dissolve the sugar. It is important to avoid other sweeteners, such as honey, and to also avoid adding food coloring. Be sure to clean the feeder regularly to avoid fungus and mold.

How can I attract more bees to my yard?

Bees are very important pollinators that support pollination of flowers and plants, including vegetation that we rely on for food. As with other pollinators, bees have been threatened by use of pesticides, and they have also been threatened by parasites and viruses. We can help bees thrive by providing them with plantings in our yard that nourish them. Examples of native plants that attract bees include:

- Azure aster
- Downy sunflower
- Lead plant
- Showy goldenrod
- Wild bergamot

Bees are also attracted to native trees and shrubs, such as dogwood, smooth sumac, and black willow. Other ways to attract and help bees thrive include providing a water source, limiting use of pesticides, and leaving undisturbed areas in your yard for nesting.

How can I attract more butterflies to my yard?

These beautiful and graceful creatures are mesmerizing to watch, and they silently help in pollinating the plants and flowers on which they feed. Monarchs in particular have been threatened by the decline of milkweed plants due to urbanization and other factors. Milkweed is critical in the life cycle of monarchs as they lay their eggs on certain types of milkweed, and the milkweed leaves serve as a source of nourishment in the caterpillar (larva) stage. Other species of butterflies are attracted to the flowers of the milkweed as well as many other flowers. Examples of native plants that attract butterflies include:

- Black-eyed Susan
- Butterfly weed
- Butterfly milkweed



- Common milkweed
- Green milkweed
- Prairie blazing star
- Purple cone flower

Other ways to attract butterflies and help them thrive include reducing use of pesticides, providing areas for them to rest and bask in the sun to warm their wings, such as placing flat stones in a garden, and also giving them an area for “puddling” which allows butterflies to obtain moisture and nutrients. This can easily be done by placing some water and coarse sand in a shallow pan and then placing the pan in soil.

To learn more about pollinators and native plants you can visit the following websites:

www.dnr.illinois.gov (Also check information on this site regarding Mason State Nursery)

www.naturalcommunities.net

www.nwf.org

www.pollinator.org

www.thehoneybeeconservancy.org

www.restorationnurseries.com

www.prairiemoonnursery.com

Local nurseries and garden centers that carry native plants:

During COVID-19 restrictions check with each location for service availability and hours.

Landscape Connection, 4472 S. Mulford Rd., Rockford

Rock Valley Garden Center, N. Bell School Rd., Rockford

Open for curbside service.

Gensler Gardens, 102 Orth Rd., Loves Park

Open for curbside service. Verify if native or native hybrid.

Village Green, 6101 E. Riverside Blvd., Loves Park; 2640 N. Main St., Rockford

