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## Bringing Back Beneficial Pollinators

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The significant decline in bee populations of the past few years continues to defy attempts at explanation. Interestingly, the decline coincides with changes in land use, which has led to increased pesticide application on agricultural lands and at the same time has reduced food and nesting resources for bees to isolated patches within the landscape. To help counteract these habitat changes, researchers encourage people to provide habitats free of pesticides and rich in nectar, pollen, and nesting resources wherever possible.

The necessity of insect pollinators is clear—without them pollination of the crop plants from which we get our vegetables, fruits, seeds and nuts would not be possible. Insect pollinators like honey bees are heavily reliant upon flowering plants for their survival. For pollinators, blooms produce food for both themselves (in the form of nectar) and for their offspring (in the form of pollen).

To insure enough pollinators are present to pollinate crops, farmers are often advised to plant non-native annuals such as dill, coriander and sweet alyssum. However, research indicates that native plants can attract just as many (if not more) pollinators. In addition, native plants have the advantage of being perennials that grow and increase in floral area over several years without needing to be reseeded. Finally, native plants are much less likely to become invasive than non-native annuals. And once established, native plants require no supplemental watering or fertilizer application.

To provide a pollen and nectar source all summer long, select native plants with overlapping bloom periods, and plants such as the cup plant (*Silphium perfoliatum*) and blue lobelia (*Lobelia siphilitica*) that are highly attractive to beneficial insects.

By planting pollinator-friendly native plants in home gardens and along agricultural fields, a natural pollinator corridor can be created that allows local bee populations to thrive and flourish.

For more information on this topic:

Michigan State University's *Enhancing Beneficial Insects with Native Plants* webpage at <http://nativeplants.msu.edu/>

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: National Pollinator Week June 20-26, 2011  
<http://www.fws.gov/pollinators/>

U.S. Forest Service: Our Future Fly on the Wings of Pollinators  
<http://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/pollinators/index.shtml>

National Biological Information Infrastructure – a world of information  
[http://www.nbio.gov/portal/server.pt?open=512&objID=222&mode=2&in\\_hi\\_userid=2&cached=true](http://www.nbio.gov/portal/server.pt?open=512&objID=222&mode=2&in_hi_userid=2&cached=true)

Wikipedia: Pollinator decline  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pollinator\\_decline](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pollinator_decline)

