



Southern Exposure Seed Exchange

Gardener's Quick Guide to Welcoming Pollinators and Other Beneficial Insects

Beneficial insects help in the garden in three major ways: as pollinators, as food for other beneficial insects, and by eating insect pests. Each of us can make choices in what we plant that impact the diversity of life in our yards, our towns, and our world. Here are three ways for vegetable gardeners to put out the welcome mat for beneficial insects:

- **Avoid using pesticides**, even organic ones. If you do use any pesticide, limit its use to the time and place where the pest is a problem.
- **Provide food**, including flowers that bloom in at many different times of year and that are accessible to a broad range of insects. Pollinators need blooms all season.
- **Provide habitat**. Let a variety of native plants grow, including trees, shrubs, grasses, low-growing perennial flowers, and annual flowers. Leave some leaf litter on the ground over the winter.

We're all familiar with the role of bees as pollinators. But most gardeners aren't aware that many predatory insects in the Southeast, including hundreds of kinds of hoverflies and parasitic wasps, serve a second role as pollinators during part of their lifecycle.

To support a healthy, diverse ecosystem of insects, it's important to have a wide range of well-chosen plants. Your pollinator mix contains **hardy annuals** (including bachelor button, alyssum, calendula); **summer annuals** (including zinnias, cosmos, cleome, sunflower); and **perennials** (including black-eyed susan, echinacea, bee balm, butterfly weed, garlic chives). These plants have been **selected to give you and your insect friends:**

- A long season of varied blossoms, both quickly this season and, with good culture, on into future years
- Successive waves of flowers
- Different heights and flower types, to support a diversity of insects

(continued on reverse)

- Lots of old-fashioned single-blossom flowers that pollinators can access more easily than modern double-blossom flowers
- Many “user-friendly” small flowers in clusters, also for easy access to pollen and nectar. (Some pollinators, including butterflies and moths, have long tongues for reaching deep into flowers, but other pollinators need a lot of small flowers with exposed nectaries.)
- Several kinds of plants native to the Eastern US, (also suitable for other climates) including echinacea, bergamot (bee balm), and butterfly weed. These help support a broader range of native pollinators.

These pollinator plants can be sown directly, or started in flats for later transplanting. You can fit them into spaces you might otherwise consider too small, too rocky, or otherwise undesirable for your main vegetable plantings. Your pollinator plantings can work at any scale, from a small strip of plants in a city garden to a vast hedgerow between rural properties. Sow each variety separately following packet directions, or visit our website – www.southernexposure.com – for more detailed planting directions.

For greatest benefit:

- Keep some seed of each type of flower for later planting, in case bad weather or other conditions cause trouble for you initial planting.
- Plant each type of flower in clumps or swaths to create areas for resting and nesting, and so they’re easier for pollinators to find.
- Spread your insectary plants out. Put plants for beneficial insects in various different parts of your garden or property. This helps ensure that your vegetables also get pollinated, and it reduces the chance of spread of diseases that can affect beneficial insects.
- Early spring can be a hard time for insects that feed on flowers, and for early-emerging predators like tiny pirate bugs. For many, early spring is the time of year when food is scarcest. The cold-hardy annuals in this collection will help insects survive this time. To help them more, let some chickweed or wild mustard flowers linger in your garden.
- Next year, keep an eye out for self-sown seedlings of annual flowers like Bachelor Buttons, Cosmos, and Zinnias.
- Make sure your landscape also includes a wide variety of other vegetation such as trees and shrubs.

To learn more about how you can invite native pollinators and other beneficial insects into your garden, visit the Xerces Society website – www.xerces.org/