

The week of June 17-23, 2013 is National Pollinator Week. The U.S. Senate so designated the last week of June to increase public understanding of the importance of pollinators to agriculture and the environment.

**What is a pollinator?** Pollinators are animals that help plants reproduce. Most people think of honeybees, but many other species of bees and animals such as butterflies, moths, ants, beetles, and hummingbirds are also pollinators. Pollinators visit flowers in search of food (pollen or nectar) and then incidentally transfer the male pollen to the female part of a flower when the pollen sticks to their bodies as they move around the flower, resulting in the formation of a fruit or seed.

#### Why are pollinators important?

Pollinators help pollinate over 75% of flowering plants and nearly 75% of crops worldwide. In the U.S. alone, bees undertake the astounding task of pollinating nearly \$20 billion in crop value, particularly for specialty crops such as almonds and other nuts, berries, fruits, and vegetables. Do you like your morning coffee, a chocolate bar, or wearing cotton clothing? None of these would be possible without pollinators. And these pollinators do their work for free!

The vital services pollinators provide do not come without a responsibility on our part. Natural habitats are being lost as development encroaches on forests and meadows. Most pesticides are "non-selective," which means they kill good insects along with the bad. In the past decade, a phenomenon known as Colony Collapse Disorder has led to a massive die-off of colonies of domesticated honeybees – up to 50 percent of hives in the U.S. died last winter. Recent studies say that a combination of factors is the cause – pesticides, genetic inbreeding of domesticated honeybees, poor diet, stress from moving large commercial hives around the country, and parasites.

**What can you do to help?** There are lots of things we all can do to make sure pollinators keep up their good work.

- Create a pollinator-friendly yard with flowering plants that supply pollinators with nectar, pollen, and homes. For information on what to plant in our area (using your zip code), download a free regional guide at [www.pollinator.org](http://www.pollinator.org). Any kind of mint is a great plant for attracting insect pollinators.

- Avoid the use of pesticides and accept that a little damage from plant pests is just part of nature. The Beekeepers Guild of Southeast Virginia recommends this organic recipe for use on vegetables, ornamentals, and herbs: Mix 1 tablespoon of mild, non-bacterial dish soap (such as Ivory) with 1 cup cooking oil, such as safflower, soybean, or peanut. Store this concentrated solution for use throughout the gardening season. When needed, mix 4 teaspoons of this concentrate in 2 cups of water and pour into a pump sprayer or spray bottle. Spray plants thoroughly when daytime temperatures are below 85 degrees.

- If you must use pesticides, read the label before purchasing and avoid ones that say they are toxic to bees. Do not apply pesticides to flowering plants. Apply pesticides in the evening when many pollinators are not active.

- If bee or wasp nests are in locations that interfere with human safety, don't destroy them. Honeybee nests or swarms will be removed by local bee-keepers: call neighbor Julius Callahan at 757-717-8551. Bee Busters, owned by George Waldenmaier on the Eastern Shore (757-787-3013; cell: 757-710-8458), will collect wasps from either ground or hanging nests, which will be used to make allergy medication

for sting victims.

- Put your name on the waiting list for the new pollinator license plates. Once enough applications are received, the colorful plates will be produced by the DMV to increase public awareness of the importance of pollinators. Sign up for the plates at [www.PollinatorPlates.org](http://www.PollinatorPlates.org).

There's lots more information on pollinators, beekeeping, and educational programs for kids and adults at the website of the Pollinator Partnership, [www.pollinator.org](http://www.pollinator.org).

Karen can be reached by e-mail at [KarenLMayne@aol.com](mailto:KarenLMayne@aol.com) or by phone at 587-1287

