



Honeybee on dill flower. Herbs and other edibles are a great addition to a pollinator garden.

“No shoes, no shirt, no problems” to quote a Kenny Chesney song rather sums up how summer feels in the Keys. Besides that, wearing no shoes connects us with the earth. My friend says barefoot walking in the grass allows the wifi waves we absorb from our electronic devices to leave our body. Hmm... I'll go with that.

While musing on the benefits of barefoot walking... Yoweee... a sharp stabbing pain emanates from my big



Close up view of the pollinator house before hanging. Thanks Denise! for the cute plastic bee decoration.

toe. I must have just gotten stung by a bee! Not to worry, I'm not allergic to bees, just a bit of pain now, some swelling later on. There is an old saying that beekeepers never have arthritis since bee venom has anti-inflammatory properties. Guess it is my lucky day... you can create a positive spin on anything.

Ironically I got stung while walking in the future site of a butterfly and pollinator garden... a suddenly sunny patch in my front yard created by the removal of a dead tree. It's a perfect space for a pollinator/butterfly garden, whose plants require 6+ hours of sun per day. The more sun, the more active the garden will be.

Though butterflies are the poster children of pollinator gardening, birds, bats, moths, flies, beetles, wasps, small mammals and bees can all be pollinators. They visit flowers to drink nectar or feed from the pollen, then move pollen between male and female plants, fertilizing the flower's eggs, which then produce seeds to create a new generation.

Pick a site where there is well-drained soil, and access to water to establish and maintain the plants, and for the

pollinators to drink... a saucer filled with stones and water will do. Choose plants that attract pollinators, selecting plants with different colors and shapes, that will bloom during different months, to provide for a year-round habitat.

When we think of bees, we think of the European honey bee that nests in beehive colonies. At the other end of the spectrum, native bees are solitary nesters that build their nests inside available nesting holes. Mason bees love tubular homes. Leafcutter bees snip bits of leaves to line their nests. Carpenter bees carve their nests out of wood. Paper wasps build umbrella-shaped nests that hang underneath limbs or on your home's fascia.

Like all living things, pollinators need a place to rest and some might appreciate a little house. Building a pollinator house is a creative project utilizing recycled materials such as



The Spanish moth is attracted to members of the spider lily family, chewing on leaves, bulbs and rhizomes.

scraps of wood and dead bamboo stalks. They are called pollinator houses because pollinators visit them, but they are actually pollinator nurseries, because solitary bees use the holes for a place to deposit their eggs. The bee selects a perfect sized hole, typically around 3/8," then collects pollen and nectar to place in the tube, on which she lays one egg on top of the mixture. The eggs hatch and the larva eat the pollen mixture. When the time is right the larva pupate, and remain in that state until the following spring, when they emerge to start the process over again.

So worth it! Plant the plants, attract the pollinators, provide food and

Butterfly and Pollinator Garden... CONTINUED - Photos by Carol Ellis



A frame made of scrap wood, bamboo stalk pieces, blocks of wood with drilled holes, and a glue gun are all you need to construct a pollinator house from recycled materials. Get creative!

housing for them, and the cycle continues. My initial choice of plants may not be perfect, but with observation, adjustments and time, the garden will become a thing of beauty.

Here's how I am planning the garden: since sun is a very important factor, I want to make sure that no plant gets too large to shade out any area. A good rule of thumb is to select one tree, two shrubs, one vine, and three wildflowers or grasses for a small garden. If more room is available, increase the number of plants at the same ratio. Plant in groupings for the most impact, and to reduce the appearance of leaf damage when the caterpillars are munching.

Think about what will bring you the most joy... and plant with that in mind. Hummingbirds are attracted to the tubular flowers of the following plants: Red firespike, Pineapple sage, Purple passionflower vine, Aloe vera, Firebush, Necklacepod, Coral honeysuckle vine,



Pollinator house with blocks of wood attached and a few bamboo stalks. The house is taking shape!

Bahama strongbark (tree) and Little strongbark (small tree or shrub).

Bees like Sunshine mimosa, Portulaca, African blue basil, Purple passionflower, Necklacepod, Fiddlewood, Greenheart, Soldierwood, and Star jasmine vine.

Butterflies like Pentas (pink, red or white are most appealing), Sunshine mimosa, Butterfly weed (Asclepius tuberosa is native), Giant milkweed, Corky stemmed passionflower, Bahama cassia, Beautyberry, Blue porterweed,

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Jatropha, Plumbago, Scorpiontail, Wild sage, Zinnia, Sunflowers, Red firespike, Balloon vine, and Purple passionflower to name a few. The Key West morning glory (Skyblue clustervine) attracts the sphinx moth.

For birds, you want plants that produce fruit such as Shiny leaf wild coffee, Satinleaf, Soldierwood, Bahama Strongbark, Little Strongbark, and Beautyberry.

The above plant suggestions are natives/or friendly additions for the Florida Keys, which is Zone 11. They are low maintenance once established, have fewer pests and diseases and the native pollinators will flock to your yard.

Don't be a member of the more-dollars-than-sense crowd who would rather throw money at a problem than understand the root cause. Broad-spectrum insecticides should never be used. They kill a large group of insects, including good pollinators as well.



Finished pollinator box hanging on a tree at driveway entrance, welcoming friends and critters to our wildlife habitat.