

Did you know?

Interesting facts about pollinators

- When we think of pollinators, we usually think of honeybees, butterflies, and hummingbirds. But many other insects and animals also serve as pollinators. Examples include flies, wasps, gnats, sweat bees, bumble bees, mason bees, bats, moths, ants, and beetles!
- Pollinators are after nectar – a sweet liquid produced by plants to attract pollinators – and they brush against pollen in the process, picking up tiny grains of pollen and carrying them to other plants.
- Each plant produces a unique shape of pollen that is not compatible with any other plant. So for example, Zinnia pollen will only pollinate other Zinnias. If a Zinnia plant receives Cucumber pollen from a bee, it will not serve to pollinate the flower.
- Many plants don't need pollinators at all – they rely on wind to transfer their pollen. Your “Spring Allergies” are caused by pollen carried on the wind. Examples include Oak trees, Pine trees, and the dreaded Ragweed in the summer/fall. In the garden, Tomatoes are an example of a wind-pollinated crop.
- Butterfly adults are often pollinators, and need nectar for food. But the juvenile stage (the caterpillar) also needs food, so it is important to provide “Host Plants” for caterpillars of many species to consume. Remember, caterpillars are ravenously hungry, and will often eat plants until nothing is left. Ugly caterpillars transform into beautiful butterflies – so look up a caterpillar to see what it transforms into!
- Some butterfly caterpillars eat many different plants, while others eat only a few. Monarch Butterfly caterpillars eat only plants that are in the Asclepias (Milkweed or Butterfly Weed) family. There are at least 5 different kinds of Asclepias found in the Eastern USA, and often they grow in ditches and on banks along roadways. They are often mowed down in summer, which would kill any caterpillars currently on them. Farmers sometimes spray herbicides to kill Asclepias because it is mildly poisonous to cows and horses.
- We hear in the news that Honeybees are in trouble (which is true, they are facing many obstacles). Remember that Honeybees are not native to North America. We have many native bees that are also excellent pollinators, but that do not give honey. Many of our native bees are solitary and don't form large hives. Look up “Mason Bee Houses” for ideas on how to make suitable nesting areas for our native bees.
- For great guides to insect identification, check out Prince William Conservation Alliance (www.PWConserve.org), click on “Wildlife”
- Also check out the Butterfly Society of Virginia (www.butterflysocietyofva.org) for lots of great information!