

# Pollinators

National Park Service  
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Natural Resource Stewardship and Science  
[www.nps.gov/pollinators](http://www.nps.gov/pollinators)



More than 75% of the Earth's flowering plants depend on bees, butterflies, birds, bats, and other pollinators. Yet scientists have noted that these hardworking pollinators are in trouble.

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## What is a pollinator?

All bees and butterflies and some wasps, moths, birds, flies, beetles, and small mammals, such as bats, are pollinators. They feed on nectar (sugars) and pollen (protein) from flowers. As they carry pollen from the male part of the flower to the female part of the same or another flower, fertilization occurs producing fruits, seeds, and young plants. Pollinators

visit flowers in search of food, shelter, nest-building materials, and sometimes even mates. Some pollinators, including many bee species, intentionally collect pollen. Butterflies, birds and bats, move pollen accidentally. Pollen sticks on their bodies while they are drinking or feeding on nectar in the flower blooms and is transported from flower to flower.

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## Why are pollinators important?

One out of every three bites of food we eat exists because of pollinators, including many fruits, vegetables, and seeds. Honey bees alone contribute \$15 billion to the United States economy (White House, 2014).

Healthy ecosystems also depend on pollinators. This includes the pollination of 180,000 different types of plants that help stabilize our soils, clean our air, supply oxygen, and support wildlife.

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## Why are pollinators in trouble?

Populations of bees and other pollinators are declining around the world for several reasons:

- Agriculture, mining, and human development contribute to pollinator habitat loss and fragmentation. In addition, non-native plants often outcompete native species reducing suitable pollinator habitat.
- Parasites and diseases affect both pollinators

and the plants on which they depend.

- Insecticides kill pollinators and may hamper the ability of pollinators to navigate or forage. Herbicides kill important host plants.
- Climate change is modifying the distribution of pollinators and their host plant bloom dates, which affects the availability of food sources.

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## What can I do?

Even small changes in our own backyards can help pollinators survive and thrive. We can provide habitat for many types of pollinators by planting native flowers of different shapes, sizes, colors, and bloom times. For planting guides that are specific to different regions, visit [www.pollinator.org](http://www.pollinator.org).

We can also:

- use non-lethal methods to control pests;
- place out a shallow dish of water to help thirsty pollinators stay hydrated;
- provide nesting sites in living and dead trees, brush piles, and bare ground; and
- learn more about pollinators at [www.nps.gov/pollinators](http://www.nps.gov/pollinators).