NEVADA COUNTY RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Pollinators and Nectar Producing Plants

A pollinator is any animal that acts as an agent for distributing pollen from plant to plant. Pollinators ensure full harvests and seed production from many agricultural crops and provide for healthy plants grown in backyards, community gardens, and rural and urban areas. Populations of insect pollinators such as butterflies and bees have declined dramatically in recent years. Even though we'd all be in trouble without pollinators, many people ignore their value and at worst eradicate them with indiscriminate pesticide application and habitat destruction. Pollinators are worth protecting for their own sakes, but we would do well to remember that these creatures facilitate reproduction in 90% of the world's flowering plants, and that--on average--one in every three bites of food we humans take comes courtesy of an animal pollinator.

When people think of pollination, many focus on bees. In many cases the use of insecticides for pest control has had the unwelcome side effect of killing the bees necessary for pollinating crops. Such environmental stresses plus several species of parasitic mites devastated honeybee populations in the United States beginning in the 1980s, making it necessary for farmers to rent bees from keepers throughout the U.S. in order to get their crops pollinated and greatly affecting the pollination of plants in the wild. Bees are the principal pollinators, but there are other important pollinators as well. These include other insects such as flies, moths, butterflies, wasps, and even some beetles. They also include hummingbirds and bats.

Creating an enjoyable and environmentally friendly backyard habitat helps support all valuable pollinators. When the garden is blooming, avoid using pesticides that can harm the wildlife you're trying to attract. To draw butterflies, hummingbirds and other pollinators to your yard, select nectar-rich plants that are diverse in color and that bloom at different times to support these creatures all year long. For maximum bloom, plant the bed in a sheltered, wind protected area that receives full sun and has well-drained soil.

A small puddle in a sunny spot will provide butterflies with adequate liquids, salts and nutrients. Butterflies find purple, yellow, orange, pink, and red especially appealing, but the best way to attract them is to plant a variety of flowers, shrubs and vines that bloom throughout the growing season. Many butterflies have very specific food requirements. Often the host plant for the caterpillar isn't the same nectar plant for the adult butterfly of the same species. To be a successful butterfly gardener you must provide both the host and nectar plants that the butterfly species in your area prefer to eat.

Many hummingbirds are attracted to red, orange and pink tubular or cupped flowers, which accommodate their long, thin beaks. These include penstemon, columbine, delphinium, bee balm, butterfly bush, red salvias, impatiens, hollyhock, petunia and fuchsia. A garden sprinkler or mister can provide a source of water for hummingbirds in your garden. Encourage nesting by planting large twiggy shrubs nearby.

Native plants: For easier maintenance of your wildlife habitat landscapes consider using native plants. Native plants are adapted to local weather and soil conditions, they better resist local insects and diseases, and they provide foods that are familiar and timed to the life cycles of the animals in the region. Using native plants also reduces the potential for introducing invasive exotics that can cause serious problems to existing native populations. As invasive non-native plants spread, they may crowd out and compete with natives, causing some wildlife to lose their preferred, and much needed food and nesting sources.

Nectar-Producing Plants that will grow in Nevada County, USDA Zone 7*

California Natives that will grow in Zone 7

Annuals/Perennials

Achillea millefolium	Common Yarrow
Aquilegia eximia	Serpentine Columbine
Aquilegia formosa	Western Columbine
Asclepias californica	California Milkweed
Aster chilensis	California Aster
Clarkia bottae	Farewell-to-spring,
Clarkia unguiculata	Mountain Garland
Clematis ligusticifolia	Western White Clematis
Cynoglossum grande	Western Hounds Tongue
Delphinium cardinale	Scarlet Larkspur
Iris douglasiana	Douglas Iris
Lathyrus vestitus	Wild Pea
Lupinus argenteus	Lupine
Mimulus cardinalis	Scarlet Monkey Flower
Mimulus spp.	Monkey Flower
Penstemon centranthifolius	Scarlet Bugler
Salvia spathacea	Hummingbird Sage
Sedum spathulifolium	Stonecrop
Solidago californica	California Goldenrod
Zauschneria californica	California Fuchsia

Shrubs

Arctostaphylos spp.	Manzanita
Calycanthus occidentalis	Spice Bush
Ceanothus spp.	California Mountain Lilac
Ceanothus cuneatus	Sierra Buckbrush
Cercis occidentalis	Western Redbud
Eriogonum bailey	Annual Field Buckwheat
Heteromeles arbutifolia	Christmas Berry
Philadelphus lewisii	Wild Mock Orange
Potentilla glandulosa nevadensis	Nevada Cinquefoil
Rhamnus californica	Coffeeberry
Rhododendron occidentale	Western Azalea
Rhus trilobata	Squawbush
***Ribes spp.*	Currant, Gooseberry
Sambucus spp.	Elderberry

Trees

Acer macrophyllum	Big Leaf Maple
Acer negundo californicum	California Box Elder
Aesculus californica	***California Buckeye
Arbutus menziesii	Madrone
Salix spp.	Willow

Common Nursery Annuals/Perennials OK in Zone 7

Agapanthus spp.	Lily of the Nile
Antirrhinum majus	Snapdragon
Armeria spp.	Thrift
Asclepias tuberosa	Butterfly Weed
Astilbe spp.	False Spirea
Borago officianalis	Borage
Centranthus ruber	Jupiter's Beard
Chrysanthemum maximum	Shasta Daisy
Coreopsis lanceolata	Cosmos
Delphinium.belladonn	Pinks
Echinacea purpurea	Purple Coneflower
Echinops exaltatus	Globe Thistle
Erigeron speciousus	Fleabane
Gallarida grandiflora	Blanket Flower
Heuchera sanguinea	Coral Bells
Iberis sempervirens	Candytuft
Lathyrus oderatus	Sweet Pea
Liatrus spicata	Gayfeather
Lobelia erinus or *L. cardinalis*	Cardinal Flower
Lobularia maritima	Sweet Alyssum
Monardadidyma or *M. fistulosa*	Bee Balm
Oregano vulgare	Oregano
Penstemon spp.	Beardtongue
Phlox drummondii	Annual Phlox
Rudbeckia hirta	Gloriosa Daisy
Salvia splendens	Scarlet Sage
Sedum spectabile	Sedum
Scabiosa atropurpurea	Pincushion Flower
Sidalcea malviflora	Checkerbloom

Common Nursery Shrubs OK in Zone 7

Abelia grandflora	Glossy Abelia
Buddliea davidii	Butterfly Bush
Campsis radicans	Trumpet Vine
Caryopteris incana	Blue Spirea
Choisya ternate	Mexican Orange
Clethra alnifolia	Summersweet
Lavendula	Lavender
Lonicera (check zone)	Honeysuckle
Philadelphus	Mock Orange
Rhododendron	
Syringa spp.	Lilac
Weigela florida	Weigela

Websites for further study:
California Native Plant Society – www.cnps.org/gallery/callahan/
Las Pilitas Nursery – www.laspilitas.com/
Clipart of butterflies and other animals - http://butterflywebsite.com/clipart/index.cfm

Notes:
*USDA Hardiness zones in Nevada County range from zone 5 to zone 9; zone 7 is an average.
**Ribes species are carriers for White Pine Blister Rust; avoid planting Ribes above 3,000 ft. elevation.
***Some references list California Buckeye as poisonous to honey bees.