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Attracting Hummingbirds, Butterflies, and Honeybees to the Garden

Many people start a garden so that they can have flowers to enjoy, or vegetables to eat. A nice added bonus to gardening is that you will inevitably attract wildlife. Hummingbirds, butterflies, and honeybees need flowers for the nectar and pollen they eat, and in turn, having these creatures in our gardens yields more flowers and seeds for us, (plus they are colorful and fun to watch!).

Hummingbirds as a rule like red flowers, but they are attracted to anything that has a tube shaped flower- they stick their beak in, and drink the flower's nectar. Good examples are beebalm and cardinal flower. They typically appear in late April and stay for the summer before heading back to warmer climates for winter.

Butterflies enjoy plants that they can land on, especially flowers that are daisy-shaped like purple coneflower or black-eyed Susan. We have many varieties of butterflies to enjoy in New England, including the Monarch, Painted Lady, and Swallowtail butterflies.

Honeybees and bumblebees are the work force of the flower, vegetable, and fruit gardens. We need these busy bees to keep our plants going. And unlike yellow jackets or wasps, these guys are very gentle and rarely sting- they are too busy making honey.

Having hummingbirds, butterflies, and honeybees working around the garden is also fun for children, and a great way to appreciate how important diversity is in every ecosystem. (Fun summer project- draw all the different butterflies you see this summer!)

Plants to attract and keep hummingbirds in your garden-

Start with spring bloomers like columbine, bleeding heart, false indigo, red bud tree, and ajuga. Then add early summer bloomers like lavender, daylilies, pinks, coralbells, creeping phlox, and lupine as well as deciduous azalea, scotch broom, lilac, weigela, and wisteria. In summer, beebalm, garden phlox, hyssop, speedwell, sage, butterfly bush, clethra, and red hot poker are great nectar sources. Trumpet vine, honeysuckle, and scarlet runner beans are nice hummingbird vines. For fall, try flowers like sedum, gayfeather, blue mist shrub, and Russian sage. Round out the hummingbird garden with annuals such as fuchsia, impatiens, red salvia, cleome, snapdragon, nasturtium, red cuphea, and ivy geraniums.

Plants that butterflies like-

Daisy-shaped perennials such as coreopsis, Shasta daisy, Montauk daisy, purple coneflower, asters, fall mums, pincushion, blanket flower, butterfly weed, black eyed Susan, yarrow, globe thistle, golden rod, butterfly bush, and astilbe, to name a few.

Food sources for butterfly caterpillars also need to be considered. Generally, lots of plants that are considered "weedy" are good, so leave a few, and plant some extra parley cabbage, broccoli, fennel, marigold, milkweed, dill, snapdragon, and sorrel.